



SEQUAL Family Literacy Handbook  
Learning from Practice  
Practitioner Action Research  
2007-2008

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"Big R and Little r."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hubbard, R.S. & Power, B.M. (1999). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Getting Started.....	4
Your Practitioner Action Research--Planning	
Guide— <u>Self-Selected Question</u> : Cohort 1	5
Step 1—PIT.....	6
Step 2—Question-Posing.....	7
Step 3—Planning.....	9
Step 4—Observing.....	12
Step 5—Reflection.....	13
Your Practitioner Action Research	
Planning Guide— <u>Guided: Cohort 2</u> .....	17
Step 1—PIT.....	18
Step 2—Question-Posing.....	19
Step 3—Planning.....	21
Step 4—Observing.....	23
Step 5—Reflection.....	24
Appendices.....	28
Performance Standards.....	29
Methods for Collecting Data.....	31
PPVT Percentile Ranking.....	33
Model of a Monograph.....	34

## Introduction

SEQUAL is Pennsylvania's Family Literacy Program Improvement Initiative, funded through the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. For the past seven years, family literacy program improvement teams have participated in a systematic process of collecting and analyzing program data related to specific areas of inquiry.

This year, SEQUAL will use a Practitioner Action Research (PAR) model for both program improvement and practitioner professional development. As in other years, each program will be expected to form a cross-agency program improvement team that is charged with guiding the agency's program improvement process. For 2007-08, each team will be asked to participate in one of the following PAR cohorts:

Cohort 1: Using a Practitioner Action Research model, programs will work with SEQUAL staff to identify their own area of inquiry or question, devise their own intervention(s) to address the question, collect relevant data, reflect on the results, and share findings and best practices with their colleagues.

Cohort 2: Using a Guided Practitioner Action Research model, programs will use a pre-determined question and interventions, collect pre-specified data, reflect on their results, and share/compare findings and best practices with other family literacy programs who also are investigating this question.

Whichever cohort your team selects, you will receive ongoing support from the SEQUAL team and your family literacy technical assistants throughout the year.

Our SEQUAL goal for 2007-08 is to form a vibrant family literacy PAR community where we can have fun by communicating regularly, learning together, sharing best practices, and commiserating over lessons learned along the way.

## **Getting Started with Practitioner Action Research: A Process Overview**

### ***Today's Objective***

By the end of this SEQUAL Kick-off event, each program will have worked through the first three steps of the SEQUAL PAR process:

- Step 1: Establishing your Program Improvement Team (PIT)
- Step 2: Posing a solid question
- Step 3: Planning your intervention(s)

While your program may not be able to complete a **final** draft of all three steps, it is our expectation that each program will leave today's Kick-off event with a draft program improvement team roster, a researchable question, and a draft intervention. Following the Kick-off event, you will want to discuss this draft plan with your complete PIT, get their input into your project and submit the final versions of Steps 1, 2 and 3 to Donna Dencler and Trish Link by dates indicated on the Checklist of Events and Assignments.

### ***Ongoing Support***

SEQUAL conference calls in December, facilitated by Donna and Trish, will allow programs with similar issues to share their PAR projects with each other. Teams will be encouraged to stay in touch throughout their investigations, using the SEQUAL listserv, moderated by Trish and Donna. Programs will be expected to respond at least 3 times to questions/ issues raised on the listserve. Family literacy technical assistants will be interested in hearing about your PAR progress when they talk with you throughout the year.

### ***The Spring Poster Session***

The Spring SEQUAL event will provide an opportunity for each program to create a Poster Display detailing their question, intervention(s), methodology, and reflection on the results and implications for best practice. PITs are invited to showcase both their PAR project and their graphic creativity at this Poster Session. Programs will have an opportunity to hear about each of the projects, ask their colleagues questions, and provide each other with valuable feedback.

### ***Final Monographs***

Brief narrative monographs from each program will be due by June 14, 2008 and will be posted on the PA Family Literacy Website ([www.pafamilyliteracy.org](http://www.pafamilyliteracy.org)). The final monograph is a narrative version of your poster display which will highlight the story of your team's PAR project. SEQUAL staff and family literacy technical assistants are available, as needed, to help you draft your final monograph.

**YOUR PRACTITIONER ACTION RESEARCH  
PLANNING GUIDE**

**SELF-SELECTED QUESTION: COHORT 1**

## Practitioner Action Research

### What is Practitioner Action Research (PAR)?

According to B. Allan Quigley (my mentor whose *Action Research Planner*<sup>2</sup> provided the foundation for this handbook), action research is defined as, "A type of research in which educators, often with stakeholders and other professionals, examine their own practice, take specific actions to improve practice, and interpret the results. In action research, people systematically analyze a problem, review the literature and relevant experience, set a baseline for purposes of comparative analysis, systematically gather evidence on the observed change(s), and collectively reflect on the outcomes (Quigley, p. 171<sup>3</sup>). Allan also once called it, quite simply, "Satisfying the itch."

