

2025-2027

LEGACY OF FAMILY LEARNING

Our Case for Support



ncfi National Center for Families Learning

From the President

Our nation is facing a growing literacy crisis. Average reading scores have declined across all ages for a decade, fueled by decreased federal funding, inconsistent literacy instruction, and fragmented approaches for adults who need help with literacy.

The consequences are enormous. A recent U.S. Senate report warned that unless literacy rates improve, *“we have no hope as a country to compete in a global marketplace.”* Low literacy already costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$2.2 trillion each year, according to Gallup. Beyond economics, low literacy undermines public health, weakens communities, and threatens family well-being.

But we are not without solutions. Through decades of research and practice, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has proven what changes everything: when parents gain literacy skills, their entire family’s future transforms.

By taking a multigenerational approach, NCFL breaks the cycles of illiteracy and poverty that families are trapped in. We don’t just teach reading—we transform parents into their children’s greatest champions through evidence-based programs where parents and children learn side by side.

Family learning pays it forward—give parents and children literacy skills, and you’re reshaping their economic trajectory. When one family learns to read and learn together, futures brighten. When entire communities learn together, the world shifts. Every \$1 invested in the Legacy of Family Learning Campaign creates \$32 in return—building a stronger workforce, thriving families, and more connected communities.

By supporting **NCFL’s Legacy of Family Learning Campaign**, you invest in proven solutions that eradicate poverty at its root. Please join us as we strengthen families and transform communities through the power of learning.

With gratitude,



Felicia C. Smith, EdD
President & CEO



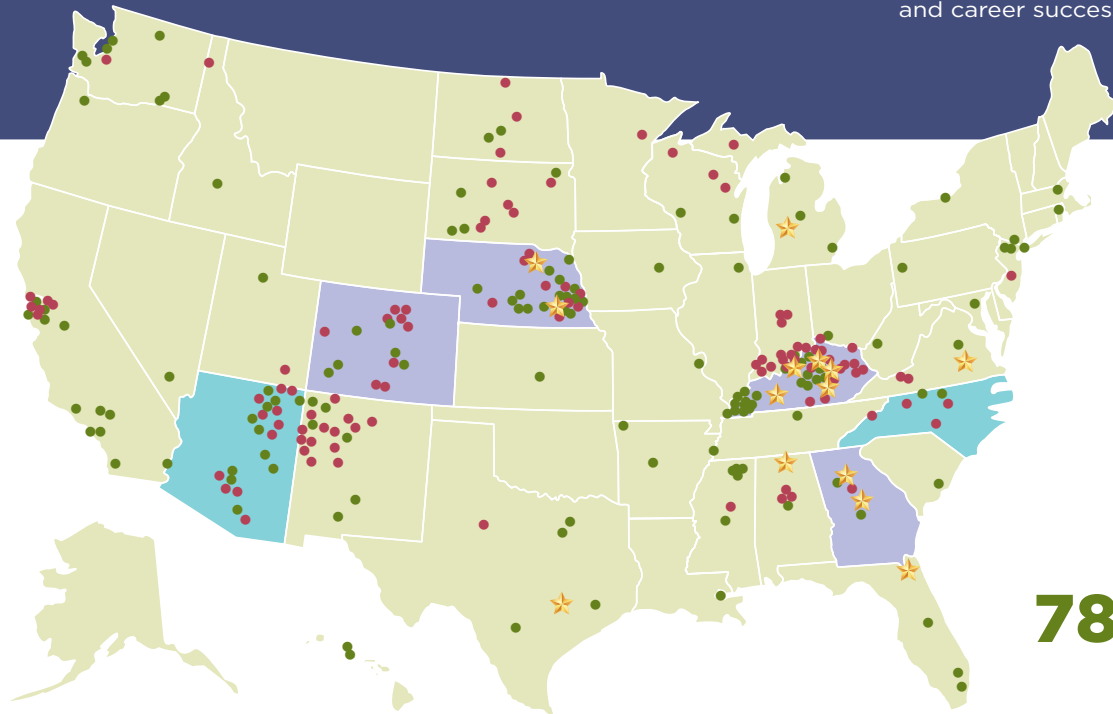
A legacy of literacy that lasts generations

For decades, NCFL has proven that family learning works. Today, we continue adapting to meet family needs and expand multigenerational learning.

