

Witness appearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services and Education

Honorable Bill Goodling
Former Chairman of U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
1995-2001

&

Chairman of the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy
At Pennsylvania State University
State College, PA 16801

Testimony on the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program
Fiscal Year 2007 Appropriations

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Submitted by Hon. Bill Goodling
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of our nation's most important literacy program, the Even Start Family Literacy Program. As you know, this program is currently funded at \$99 Million. This amount is the result of three years of reductions totaling \$151 Million or a 60% cut. As you know, this program provides for high quality education services that produce positive results for our nation's poorest and most undereducated families. Through Even Start, thousands of at-risk families are receiving the services and support they need to be successful in school, at work, and in their communities.

How are these cuts affecting program participation and performance? In my home state of Pennsylvania for funding years 2004-05 there were 25 Even Start Programs. For 2005-06, the Commonwealth has 24 programs, and in 2006-07, there will be 12 programs. If Even Start is funded at the current level of \$99M for 2007-08, all Pennsylvania family literacy programs will experience an additional 8% cut since -- unlike this year -- no carryover or extra state funds will be available. As a result, there is the expectation that additional Even Start and state funded family literacy programs will be eliminated for 2007-08. Basic program operations will be cut as will the support services for evaluation and program improvement, data management and reporting, professional development, and technical assistance. Of course, if Even Start funding is eliminated all together, as was the request of the Senate and the Administration for FY 2006, the picture will look drastically worse. For the next fiscal year, I am asking that funding be returned to the FY 2005 level of \$225 Million.

Over the years, the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy, at Penn State, has reviewed the impact of Even Start and has demonstrated that preschool children who are enrolled for just three months or more scored significantly better on developmental tests than children newly enrolled in the program. In addition, the more the parents of these children participated in adult and parenting education the better their children scored on developmental tests. The impact on developmental test scores was greatest for children birth to 3 years old when the most rapid language learning is occurring. The lesson to us is that parents are learning how to be their children's first teachers.

Even Start is unique in offering a comprehensive one-stop family literacy intervention that includes adult literacy, adult basic education, GED preparation, and English-as-a-Second Language; early childhood education for the children; and training for parents in how to be the primary teachers for their children and full partners in their education. In addition, teachers supervise and support parents as they work with their children in literacy activities so that parents will continue to foster their children's literacy at home.

Not surprising, the adults entering Even Start programs have lower educational attainment levels than those in stand-alone adult basic education programs. In fact, Even Start parents are far more educationally disadvantaged than Head Start parents. In 1997, only 15% of Even Start parents had a high school diploma or GED, compared with 72% of Head Start parents. Forty-one percent of Even Start families had an annual household income under \$6,000, compared to 13% of their Head Start counterparts. In the 2000-2001 program year 84% of Even Start participants were at or below the federal poverty level. The structural problem is that those with the least amount of education participate the least in adult education. For example, in 1999, 14.7% of adults with an 8th grade or less education participated in some type of adult education program while 25.6% of those with some education between 9th and 12th grades (without a diploma), and 34.8% of those with a diploma participated in an adult education program. Good adult education and childhood literacy programs must go hand-in-hand.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not also request an increase in adult education funding, which is a key partner in family literacy programs. Just recently, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that approximately 93 million Americans had deficient levels of literacy that could prevent them from reaching their full potential or from providing academic support to their children. Adult literacy must also be a key component of any initiative to keep America competitive. To truly be competitive, we must ensure that those individuals already in the workforce have the literacy skills they need to obtain and retain employment in today's technological workplace.

Research has shown, and as we know instinctively, that poor families have the least access to community social support services perhaps due to parental low literacy levels. Even Start programs ensure that families receive the community social services they need. Families must first be able to meet their basic needs before they are ready to achieve educational goals.

Unlike other federal programs, in order to receive Even Start funding, programs must demonstrate linkages between a local educational agency and a community-based organization to ensure that the family literacy program is well grounded in the community.

Regrettably, in spite of the population this program serves and sound scientific evidence to the contrary, the Administration has decided to make something of a poster child of the Even Start program. The picture they paint is not the one I, as author of the program, or independent researchers, would recognize. They say research to date has not verified the program's effectiveness and therefore it should be eliminated.

