

Connecticut Family Resource Centers Get Results for families!

All 62 state-funded Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in Connecticut implement a Families in Training component as one of the seven components they are legislated to conduct. The FRCs use the Parents As Teachers Program, a national model for parent education and family support, to meet this criteria. Research from the PAT National Center show that this program makes a difference in the lives of families served. Evaluations conducted by the FRC Alliance in recent years support these findings as well.

National studies as well as reviews of Connecticut FRC programs show that families who participate in the PAT program gain knowledge about child development, increase their confidence in parenting, and become more connected in the community to resources and services. In addition, this program has been instrumental in early identification of many children with developmental delays and referring them for needed services such as Birth to Three. Let's take a closer look at PAT and how this program improves conditions for children and families in the state.

PAT Program Description

There are four program components to the Parents As Teachers model: personal visits, playgroups, child assessment, and resource and referral. Here is a brief description of each of these components:

PLAYGROUPS - Parents and children come together for learning and fun. Parents share common concerns and gain new insight while their children practice school readiness skills such as socialization, problem solving, communication, and more.

PERSONAL VISITS - Certified Parent Educators provide one-on-one visits with parents and children in which personalized instruction is offered to parents using the Parents As Teachers curriculum. Personal visits may take place in the family home or in the Family Resource Center.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENT - Periodic screenings, or assessments, are used to track children's overall development in communication, motor, intellectual and social domains. Early detection of a developmental delay often helps to prevent later difficulties in school. The screenings can also be used as a tool to direct play and activities for children to areas in which they can build their skills.

RESOURCE AND REFERRAL –Referral services help families find the resources they are looking for and links them with community services in the community. Resources are available at FRCs to assist families with specific questions on child development, parenting, and other concerns.

Survey of Parenting Practice indicates FRCs Get Results!

A pilot project was conducted in the Spring of 2007 in which sixteen FRC sites participated. Parents at the sites were given the University of Idaho Survey of Parent Practice to complete. This retrospective survey was designed to measure whether the programs two core goals are being achieved: increase parent's knowledge of child development and teach appropriate ways to stimulate learning and increase parent's competence and confidence in giving their children the best possible start in life. A total of 243 parents responded to the survey.

Results from the analysis of the data showed that there were statistically significant gains by parents in terms of their competence, confidence, and knowledge upon completion of the PAT program in comparison to when they started. On average, participants reported progress toward achieving the two main goals of the program. Below are two quotes from parents in response to questions in a narrative part of the survey:

- When participants were asked how PAT has affected the way they parent, one parent responded: "I feel I have a larger repertoire of ideas and strategies to use with my children. If I have a concern with one of my children, I know I have somewhere to go for advice and support."
- When participants were asked what they would tell another parent enrolling in the program, one parent responded, "I would tell a parent that it has been a wonderful experience. I have not only made what I consider to be lifelong friendships, but my son has greatly improved his interactions with peers. It is also been tremendously helpful to have warm and knowledgeable staff who are approachable."

UMASS Study

In addition, a study was commissioned of UMASS in 2005 by the Family Resource Centers in Connecticut. The results from the study suggest that families involved with FRC services and programs are benefiting from this involvement in many areas. The study states, "parents of these students seem to be more connected and involved with their children's schools than comparison group students." The following parental involvement items on the teacher surveys produced statistically significant results:

1. attend parent/teacher conferences
2. attend school related programs and activities
3. help students with homework
4. volunteer services at school
5. show interest in their child's progress

The student behaviors items of the teacher surveys also indicated that students involved with FRC services received more favorable ratings on almost every item (10 items total) and produced statistically significant results ($p < .05$) on the item "completes homework".