

BRIGHT SPOTS

Ready for School, Prepared to Learn



Parent-Child Home Program, Garden City, NY

Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) focuses on a gentle lesson for parents and guardians seeking to prepare young children for school: Sit down with your child, and a book or a toy, and have fun.

“When it’s fun for the child, that’s when they really learn,” says Merl Chavis, a home visitor in the PCHP program at SCO Family of Services, a Brooklyn social service agency.

PCHP began 45 years ago, when Phyllis Levenstein, then a doctoral student at Columbia Teachers College, developed the program model to reduce high school dropout rates by working with low-income parents before their children ever entered school. Now headquartered in Garden City, N.Y. on Long Island, PCHP partners with local school districts, charter schools, social service agencies, hospitals and community health centers, public libraries and universities to set up program sites and reach out to families.

Parents and guardians sign up for the two-year program when their children are two-years-old. From fall through spring, a PCHP home visitor then comes to the family’s home for a half-hour, twice weekly, to meet with the parent or guardian and the child. Each week, the home visitor brings a carefully selected book or educational toy as a gift to the family and shows the adults how play can help children learn.

The Power of Play

The shift that takes place during the home visits is gradual but life-changing. “This program means parents spend time with their child, rather than putting the child in front of TV with a video game,” says Joyce Parent, coordinator of the PCHP site in Salem, Mass.

WHO THEY ARE

The Parent-Child Home Program:

- Uses home visits to strengthen parent-child verbal interaction and reading and play activities that help children learn.
- Reaches 6,750 families:
 - 30% African American, 30% Hispanic, 30% Caucasian, 10% Asian immigrant and other immigrant populations.
- 38% of parents/caregivers in U.S. less than 10 years.
- Annual income of families served:
 - 45% less than \$10,000.
 - 84% less than \$30,000.
- Average annual cost per family: \$2,800 (ranges from \$1,500 to \$4,500 depending on a site’s partner agency, location and target population).
- Operates in 150 sites in 15 states, plus sites in Ireland, Bermuda and Canada.

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As parents watch their children play with toys and books, Brooklyn-based Chavis adds, “They see the little lights going off in their children’s brains and begin to realize how much more their children are capable of.”

Jessica Dowshen, PCHP director at the SCO Family of Services site, explains that parents frequently didn’t play as children themselves. “Many tell us they don’t remember receiving toys and books when they were growing up.” As a result, she says, parents often don’t understand or value that type of interaction with their child.

The home visitor makes of 92 visits to a family over the course of two years, all during the school years. “At around the 23rd visit,” Chavis reports, “you can see parents really changing their behavior towards their child. They become more patient, more relaxed. They start to think about their children differently.”

Families gain a library of children’s books and a collection of educational toys — from *Pat the Bunny* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to textured foam block shapes and stacking cups. Home visitors also connect families with other needed services such as GED programs, food stamps, local libraries, and even free cultural programs for children. Typically at age four, children transition into pre-kindergarten or Head Start.

Results that stick

Studies over a dozen years show that PCHP makes a long-term difference. A 1998 study in Pittsfield, Mass. found that 84.1 percent of 123 young adults who completed two years of PCHP as toddlers graduated from high school. This rate matched the nationwide rate of middle-income students (83.7 percent), and significantly bested the nationwide rate for low-income students (64.8 percent).

A 2009 study of PCHP graduates at The King Center Charter School in Buffalo, N.Y. found that they began — and completed — kindergarten with better literacy skills than a comparison group. In third and fourth grades, another study found, significantly more PCHP children scored “proficient” on state assessments, in comparison to the non-PCHP students in the school (27 percent more in math, 23 percent more in English Language Arts) and to non-PCHP students in the district (40 percent more in math, 30 percent more in ELA).

In 2012, data will be available from a study funded by the Pew Charitable Trust Foundation, the Heising-Simons Foundation, and the New York University Child & Family Policy Center to evaluate PCHP’s effectiveness with the Black and Latino communities in two New York City boroughs.

“We don’t believe the kids graduate from high school because home visitors read them stories and introduced some toys into the household,” says PCHP Executive Director Sarah Walzer. “Rather the impact comes from successfully engaging parents as their child’s first and most important teacher and ongoing academic advocate.”

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

At The King Center Charter School, Buffalo, NY, 2009, PCHP graduates:

- **Scored higher on Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test on entering kindergarten (average 99.9) and leaving (average 104.7) than non-PCHP students in the same class (89.4 entering, 94.7 leaving).**
- **More scored proficient on state English and math assessments in 3rd and 4th grades than other students in the school (27% more in math; 23% more in English).**

On Daberon assessments of development in Pittsfield, MA, public schools (2005):

- **Students who completed both PCHP and pre-K entered kindergarten scoring an average 10.15 months developmentally above their chronological age.**
 - **Compared to an average of 3.3 months for students district wide.**
 - **Compared to an average of 4.86 months for students with only pre-K.**

HIGHLIGHTS

The Parent-Child Home Program:

- **Plans to increase families served from 6,750 to 10,000 by end of 2013 fiscal year.**