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How to use the SPELL Blueprint

The SPELL findings have resulted in these recommendations for public libraries and other organizations that serve parents of children birth through three. It is not possible to incorporate all of the recommendations at one time; consider selecting 3-6 items from the In Your Organization column and the Reaching Out column to begin with, or focus on incorporating the suggestions in one of the main headings in both of those two columns. Use the recommendations to inform your existing programs and services, as well as to incorporate into planning for new ones.

Items marked with a star are easy and inexpensive to implement!

In Your Organization

Staff training

- Empower all staff to know that they can make a difference in informing parents about early literacy and empowering them to include early literacy activities in the daily lives of their families.
- Train all library staff and board on the importance of early literacy and effective practices.
- Train children's staff in the SPELL findings and blueprint.
- Train all staff in cultural proficiency.

Space

- Create a welcoming, safe, and inviting for parents and young children. If possible, have a separate space for children 0-5 and their families.
- Include manipulative displays and toys that are developmentally appropriate for 0-3 year olds in the children's area.

Reaching Out

Relationships

- Actively partner with other organizations that serve parents with young children; together you can cross-promote services and programs; train others on delivering an early literacy message; reach more parents; maximize valuable time and resources; and sustain services more easily.

Types of organizations to consider for partnerships:

- pediatricians/health clinics
- religious institutions
- home visit nursing services for expecting and new parents
- obstetricians
- childcare centers
- preschools
- social service agencies (WIC, etc)
- hospitals

Home Early Literacy Practices

When you take steps from the "In Your Organization" and "Reaching Out" columns, you help lead parents to these ideal early literacy practices at home.

Expecting Parents

Parents expecting their first child will be more knowledgeable about early literacy principles and practices. They will begin to outfit their homes with baby books and other items to create a literacy-rich home environment.

Parents with 2+ Children

The more children that parents have, the busier they are and the less likely they are to read and engage in other early literacy activities daily. Taking steps like making such activities into a fun game, engaging older siblings in the activities, making program times and locations very convenient, and making it simple and free for parents to find and check out reading materials.

In Your Organization (cont.)

- Post early literacy tips and activities around your library/organization for parents to do with their young children. ★
- Create a “loud zone” for young children and families.

Collections

- Have a rich collection of board books in languages common in your community and that are culturally appropriate for cultures in your community, along with books that are wordless.
- Offer collections of books for parents on parenting and early literacy, in different languages as appropriate in your community.
- Offer book bags or backpacks available for checkout that include 5-10 books each that are developmentally appropriate for specific ages. ★
- Display, organize, and/or label books based on age level (babies, toddlers, preschool, etc.).

Programs

- In programs and everyday service, model simple early literacy activities and let parents know how important—and easy—it is for them to do such activities every day. ★
- Provide programs for young children and parents at times convenient for working parents to attend (evenings, Saturdays).
- Engage older siblings in early literacy activities with younger children; recognize them for their efforts in your organization and at home with their younger siblings.

Reaching Out (cont.)

- Reach out to stores/businesses/services to ask them to promote early literacy awareness and practices, as well as your programs.

Types of stores/businesses/services to consider approaching for promotion:

- big box stores
 - baby/children’s stores
 - toy stores
 - post offices
 - gas stations
 - grocery stores
 - convenience stores
- Assess your relationships and collaborations regularly to address how effective they are. Also, routinely look for potential new partnerships.

Methods

- Promote your early literacy programs and services, as well as early literacy awareness in general, widely in your community; consider the two lists above, plus websites and online social networks, as well as direct email and text messaging. Also consider specific mailing lists for parents with children in different age groups.
- Get the message out that very young children are welcome in your library; their presence is not bothersome, even when they may be loud or on the move. ★

Actions

- Present outreach programs in convenient locations and in conjunction with existing programs that serve low-income parents.

Home Early Literacy Practices (cont.)

Home Environment

Literacy-rich home environments have lots of reading materials (owned or borrowed from a library) for both young children and everyone in the household; writing and coloring materials (crayons, paper, pencils, chalkboard and chalk, markers, etc.); music for young children; age-appropriate manipulatives and games/puzzles; and comfy, well-lit spaces to read.

Early Literacy Knowledge Base

Parents of very young children that are knowledgeable about early literacy as well as baby and toddler behavior and cognitive development may be more likely to engage in effective early literacy activities in the home. Classes and reading materials for parents about early literacy can help empower them; peer support from other parents can as well.

Home Habits

Ideally, parents will engage in early literacy activities every day at home, including reading, talking, singing, playing, and writing, using simple but effective methods, and making the activities such a habit that they don’t see it as something extra to do. Parents and other family members can set an excellent example by reading themselves at home for information and pleasure.

In Your Organization (cont.)

- Actively engage parents in their children's early literacy activities; programs like 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten are effective at this, as are lapsit programs that encourage and model early literacy activities for parents.
- Offer parent training classes on early literacy, which should include a group dynamic in which parents support one another as they learn and develop their home early literacy practice.
- Evaluate the success of your early literacy programs, especially in reaching and changing behavior in low-income parents.
- Offer a fun gaming element to your programs to engage parents, such as 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten; this makes reading and other early literacy activities fun for both kids and parents.

Policies

- No overdue fees for board books and picture books.
- No fines for lost or damaged board books, flexible policy for picture books.

Customer service

- Ensure parents know that their very young children are welcome in the library/organization. ★
- Take every opportunity to present early literacy tips and simple activities to parents of very young children in a friendly, engaging way, including modeling activities with their children. ★

Reaching Out (cont.)

- Leverage the online environment for promotion and service delivery. Low-income parents report using the internet and social media sites for information on parenting.
- Reach out to expecting parents (especially first-time parents) at prenatal programs and events (or hold events at your library) about early literacy. One idea: host a community baby shower and include information about early literacy during the festivities.
- Arrange and/or host early literacy peer support groups for parents. Provide research and methods about early literacy to the groups based upon members' existing knowledge, encourage an influential parent to be the informal group leader, and check in from time to time to provide more tips and evaluate progress.

Home Early Literacy Practices (cont.)

On-the-Go Habits

There are many early literacy activities that parents can do when they're in the car, store, public transportation, other people's homes, etc. Activities like pointing out the text that's all around, reading signs out loud, and asking children to name objects are simple and effective habits that parents can develop.

This is a living document; we welcome your input into and questions about this blueprint and the SPELL project overall. Please send your feedback to Beth Crist, crist_b@cde.state.co.us, and visit the SPELL website: <http://spellproject.weebly.com/>