



# Idiom

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## Success in the Mainstream through Teaching Parents to Support Early Literacy Learning: The K-PASS Program

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With news reports clamoring that schools are not meeting their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and often citing English language learners (ELLs) as central to the problem, school districts are under pressure to respond and solve this problem. It is striking that in many cases ELLs are considered “behind” in relation to their peers before they even begin school. Factors contributing to this belief are: ELLs tend to have socioeconomic or psychological factors that conspire against achievement in school and English acquisition; immigrant families are less likely to enroll their children in preschool prior to entering kindergarten; some parents lack literacy skills in their first language (L1) and struggle to communicate in English (L2). To address the needs of this population, the director of English Language Learner (ELL) programs and several English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers in White Plains, N.Y., designed the Kindergarten-Providing Academic

Skills and Strategies (K-PASS) program to teach parents about the literacy skills needed for their child’s success in kindergarten. The central purpose of K-PASS was to try to improve kindergarten readiness in the area of literacy—to get ahead of the achievement gap and help ELLs enter kindergarten with the required readiness skills and orientations to participate in the mainstream.

The K-PASS pilot program (2007-2008) synthesized teacher observations and current research in an effort to create a family-oriented intervention to prepare incoming kindergartners with the skills and concepts that many non-immigrant children learned at home or in preschool. Several steps were taken in the implementation of the pilot. First, children were identified as needing educational support based on pre-kindergarten enrollment evaluations, including the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, 3rd edition (DIAL-3), social history obtained from parents, and a home language survey. The administration of the DIAL-3 was conducted in the children’s native language (L1). If a child had not participated in a pre-school program and scored below the 30th percentile on the language subtest of the DIAL-3, the child and his or her parents were invited to participate in the K-PASS program. Twelve families participated in the 2007-2008 pilot. The children involved demonstrated a lag in their L1 development. Using the research of Cummins (1981) and

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## This issue’s theme:

### Preparing for Mainstream



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(The K-PASS Program *continued from page 1*)

Krashen (1999) to ground their teaching and program design, district staff addressed this lag, as a language delay in the L1 would make learning English difficult.

The second step of the K-PASS pilot was to invite the parents of the identified target children to participate in a series of parent workshops on literacy taught in Spanish. The foundation for the workshops was to emphasize that early literacy is typically developed at home and introduced by parents. Gilliam, Gerla, and Wright (2004) have documented success improving the literacy of young immigrant children when their parents were trained to become aware of home- and community-based literacy activities that support the development of literacy skills and orientations. Therefore, parents were viewed as crucial literacy education partners by the school district. In addition, if children are from homes where family members are not literate in their L1, they often have difficulty becoming literate in the L1 and subsequently experience challenges in achieving L2 literacy (Krashen, 1999). Krashen writes that children typically acquire their L1 in a natural environment; he argues that without a well-developed L1 children cannot transfer language skills to L2. This research further supports the importance of interventions such as the K-PASS program.

The series of hands-on parent training workshops focused on home-based early literacy learning strategies and materials. During the workshops, teachers provided parents with teacher-created materials and modeled the use of these materials. Parents were asked to practice these literacy activities at home during the summer. Three 90-minute workshops conducted in Spanish focused on three kindergarten-oriented thematic curricula (*What's in a Name*, *All Around Town*, and *Shapes and Colors*) were shared with parents. *New York State Learning Standards*, local

kindergarten curriculum, and literacy research provided guidance to the ESL teachers as they selected academic content and skills to be covered in the K-PASS workshops. It was determined that participation in kindergarten would be facilitated if the children could learn to identify their first and last name, names of family members, letter names, colors, and shapes. Skills such as book handling, holding a pencil, and cutting paper were also included as part of the program; parents were taught the importance of helping their children to learn to listen to a picture book and recall details, use the pictures to understand the story, and to know the direction of the text. All of the family-based strategies for achieving learning goals were elucidated through discussion and teacher demonstrations. Finally, families were given Spanish and English books as well as materials so that the ideas and orientations highlighted in the workshops could be explored at home over time.

All of the twelve families invited to participate completed the program. Following program completion, children were reassessed to measure the program's impact. When comparing the pre- and post-intervention DIAL-3 scores, 7 out of 12 children improved their scores notably. Three children made limited progress and two had lower scores. The ESL teachers found that even children who did not improve their scores appeared significantly more ready for kindergarten and comfortable when participating in class in the fall than when they had come in for the kindergarten screening process.

Everyone involved in the K-PASS pilot is pleased with the tremendous potential this program offers for mainstreaming ELLs. With a relatively small investment of money and time, the program was able to document significant gains in literacy-based school readiness with a historically challenging population. The successes of the pilot K-PASS program impressed the

school district administration, and the program was expanded. During the 2008-09 school year the program will serve 36 children and families.

In order to create opportunity for immigrant children and allow them to enter the mainstream in kindergarten without falling behind, schools need to create programs and curricula that close or avoid an achievement gap. It is essential that schools work to involve immigrant parents in American schools and help them to access the promises of a high-quality education for their children. Schools should teach parents about learning processes and school expectations, routines, and resources. This active positive outreach to parents will help reduce linguistic and cultural barriers to academic achievement.

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