I think some perspective is helpful. The first flawed attempt by the Department to evaluate an effective family literacy model (Even Start) resulted in inconsequential results. As the research was structured, there were no pre-requisite evaluations to determine whether the program, if properly implemented, was a workable model.

In spite of the Department-sponsored, flawed Even Start evaluations, we in Congress took a hard look at the program, as well as, listened to the Even Start state coordinators. Armed with that knowledge, and from our experience with Head Start and Title I (that has had mixed results) we decided to enact new reforms through the Learning Involves Families Together (LIFT) Act at the end of 2000. The necessary upgrades were structured -- if implemented correctly -- to make Even Start a model to help lift the "poorest of the poor" families, especially Latino families who are at the bottom of the income and education ladder, out of poverty into a productive future.

The key reauthorization changes required by the LIFT Act (effective beginning with FY 2001, except as otherwise indicated) were:

- Instructional activities must be based on scientifically-based reading research.
- Stronger staff qualification requirements.
- Enrichment AND instructional services during the summer months.
- Projects must build on "high-quality" existing community resources.
- Projects must use independent local evaluation for program and participant improvements in literacy achievement results.
- States are required to submit to U.S. Department of Education State program quality indicators as of June 30, 2001, and use those indicators to evaluate local projects for the purpose of making continuation funding decisions (indicators are used to monitor, evaluate, and improve local projects).
- Programs must promote the academic achievement of children and adults.
- An individual with expertise in family literacy added to the required members of the local application review panel.
- Minimum size for sub-grantees in the ninth and succeeding years reduced to \$52,500.
- Participating families must be encouraged to attend regularly and remain in the program a sufficient time to meet program goals.
- Continuity of family literacy services must be promoted, if applicable, to ensure that individuals retain and improve educational outcomes.

- Equitable participation requirements for school-age private school students applicable to Even Start (beginning FY 2002).
- Maintenance of effort requirements applicable to Even Start (beginning FY 2002).

The Department was required, under the law, to verify that all these reforms were in place and after two years of compliance, to begin evaluating the program. This assumed, of course, that the Department's evaluators had structured the necessary scientifically-based evaluation tools for a family literacy program. Nevertheless the recent Department evaluations that question the value of Even Start, that are cited by the Administration, use statistics from before the new LIFT and NCLB requirements took affect.

As an aside, it is worth noting that as author of the Reading Excellence Act, the "Lift Act", the Head Start reauthorization, and the "Workforce Investment Act", to name several, I was the first in Congress to insist that federal education and workforce programs incorporate into their protocol "scientifically-based, replicable and reliable research" to better determine the cost effectiveness of these efforts. The same language was endorsed and continued in the Administration's "No Child Left Behind" Act.

The Department's evaluators did not evaluate only programs that had fully implemented the model as prescribed in the law, but instead chose only a very small number of programs (18 out of 1200) to make very large generalizations. When they returned to do the follow-up study, only eight of those programs were still functioning thereby making the result all that more suspect. In addition, this process runs counter to the Department's inadvisability of using individual programs (such as Texas A+M, Penn State University, and the States of Michigan and Illinois have done) to study the effectiveness of Even Start. That is exactly what the Department did in these cited evaluations, and are now using to justify the Administration criticism of the program.

Also, Even Start works with children from birth through age 7; but studies referenced by the Administration only looked at children above 2.5 years in age. Everyone agrees that the first three years of life are critical. Even Start is the only program in the Department of Education that focuses on this age group of learners. They were omitted from their studies.

The Texas A & M studies over several years have carefully followed families over time. That is the only way to study the success or failure of a family literacy program, such as Even Start. These studies demonstrate that the programs reviewed have had a significant impact on parents and children. The most recent study is provided at the end of my testimony. The studies have found significant gains in the following areas:

1. Parents graduated from high school and received GEDs;
2. Parents went on to a higher education or job-training program;
3. Parents left welfare rolls and joined taxpaying workforce rolls;
4. Parents moved from public housing;
5. Parents became full partners with the schools in the education of their children;
6. Children came to school with a much-improved attitude about learning than their older brothers and sisters; and

7. Children came to school ready to read or actually reading.

Of course the larger question to appropriately ask is, “How does this research translate into actual yearly performance?”