Invest in Literacy to Build a Brighter Future

A \$10 Million investment in our Legacy of Family Learning Campaign will grow into a +\$320 Million economic outcome. Literacy pays back, with dividends, for families and society alike.

Over the next several years, the Legacy of Family Learning Campaign will **reach over 12,000 families in more than 850 schools nationwide.** Your donation will help students thrive in school, help parents support their children's learning, and help families build pathways to education and career success.



FOUNDED IN **1989**

200+
COMMUNITIES

41
STATES

78% PERCENTAGE OF REVENUE SPENT DIRECTLY ON PROGRAMMING AND COMMUNITIES

- ★ Family Learning Communities
- Current Community Initiatives
- Legacy Community Initiatives
- Current Statewide Initiatives
- Legacy Statewide Initiatives

**Did you know?
The literacy gap in the
U.S. continues to widen.**



1 in 3 employers report that their average employee lacks the literacy skills needed to do their job effectively.



Nearly one in three students in key school years are chronically absent, creating serious learning gaps.

70%

Almost 70% of U.S. 4th graders have basic reading skills, limiting their ability to take on challenging material.

Why Literacy Matters More Than Ever

Average student scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), tracked at key points in 4th and 8th grade, have generally decreased since 2015. Math scores for eighth graders are at their lowest point since 2000, and average reading performance is below pre-pandemic levels.

It's not just about academic achievement. The NAEP report shows that 2025's 12th graders are reading at the lowest levels in three decades. These students are now on the verge of entering the workforce without the skills needed to fully contribute to the economy.

Adult literacy scores show the same troubling downward trend. Without intervention, these learning challenges will persist across generations.



“ Children of low-literacy parents have a 72% chance of staying trapped in the same cycle. ”

This isn't just an education problem—it's the root of poverty, health disparities, and economic mobility.

4x

Students not reading proficiently by third grade are 4x more likely to drop out before getting a diploma.

1 in 4

unemployed adults reads at or below the lowest literacy levels.

3x

Adults with low literacy are 3x more likely to have an adverse health outcome.

43%

of adults at the lowest level of literacy skills live in poverty.

50%

income penalty: Adults with low literacy skills earn half of what higher literacy level workers can.

The High Cost of Low Literacy

Overall, low-literate adults participate less in the labor force, rely more on social services, and strain healthcare systems. Estimates show that addressing these negative social and economic outcomes from low adult literacy can generate **\$2.2 trillion—or 10% of GDP.**

These challenges are interconnected and intergenerational.

They demand bold, family-centered solutions.



Scan to read more about low literacy in America in Dr. Smith's op ed in The Hill.



When families learn together, they escape poverty together.

For over 35 years, NCFL has pioneered the family learning movement that shows schools and communities how parents and children can succeed side by side. We've moved parents from the sidelines to the center of their children's education.

Engaged families build better schools and stronger communities.



IN FOCUS: Empowered through Education

Brandy first joined NCFL's Kentucky family literacy program because she thought it would help her children, giving them more opportunities to connect and feel supported. Through the program, she also found the chance to build her resume, earning a ServSafe Food Handlers certification. Brandy is now working towards a nursing degree with the goal of entering the mental health field. She credits family literacy with improving her family's well-being and making learning a family activity in her home.

**4X ROI: A NURSING CAREER CAN QUADRUPLE
THE EARNING POWER OF A MINIMUM-WAGE JOB.**

1

PROGRAM MODELS

NCFL creates and implements evidence-based programs that engage entire families—adults and children—in literacy, workforce skills, and lifelong learning.

