MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE

Reg: Representative Clark

To: Education; Appropriations

MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION 2001

By: Representative Clark

House Bill No. 825

AN ACT TO BE KNOWN AS THE "FAMILY LITERACY FOR FAMILY INDEPENDENCE ACT"; TO DEFINE CERTAIN TERMS USED IN THE ACT; TO ESTABLISH A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM UNDER THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ACTING JOINTLY WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, FOR THE PURPOSE OF CREATING FAMILY LITERACY PROJECTS IN ECONOMICALLY AND EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED AREAS OF THE STATE; TO REQUIRE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROGRAM TO PERFORM COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES IN EXCHANGE FOR BENEFITS RECEIVED FROM THE PROGRAM; TO AUTHORIZE CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL ENTITIES THAT RECEIVE STATE FUNDING TO APPLY FOR GRANTS TO SUPPORT FAMILY LITERACY PROJECTS; TO REQUIRE FAMILY LITERACY PROJECTS TO BE COLLABORATIVE UNDERTAKINGS IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES; TO PRESCRIBE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANT APPLICATIONS AND FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN AWARDING GRANTS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Family Literacy for Family Independence Act."

SECTION 2. The Legislature finds and declares that numerous studies have shown the inextricable link between chronic welfare dependency and intergenerational undereducation and that many welfare recipients need to improve their literacy skills in order to succeed in the workplace. The Legislature further finds that strong, long-term evidence demonstrates that family literacy not only helps families with educational obstacles, but also moves them from welfare dependence to self-sufficiency while, at the same time, strengthening the family unit. The purpose of this act is to establish a mechanism to teach basic skills to such families through the context of family and work while providing opportunities for adults to gain work experience.

SECTION 3. As used in this act, the following words and phrases have the meanings ascribed in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

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(a) "Eligible parent" means a parent, guardian or custodian who meets the following requirements:

(i) Has at least one (1) child who is in the age range of birth through sixteen (16) years;

(ii) Lacks sufficient mastery of basic educational or basic English language skills needed to function effectively in society or lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent; and

(iii) Is a citizen or legal resident of the United States or is present lawfully in the United States.

(b) "Family literacy program" means a program of services that are of sufficient intensity, in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration to make sustainable changes in a family, which services integrate all of the following activities:

(i) Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children;

(ii) Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children;

(iii) Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and

(iv) An age-appropriate educational program designed to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

(c) "Literacy" means, when used with respect to an individual, the ability of the individual to speak, read and write English and to compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to:

(i) Function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society;

(ii) Achieve the goals of the individual; and

(iii) Develop the knowledge potential of the individual.
(d) "Eligible grantees" includes Headstart and other early childhood programs, adult education providers, public school districts and other local education agencies, family resource centers, postsecondary educational institutions, public or private nonprofit agencies, technical schools, and other institutions that have the ability to provide model family literacy services to adults and families.

SECTION 4. (1) The family literacy program is established jointly under the State Department of Education and the Department of Human Services to increase the basic academic and literacy skills of eligible parents and their children. The State Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, shall establish family literacy projects as part of the overall program at locations in the state where there is a high incidence of economic and educational disadvantage.

(2) The State Board of Education shall adopt procedures necessary to implement the family literacy program.

(3) The Department of Human Services shall establish guidelines for requiring program participants to engage in community service activities in exchange for benefits received from the program. Participants shall be allowed to choose from a variety of community and faith-based service providers that have arranged with the department to provide community service opportunities or program services. The department shall encourage participants to engage in community services within their own communities. Participants also must be allowed to fulfill the requirements of this subsection by providing community services to the program from which they received family literacy program services.

(4) Beginning in 2002, before December 31, the State Department of Education and Department of Human Services shall submit jointly an annual report to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives regarding the
community service activities of family literacy program participants. The report must include data on the number of participants, the types of community service performed and the number of hours spent in community service activities.

SECTION 5. (1) A local school district, education agency or adult education program that receives funding from the state may apply for a Family Literacy for Family Independence Grant, in an amount not to exceed Fifty Thousand Dollars ($50,000.00), to support a family literacy project if the State Board of Education and Department of Human Services determine that a high percentage of adults in the relevant geographical area have not graduated from high school.

(2) A family literacy project must be a collaborative undertaking of a project team that consists of representatives of each of the following:

(a) One or more local school districts;
(b) An adult education provider that receives state funding;
(c) A private or public early childhood education provider; and
(d) A representative of the Department of Human Services and any other social service, governmental or private agency that may provide assistance for the planning and operation of the project.

(3) Family literacy projects selected for grants must use either a nationally recognized family literacy model, such as models developed by the National Center for Family Literacy, or a model that, in the determination of the project team, State Department of Education and Department of Human Services, is superior to a nationally recognized family literacy model.

(4) Through a family literacy project, eligible parents must be instructed in basic education and general educational development. Preschool and school-age children must receive
instruction in developmentally age-appropriate educational programs. Other planned, structured activities involving parents and children in learning activities may be established as part of the project curriculum.

(5) A Family Literacy for Family Independence Grant application must include a plan addressing, at a minimum, the following:

(a) Identification and recruitment of eligible parents and children;
(b) Screening and preparation of parents and children for participation in the program;
(c) Food services for program participants;
(d) Instructional programs that promote academic and literacy skills and which equip parents to provide needed support for the educational growth and success of their children;
(e) A determination that at least ten (10) parents with children will enroll in and be eligible for the program;
(f) The provision of child care through either private or public providers;
(g) A transportation plan for participants;
(h) The membership of the project team required under subsection (2) of this section; and
(i) A plan for the assessment of parents, children and the overall family literacy program.

(6) In selecting grant recipients, the State Board of Education and Department of Human Services shall consider, at a minimum, the following:

(a) The educational needs of the local adult population;
(b) The incidence of unemployment in the area;
(c) The degree to which community collaboration and partnership demonstrate the ability to bring additional resources to the program;
(d) The readiness and likelihood of the applying organization to establish a successful family literacy project;
(e) The extent to which the family literacy services for parents place equal emphasis on teaching both parents and children;
(f) The extent the project works with heads of families who are economically disadvantaged, eligible for welfare or who are unemployed;
(g) The project's requirement that established goals and objectives be achieved, which goals and objectives must include increased parent skills, increased child development, increased parent-child interaction, employment and reduced dependence on public assistance;
(h) The project's plan to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program based on performance-based outcome measurements such as: improved educational levels; improved parenting and life skills; reduced dependency on welfare; increased employment; increased self-sufficiency of adults; improved developmental skills and independent learning of the children; increased parental participation in their children's education; and home environments that are supportive of educational endeavors; and
(i) A project's commitment to allocate at least five percent (5%) of funds and to develop a plan for professional development and training for family literacy program staff and administrators to ensure the proper integration of adult education and children's educational programs and the blending of human and financial resources.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.