The most recent data in Texas for 2004-2005 verify what Texas A+M documented. The outcomes in Texas’ 92 programs with 207 sites verify that:

- ✓ The families enrolled in 2004-2005 stayed an average of at least 7 months or longer. Scientifically-based research shows prolonged participation equals higher performance in educational gains;
- ✓ 81% of the adult participants made significant educational gains, meaning almost 66% of the adults advanced to at least one or more levels last year;
- ✓ An average of 90 % of the parents participating increased their involvement in their children’s Education;
- ✓ 86% of Even Start kindergarteners and 82% of 1st and 2nd graders met or exceeded the standard on district selected reading assessments which is remarkable since 57% of Even Start families are non-native English speakers;
- ✓ 80% of the adults enrolled improved their parenting skills in 2004-2005;
- ✓ 84 % of the adults with a goal of a retaining their job or advancement in the job, did so in 2004-2005;
- ✓ 60% of the adults with a goal of obtaining a GED or high school diploma, met their goal in 2004-2005; and.
- ✓ 55% of the adults with a goal of entering post secondary education or a job training program, met their goal in 2004-2005.

The Texas Department of Educations also recently compared outcomes for adults in basic education with outcomes for Even Start parents. In each category, Even Start parents did better than those adults enrolled in basic education. This again runs counter to the Administration’s repeated claim, that those who participate in Even Start “generally made gains in literacy skills, but these gains were not significantly greater than those of non-participants. Not only are the gains better than with non-participants, but also as attained though other education programs.

In Illinois’ 2004 performance measurement data, for children who have been enrolled in an Even Start Family Literacy program for at least one month, shows that:

- ✓ 86.3% of children ages three to five demonstrated continuous progress in language development and literacy for preparation to begin school;
- ✓ 98.2% of kindergarten students, 95.9% of first grade students, 97.3% of second grade students and 96.8% of third grade students, demonstrated progress in reading readiness or reading at or exceeding grade level; and
- ✓ 53.7% of third grade children in Even Start programs are reading on grade level at a higher rate than economically disadvantaged third graders as a whole (46.2%).

In my home state of Pennsylvania, for both the 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 *Statewide Evaluation of Family Literacy in Pennsylvania* revealed that native English-speaking adults made significant gains on the standardized pre- and post tests in reading, math, and GED subtests, while the non-native English speakers made significant gains in oral language and total literacy on the Basic English Skills Test (BEST).

Because the results across America have been so impressive, the national governors in their current NGA policy position on federal literacy programs say that –

“The Governors recognize the role that the federal government has played in bolstering state and local literacy improvement efforts and applaud federal efforts to help states expand and/or create literacy programs that are of the highest quality and that are based on reliable and replicable research. The Governors call for the continued funding of the Even Start Family Literacy program...”

As you know, the Administration is suggesting an increased focus on other federal reading programs such as Early Reading First, Reading First, and the Striving Readers high school program. None of these newer programs has yet been scrutinized by sound research-based analysis. To say that these reading programs are based on scientifically-based reading research could be true. However, to claim that they are effective programs without evidence from a “gold standard”, experimentally-designed research evaluation does not have a factual foundation. Such a conclusion cannot be reached until after the programs are functioning for a pre-determined timeframe, in use throughout the country, and rigorously evaluated.

Striving Readers funding under the Administration’s budget would be increase by \$70 Million; but Even Start would be eliminated. It goes without saying that I continue to be a strong supporter for basing funding decisions on available scientifically-based research. Contrary to the Department’s asserting that research has not verified Even Start’s effectiveness, the National Center for Family Literacy, The Goodling Institute, and many state evaluations have shown that kindergarten teachers rate Even Start children as more prepared for school than other children. These children are also more successful in school. State and local evaluations reveal that Even Start is successful in increasing parents’ and children’s educational levels.

Eliminating or even reducing funding for Even Start will leave over 40,000 families without vital literacy or parenting services. Minority populations make up 70% of Even Start participants, 46% of whom are Hispanic. In Texas the percentage of Hispanic participants grows to over 90%. Many of those will be our newest citizens, in search of the English language skills they need to obtain a job and support their children’s education. Research shows this population is gaining the most from Even Start programs. Those most in need of a family-oriented literacy program will find no support.