2

POLICY & RESEARCH

NCFL advances national policy and advocacy by listening closely to what families and communities are experiencing on the ground. We study emerging needs and opportunities in real contexts, then elevate those insights to shape public priorities and mobilize the highest levels of support.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILIES LEARNING:

A National Model Rooted in Local Partnerships

3

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

NCFL provides educators and community leaders with hands-on training, coaching, and program implementation support and convenes the nation's leading family learning conference.

4

COMMUNITY IMPACT

NCFL partners with local governments, schools, nonprofits, and families to align and coordinate efforts that help families reach their education and economic goals. By working hand-in-hand with community members to design and lead solutions, the change is rooted locally, strengthening the social fabric in ways that sustain across generations.

PROGRAM MODELS:

From Literacy to Leadership

For more than 35 years, NCFL has delivered proven, family-centered programs that improve literacy, support families, and transform communities.

Program Impacts

- Improved attendance in K-12 schools
- Higher literacy rates for children and adults
- Stronger academic performance
- Achievement of adult education goals, including GED® diplomas
- Greater workforce readiness and earning potential
- Increased parent engagement in reading, homework, classroom activities, and school leadership

Family Literacy Model

Our multigenerational family literacy model combines parent-child learning to enhance adult literacy skills and workforce readiness, support children's education, and break cycles of poverty.



Family Engagement Model

Our family engagement model unites parents and teachers as partners in a child's learning from birth through high school. By connecting home and school, it builds parent leadership, strengthens support systems, and improves attendance, achievement, and family-teacher relationships.

Family Leadership Model

Our family leadership programs help parents strengthen their leadership at home, in school, and in the community. Using a six-step, evidence-based framework, parents build skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving that benefit their families and careers.



POLICY & RESEARCH:

From Classrooms to Capitol Hill

NCFL advances family learning by building capacity and knowledge among families, practitioners, and policymakers. We equip leaders with the skills, networks, and evidence to drive change—ensuring that family voices shape policy and that investments are sustainable.

Key Initiatives

Advocacy:

Elevating literacy while supporting leaders to sustain advocacy.

Parent Advisory Councils:

Elevating parent voice and leadership to inform policy and practices.

Networking

Connecting and mobilizing program graduates for ongoing influence.

Research & Evaluation:

Conducting rigorous studies and producing reports that guide planning and investment.



We influence both practitioners and policy leaders.

By linking direct service, capacity building, and evidence with advocacy, NCFL ensures that policies are informed by real work happening on the ground and are sustained in communities nationwide.

Change in Action

- Authored and secured federal approval for a consistent, comprehensive definition of family literacy in federal law which created the basis for ongoing federal funding that supports family literacy nationwide.
- Supported state wins, including Nebraska's adoption of family literacy priorities.
- Guided cities and districts to embed family learning into long-term plans.
- Influenced allocation of major federal and state literacy funding.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

From Knowledge to Practice

Working birth through adulthood, NCFL's professional learning offerings connect strategies with real-world application to better serve families.

Strategic Initiatives

- Statewide systems in Colorado, Georgia, and Nebraska.
- Ongoing workshops, webinars, and coaching aligned with state priorities.
- Hundreds of practitioners trained in family literacy and engagement strategies.
- Sustainable systems built so communities can continue strengthening family outcomes.

Annual Families Learning Conference

- For 35 years, the nation's premier multigenerational learning event annually convenes hundreds of educators, policymakers, funders, and leaders from all 50 states.
- The event showcases evidence-based practices, new research, and emerging innovations that shape the field.
- The event provides networking opportunities that drive meaningful connections and lasting relationships.

Family Learning Network & Communities of Practice

- Regional and national networks connecting practitioners for peer learning, coaching, and collaboration.
- Platforms to share promising practices, adapt models, and spread innovation across communities.
- Sustainable communities of practice driving continuous improvement and better outcomes for families.

Equipping Educators for Impact

From conferences to collaborative networks, NCFL trains thousands of practitioners each year, providing them with family learning strategies that they can put into practice in their communities.



COMMUNITY IMPACT:

From Local Partnership to Lasting Change

While all of our programs expand the reach of the family learning movement, Family Learning Communities™ demonstrate the power of deep, place-based partnerships.

