

BRIGHT SPOTS

Ready for School, Prepared to Learn



Parents as Teachers, St. Louis, MO

It's a familiar story for nonprofit leaders: a great need among children, a strong program to meet it — and a lack of funding to make it happen. That was the situation for Parents as Teachers in extending its highly successful Family And Child Education (FACE) program, already serving American Indian families with children ages 3 and up, to reach families with still younger children.

The FACE program embodies all of the fundamentals that have animated Parents as Teachers since its founding in 1981 to engage parents in helping their children learn from an early age, preparing them for school and staying involved in the learning process.

“The original motivation for Parents as Teachers — school readiness — is what we've tested from the start,” says Susan Stepleton, president and CEO. “And we've seen some really profound results: children in poverty starting school at exactly the same level as those who aren't. If we can erase that readiness gap at the beginning, we can level the playing field for all children.”

Fortunately, the strength of the FACE program results helped Parents as Teachers win a highly competitive federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. As one of only 49 grantees chosen from nearly 1,700 applicants for this landmark funding, Parents as Teachers will use its \$14.25-million award to support its BabyFACE program in 24 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in six states and to assess its outcomes.

Proving a positive impact

Now serving families in all 50 states and internationally, Parents as Teachers has emerged as a leading home-visiting program. Its *Born to Learn* model develops children's educational readiness through four key components:

- Personal home visits by parent educators trained and certified in child development.

WHO THEY ARE

Parents as Teachers:

- Serves 350,000 children.
- Serves 270,000 families.
- Operates 3,000 programs in all 50 states, plus Australia, Canada, China, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

\$1,700–\$2,500 cost per family.

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Susan Stepleton, President and Chief

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- Group meetings of parents to share experiences and insights and to build social networks.
- Regular screenings for learning, sensory or developmental problems.
- Referrals to community resources for services beyond the scope of the program.

Over the years, more than a dozen external studies have been conducted on the effects of the *Born to Learn* model. Citing data on outcomes for more than 16,000 children and parents, a recent research report by Dr. Edward Zigler concluded, “States that wait to start early childhood education until age 4 are making a huge mistake ... by starting at birth, Parents as Teachers starts at just the right time” ([E.Zigler, 2007](#)).

The same study found that 82 percent of poor children who participated with high intensity in both Parents as Teachers and pre-school entered kindergarten ready to learn, as compared to only 64 percent of poor children who had no involvement in either service.

Reaching younger children

Through its BabyFACE program, Parents as Teachers will now be able to provide home visiting and parent education services to American Indian families with children below the age of 3. BabyFACE will also help set the stage for continued progress in the FACE program, now offered in 45 BIE schools. BabyFACE will incorporate tribal customs and languages in a culturally attuned approach to family engagement, just as FACE relies on parent educators from American Indian communities. FACE is conducted in partnership with the National Center for Family Literacy, which also has deep experience in developing literacy as a family affair.

“BabyFACE was an outgrowth of the FACE program’s success,” says Stepleton. “With our research, we saw that if we started home visits earlier than age three, we’d have an even greater impact. We know the importance of those first few years, and it was difficult to end a program that was working well. We have a rigorous research design that we hope and believe will demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs.”

A “beautifully simple” model

BabyFACE is just one of the ways that Parents as Teachers is expanding its work to assist parents in the improvement of child health and development. After rolling out a three-year strategic plan in 2009, Parents as Teachers developed new curricula and materials, modified program certification requirements and strengthened its performance-reporting measurements.

“The model that was created was beautifully simple,” says Stepleton. “It’s not so complicated that it requires advanced degrees. It’s very scalable and very cost-effective. Parents as Teachers was conceived to make it realistic for a variety of organizations to implement a quality program that gets real results.”

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

In external evaluations, Parents as Teachers has been shown to:

- Bring low-income children to the same level of school readiness as non-poverty children.
- Reduce the need for Individualized Education Plans.
- Get children ready to learn. Of low-income children who participated in both Parents as Teachers and pre-school, 82% entered kindergarten ready to learn, compared to 64% of low-income children not involved in either service.

HIGHLIGHTS

Parents as Teachers:

- Sends certified parent educators to visit families at home.
- Organizes group meetings of parents.
- Provides regular screenings.
- Refers parents to additional services.

FACE and BabyFACE:

- Serve Native American families.
- Incorporate tribal customs and languages.
- Work through a partnership with the National Center for Family Literacy.