The overlay of English language acquisition to the low literacy skills exhibited on assessments must also be considered in the outcomes. Reading to a preschool child promotes language acquisition and correlates with literacy development and later success in school. Most of the adults set goals related to increasing their involvement with their children's literacy activities, and the majority of adults have been successful in meeting these goals. Parents reported on a pre-post test checklist engaging in significantly more literacy-related reading activities, such as reading to their children, encouraging their children to read, and taking their children to libraries. They also reported significantly more involvement in their children's schooling after participating in family literacy programs. Furthermore, children enter school ready to learn. At the end of first grade their teachers rated over half of the children as proficient or advanced in reading, writing, and math. Teachers also reported that 89% of these at-risk children were promoted to the next grade level.

Summaries of the research that support these facts I have discussed today can be found on the websites of the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State <www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute> and the National Center for Family Literacy <www.familit.org> and elsewhere (available upon request from the Goodling Institute).

The most vulnerable families in our society need the most intense intervention. Even Start is a holistic program that targets the family. In family literacy, the adage is true that the "sum is greater than the parts." The Even Start program offers access to a better future to low-literate families who live in poverty.

Finally, let us remember that Even Start is supporting the President's education goals for family literacy programs. The guidelines provided in *Good Start, Grow Smart*, a current early childhood initiative, are similar to the guidance provided in the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program. *No Child Left Behind*, furthermore, mandates that parents be involved in their children's education; services that have been developed and are delivered through Even Start. The U.S. Department of Education website states that "no other education program serves a comparable population".

Last summer an article ran in the Orlean, NY Times-Herald it concerned an Even Start program in the Salamanca City Central Schools. The article reads in part that, "...this program that helped hundreds of parents earn a GED and children learn to read will end next month after a 12 year run. Salamanca City Central School, in partnership with the Seneca Nation of Indians, announced Salamanca's Even Start program would shut down Aug. 17 because of state and federal funding cuts. Even Start helped between 20 and 25 families a year, said Mary Elizabeth Koch, City Central School curriculum and planning coordinator. The program helped people like Melissa Schwartz of Fawn Avenue obtain her GED in June 2003. "It was awesome," Ms. Schwartz, 28, said. "It helped so many families with just about anything. Even if a family needed a pack of diapers they would do anything to help. I'm just very sad to see it go." Ms. Schwartz enrolled in April 2003 with her son William, who is now 4 years old. She later became an Even Start volunteer, assisting in an infant- and toddler-education classroom. "For myself, it taught me

how to be a better parent,” she said. “Through helping out in the kids’ room, I learned new ways how to teach my child.”

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee, by eliminating or further reducing funding for this program, you will be letting down the Melissa Schwartz and mothers and fathers like her who, with all the other problems they face in trying to be good parents, are learning “new ways to help to teach (their) child”. They will be told that their good parenting is not our priority. I know that is not what you think and I hope you do this year what we were unable to accomplish last year; by agreeing to return Even Start funding to the FY 2005 level of \$225 Million.

Thank you.

**Follow-Up Data on Parents in Even Start Programs
in Texas, 2004 and 2005**

**Don F. Seaman, Research Scientist
And
Chia-Yin Chen, Research Associate**

Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning

Because of concerns for demonstrating accountability in Even Start family literacy programs in Texas, staff in the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning designed a research project to document how investment of federal funds in Even Start provides returns on that investment. Since Even Start provides basic educational experiences to both parents and children, it was determined to first implement a pilot study to assess the impact of the program on the parents in 2003-2004. Data from the pilot test indicated that a more extensive study should be conducted on Even Start programs in the state. That research is found below.

1. With the assistance of the State Coordinator of Even Start in Texas, the research team acquired a list of all programs that were in their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of program operations (61).
2. All programs were assigned a number from 1 to 61.
3. Using a table of random numbers, a one-third sample (20 programs) was drawn for the study.
4. In the selected programs, coordinators were asked to identify all families who had departed their Even Start program since it had begun, for whatever reason. Those who had “dropped out” were included as well as those who could be classified as “successful” by meeting their own goals or those of the program. Then, all families were assigned a number from 1 to whatever was the total number.
5. During a state conference, and operating from another table of random numbers, the research team trained each local program coordinator in (1) how to use the table of numbers to select those families who would be in the project from their total list and (2) how to use the telephone survey that had been developed for this project.
6. Once telephone surveys from 30 families had been acquired from each program, they were sent to the research team for analysis.