Family Learning Communities (FLCs) are NCFL's bold approach to redesigning local systems of support around families. Built through a co-design process, FLCs bring schools, businesses, nonprofits, government, and families to the same table to align resources, close gaps, and create a shared vision for learning and economic prosperity.

The result: communities that are better coordinated, resources that are more aligned, and families that have a greater ownership in shaping solutions.



This is not just programmatic work—it's economic investment. In Kentucky, FLCs have already catalyzed new partnerships with major employers and adult education providers, expanded access to family literacy and play-based learning, and increased completion of workforce certifications like ServSafe. Parents are stepping into leadership roles, student attendance is improving, and entire communities are building the capacity to sustain change beyond initial funding.

NCFL is proving that when families are engaged from the start, they can be key partners in shaping the systems that serve them, creating stronger schools, stronger economies, and stronger communities.

Employers as Education Partners

For Grand Rapids families like Maria's, community partnerships are creating pathways to prosperity. Maria is training to become a medical assistant through a program developed by the Literacy Center of West Michigan, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and major employer Corewell Health. These partners have worked

together for decades to support local families. When they wanted to amplify their efforts, they integrated NCFL's family literacy expertise in order to create the Grand Rapids Family Learning Community. In less than two years, the results are clear: families now actively influence the community's healthcare and workforce systems, and

Grand Rapids became one of only two "Welcome Back" centers in Michigan to help internationally-trained medical professionals re-enter healthcare.



Measurable Change,

For more than three decades, NCFL has invested in children and families—and the results are undeniable. Year after year, those efforts add up: **stronger readers, more engaged parents, and brighter futures across entire communities.**

Now, we have the opportunity to multiply that impact. **For just under \$1,000 per family, NCFL programs equip parents and children to learn and grow together**—strengthening skills, confidence, and community connections that create lasting opportunity.

Your investment builds the foundation for expanding access to NCFL programs and Family Learning Communities nationwide. This campaign will help reach more than **12,000 families, 850 schools, and 20,000 educators**—transforming learning, livelihoods, and local economies for generations to come.



**OUR GOAL:
12,000 Families,
850 Schools, &
20,000 Educators**

Meaningful Impact.

The true measure of family learning goes beyond any single program. When parents have the tools to support their children's educational success, those children grow into adults who carry that opportunity forward—lifting families, communities, and the next generation.



“Thanks to the literacy program, my mom and dad were able to provide me a life that they would not have been able to otherwise.”

—Former program participant



“

During tough times, we sharpen our skills, refocus our energy, and redouble our efforts. And during these times, family literacy has never been more important and never been in a better position to provide our families, our schools, and our communities with the tools they need to be successful in a 21st century workforce.

*—Sharon Darling,
NCFL Founder*

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The Power of Your Gift

Every dollar has meaningful impact:

- \$500** | **Help a family learn together**
Provides books, learning materials, and guided activities that support literacy, language, and learning at home.
- \$1,000** | **Equip a school to engage families**
Supports training and tools that help teachers and school staff build strong partnerships with families.
- \$5,000** | **Build family literacy and leadership development**
Funds parent literacy and leadership experiences where caregivers learn to advocate for their children and support learning at home and in school.
- \$45,000** | **Bring family learning to a new community**
Helps launch research-based programs that expand literacy, learning, and family engagement in a neighborhood, school, or partner site.
- \$100,000** | **Transform a district's approach to family engagement**
Supports a multi-year approach to planning, training, and coordination that can expand access to family engagement opportunities.
- \$500,000** | **Seed a new Family Learning Community**
Supports the launch of a multiyear, community-wide initiative that brings schools, families, partners, and employers together to strengthen educational and economic opportunity.

Campaign Goals

The U.S. faces a low literacy epidemic that, without intervention, will perpetuate generational cycles, hampering our workforce for decades.

This campaign amplifies our mission: expanding the family learning movement and opening pathways to economic mobility for families nationwide.

\$3.5M Program Models

Expanding Access: Launching new sites to bring family literacy, engagement, and leadership programs to more communities.

