

# Effective Strategies for Engaging Families to Support Literacy in the Home: Lessons Learned from the DELL-D Early Reading First Project

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## The DELL-D Project

DELL-D stands for *Developing Early Language and Literacy in Danville*. It is a three year, multi-million dollar project that provides intensive support to 25 teachers, and 300 young children in 10 early childhood classrooms in Danville, IL. DELL-D focuses on helping children learn emergent literacy skills, so that they can perform well in school and become great readers. DELL-D provides materials to classrooms, professional development and technical assistance for children, and resources for families.



## Our Approach

DELL-D's focus on families is based on strong research evidence that links literacy to the child's family environment and successful child outcomes. DELL-D also believes that the early childhood years are the time to "hook" families into their children's learning and schooling. Research evidence also suggests that the early childhood years is a time when parents and caregivers are most open to thinking about their own parenting roles.

DELL-D focuses its work on families by...

### Strengthening Parent-Child Connection

DELL-D recognizes the parent-child focus as an important key in the child's literacy learning. Our goal is to help strengthen the parent-child relationship by building confidence in the parent's ability in supporting the child's literacy learning.

### Enhancing Classroom-Family Connection

DELL-D builds connections between the classroom and teachers by building teachers' knowledge on how to support families. Through various events and activities, teachers gain multiple opportunities to experience and learn about strategies for collaboration with parents.

### Promoting Center-Family Connection

DELL-D supports center-family connection by providing the different centers effective strategies for supporting the parent-child and the classroom-family connection.

## Strategies to Engage Families

### Marketing to Families and Children

Backpacks are sent home to each child by the teachers at the beginning of the school year. The backpacks include information for families about upcoming family events and activities and the incentive program. Monthly materials such as flyers, theme newsletters, and parent-child activities are also sent home through the classroom teacher. These materials are attractive, colorful, and easy to read with the parent or caregiver and child as the focus.

### Incentive System

The incentive system is linked through the family center, family events, and take-home activities. The incentive system promotes participation in multiple parent-child activities. The more a family participates in events and activities the more take-home literacy goodies they earn.



*Incentive Plan Flyer sent home to families in backpacks at beginning of the year.*

### DELL-D Family Activities

**Family Center** The Family Center is housed in an early childhood building that is centrally located and accessible via public and private transportation to families and teachers. The Family Center offers many opportunities for family education and involvement, targeted toward developing the child's literacy skills. Families and teachers can use the Family Centers as a resource and lending library.

**Family Library Days** The DELL-D family liaison sets up at the local Public Library one evening each week to provide families and teachers an alternative location and evening hours to access resources offered through the DELL-D Family Center.

**Family Events** Family events are planned once a month, in the evenings to allow families to attend together. With support from the Family Liaison, classroom teachers plan and implement literacy activities around specific themes. Incentives are provided to families who attend each event.



*Family Event Calendar sent home to families in backpacks at beginning of the year.*

**Theme Newsletters** A newsletter developed to extend the TROPHIES curriculum themes that are being implemented in the classroom. These theme newsletters are developed by the Family Center and sent home to families by the teachers. The theme newsletters are sent home at the beginning of a new theme in the classroom. Each theme newsletter lets the parents and caregivers know what their children are learning in the classroom (e.g., reading and writing concepts, letters, books, and others). The newsletters also focus on literacy based activities and offer ideas for the parents and caregivers to try at home with their children to help support skills and concepts their children are learning at school.



*Example of Theme Newsletter*

**Monthly Take-Home Activities** Each month a take home activity is sent home with the children through their classroom teachers. The take home activity is related to the season or a celebration associated with the month. Children complete the take home activity with their parents and return the completed activity to their classroom teachers. The children then receive a coupon that they can redeem for a literacy treat at the Public Library or Family Center.

## Evaluation

### What Families Say

"I observed my child paying attention to directions and that surprised me."

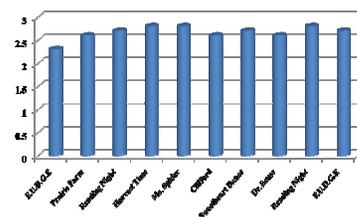
"I enjoyed watching him do the file folder activity. It really showed that he is learning at home and at school."

"I was surprised to see her interacting with kids, respecting adults, sharing and taking turns."

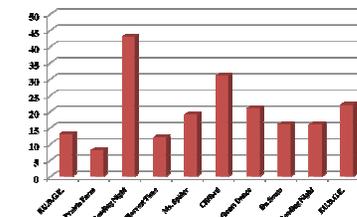
"I was delighted to see her just enjoying herself writing and being around other kids."

"Now I finally get what this is all about and what DELL-D is about!"

**Parents' Mean Satisfaction Rating for Family Events (2008-2009)**



**Attendance for Family Events (2008-2009)**



## Lesson Learned

- It takes time and effort to get a family component going in a program. The key is to be patient!
- It is important to be flexible, and responsive to parents and centers in regards to the time and day of activities, transportation, and location of the activities.
- It is important to try different ways to connect with the parents in order to address their varying needs.
- The first step is to get families to one event using marketing and incentives. The next step is to keep the families coming back.
- A creative "designer" for flyers and other materials that are distributed to children and families is a must!

## Acknowledgments