By April 7, 2005 data were acquired from 443 parents in 16 Even Start programs in the original sample (80%). Nineteen (5%) of the respondents are males and 424 (96%) are females. These parents have left Even Start for an average of 2.7 years.

Education:

(Sample question and responses) How often did you help your children with their learning activities/homework?

	1 time/week	2 times/week	3 times/week	4 times/week	5 times/week	N/R
Before ES	19%	22%	13%	5%	20%	21%
After ES (now)	1%	4%	8%	16%	50%	21%

Chi-square analysis of these results showed significance at the .01 level in the increase of the number of times parents help their children with learning activities. It means the likelihood of the increase occurring by chance is less than one time in a hundred, or 1%).

(Sample question and responses) How much did you read to your children?

	1 time/week	2 times/week	3 times/week	4 times/week	5 times/week	N/R
Before ES	24%	24%	20%	7%	15%	10%
After ES (now)	1%	4%	10%	23%	52%	10%

Chi-square analysis of these results showed significance at the .01 level in the increase of the number of times parents read to their children.

Out of the 443 respondents, 154 (35%) obtained the GED or completed high school while in Even Start, and 107 (24%) respondents enrolled in further training or education after leaving Even Start. In many cases, these parents were the first in their family to ever enter post-secondary education or training.

Employment:

Seventy-three (17%) respondents indicated that they were employed before enrolling in Even Start. They worked for an average of 26.99 hours per week. The average salary was \$184.38 per week.

Two hundred and twenty-seven (51%) are employed now. They work for an average of 32.42 hours per week. The average salary is \$246.85 per week.

	Number of respondents being employed	Average hours of work per week	Average wages per week	Total wages per week
Before ES	73	26.99	184.38	13,459.74
After ES (now)	227	32.42	246.85	56,034.95
% of increase	211%	20%	34%	316%
Standardized Gain	N/A	0.66	0.79	N/A
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	N/A

The t-test statistic was run on the differences between the means of the hours and wages *before* and *after* their participation in Even Start to determine if significant increases were attained by the parents. Out of 54 respondents who were employed before they enrolled in Even Start and are employed now, significant increases were found in both hours and wages before and after their participation in Even Start.

The standardized gain for number of hours worked *before* and *after* parents' participation in Even Start is 0.66. For amount of wages earned *before* and *after* Even Start it is 0.79.

A standardized gain calculation reveals how much of an effect the intervention provided by the program had on the gains made by the participants, i.e., the higher the standardized gain, the bigger the impact of the intervention on the scores gains. The standardized gain is said to be small (.20), medium (.50), or large (.80). Therefore, for this group of parents, Even Start program had a medium effect upon the increases of hours made by the parents and a large effect upon the increases of wages. This cannot be interpreted that participation in Even Start caused this difference, but it can be said that a significant relationship exists between that participation and the change that occurred.

Further Training:

Ninety-five (24%) of the respondents enrolled in further training or education after participating in an Even Start program. Twenty-nine (31%) of the 95 parents (31%) entered a community college while 10 (11%) enrolled in further training in the area of child care (mostly the CDA - Child Development Associate program).

Public Assistance:

Before enrolling in Even Start, 220 parents received public assistance, whereas 150 parents receive public assistance now. That is a 32% reduction in the number of families receiving public assistance who were receiving this assistance before participating in Even Start.

Volunteer:

Before enrolling in Even Start, 102 (23%) respondents volunteered in organizations, mostly elementary schools. They volunteered for an average of 3.64 hours per week.

Two hundred and five (46%) respondents volunteer now, again mostly at schools. They volunteer for an average of 3.35 hours per week. This means that the number of parents who volunteer in schools has doubled since they participated in Even Start. Although there is no way to put a monetary value on this participation, the positive impact for schools must be significant.

There is not another program that produces these kinds of results for the small amount of federal funds that are spent on them.