Supporting Families: Sponsoring parents and entire families to participate in NCFL programs.

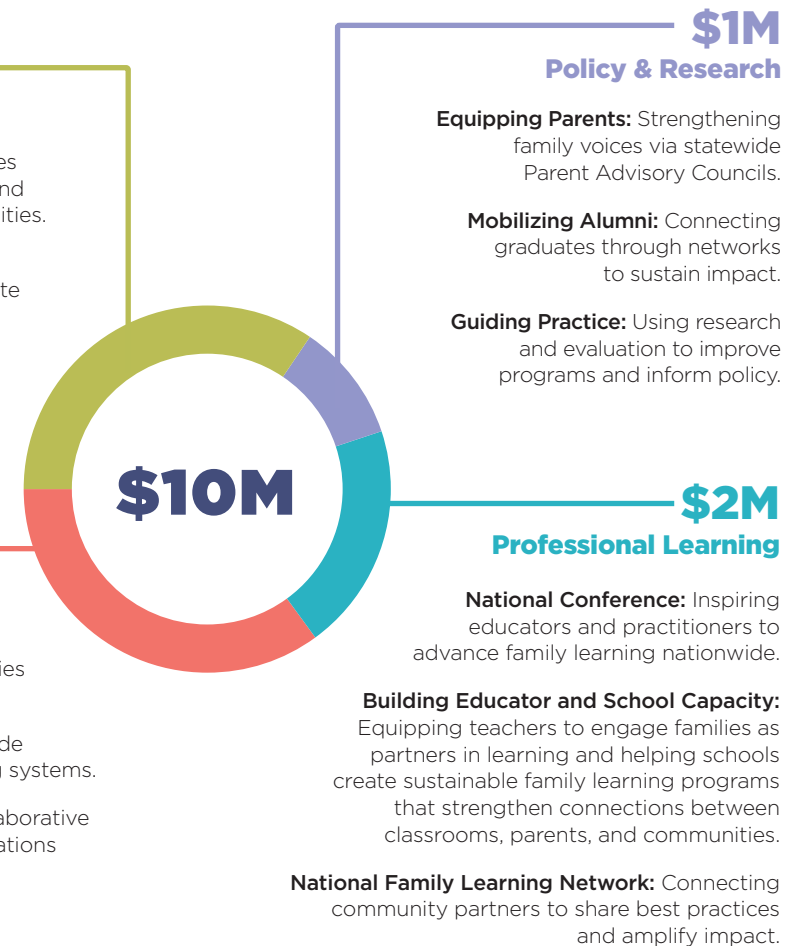
Scaling Impact: Using funding to enhance program reach, deepen services, and create lasting outcomes for families.

\$3.5M Place-Based Impact

Building Communities: Launching and expanding Family Learning Communities at the local, state, and regional levels.

Statewide Impact: Supporting statewide initiatives to strengthen family learning systems.

Regional Learning Labs: Creating collaborative hubs for schools, families, and organizations to innovate and share best practices.



Ways to Give

Your investment in family learning must match the scale of the growing problem. Join us in making that investment a reality.

Gifts to the Legacy of Family Learning Campaign can be made in a variety of ways.

Make a Donation

Make your personal, meaningful gift online or by mail using a credit card or check. Gifts are tax-deductible and may be made in memory or in honor of someone special.

Matching Gifts

Maximize your generosity: employer matching gift programs can multiply the effect of your donation.

Pledges

Your pledged commitment is accepted and allows you to make payments to fulfill the pledged amount within two years.

Donor Advised Funds

DAFs provide a flexible, tax-efficient, and strategically advantageous way for donors to maximize the impact of their philanthropic efforts.

Education success drives economic success.

Now is a pivotal moment to invest in NCFL's mission to eradicate poverty. Families and communities face unprecedented challenges, and the need for strong, sustainable connections between schools, families, and civic institutions has never been greater.

Your support powers NCFL to create systems change today that echoes for generations to come.



Scan here to donate.



For more information or assistance with making a donation, please contact:

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or **502-856-7521**

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