There are four Main Phases that we have broken into smaller steps.

The phases include:

- Question-Posing
- Planning
- Observing the Intervention
- Reflecting

### Step 1: The Program Improvement Team (PIT)

Identify administrators, teachers, collaborators and even parents to serve on your team. The PIT may change as the question is identified and the intervention is implemented. Keep in mind that sometimes it's good to have someone outside the "topic" on your team for fresh eyes. For example, if the question/problem is about adult learning gains, it may still be effective to have an early childhood partner on your team.

Ask yourself:

- "Who should be on my PIT? Why?"
- "Who else might assist?"

My potential team will consist of the following (name and position):

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<sup>2</sup> Quigley, B.A. (1999). *Pennsylvania action research handbook and project planner*. Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education and the Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>3</sup> Quigley, B. A. (2006). *Building professional pride in literacy: A dialogical guide to professional development (Professional practices in adult education and lifelong learning.)* Melbourne, FL: Krieger Publishing Co.

## Step 2: The Question

Begin by looking at your extant data. Data can be *e-data* reports from the *Performance Standards* (Appendix A), but also may be observations from your staff or questions that you have about your program's quality, perhaps informed by the *Indicators of Program Quality* (IPQ). Using the *IPQ Locator* may help your team get started. But, it also may be just an "itch" or "wondering." Starting points for your "wonderings" can be guided by the following:

- "I am curious about...."
- "I would like to improve..."
- "I don't understand why..."
- "... is a continuing source of irritation."
- "Some people are unhappy about..."

### "Question Posing"

#### **Analysis**

"What is happening now?" "What is the question area?" "Why is this an area for program improvement?" "How do we know it's a problem?" (Can be informed by *Performance Standards* or IPQs or other data.)  
What questions might we investigate?

"What are the real underlying reasons for this question and need for program improvement?" (Dig deep on this one. It may take more time than we have here today.)

You may want to discuss the following questions with your PIT to help decide on an area to investigate. Remember that PAR is a natural part of practice and teaching. It holds that effective practice and teaching are informed by personal knowledge, trial and error, reflection of practice, and conversations with colleagues.

***Commitment***

- "Is this a question we want to spend time on?"
- "Are there other more pressing issues that need our attention?"
- "Will others agree to help?"

***Feasibility***

- "Is it possible to create one or more interventions (specific actions) to address the question?"
- "Will we be able to implement the interventions?"

***Management***

- "Will we be able to manage and observe the intervention?"
- "Will we be able to complete it in the program year to see results?"

***Prior Research*** (This you may need to do after the training, back at your site.)

- "Are there other studies on this issue?"
- "What does the literature/research say about this?"
- "Have other programs experienced the same as I?"
- You may want to check the "Learning from Practice" section on the ABLE website to learn what other adult educators have done previously ([www.able.state.pa.us/ablersource](http://www.able.state.pa.us/ablersource))

Do NOT tackle questions that you can't do anything about or over which you have no control.



### Step 3: Planning the Intervention(s)

#### Developing the Measures

- What is the baseline? (If you want to have a sense of “better,” you need to know where you started. Better than “what?” The baseline is the “what?”)
  
- “What are our goals? How will we know if we reached them?” (What are my criteria for success?) They might be *Performance Standards* or any of the IPQs. They also might be quality items not defined by either of these documents (e.g. safety in the early childhood classroom.)
  
- “What is the time frame? When shall we begin? End?”
  
- “What methods will we use to collect data to tell us if it worked? How will we observe and document action and change?” (See Appendix B for suggested methods of collecting data. Plan to use at least three methods for “triangulation” of data.)
  
- “What constraints might we encounter? What can we do about them?”

## Our Research Question

If you've identified your question area, your baseline, your goals, and your interventions(s), you are ready to try to write your question. Here some examples of "bad" questions and "good" questions to give you some ideas.

<b>"BAD" Questions</b>	<b>"GOOD" Questions</b>
How can I increase my enrollment? <i>(Problem area, but no baseline, no final goal, no intervention.)</i>	How can we meet the enrollment standard by targeting non-traditional adult students, without compromising other performance standards?
How can I increase hours in adult education and meet or exceed the standard? <i>(Problem area and goal, only.)</i>	To what extent will a Peer Mentoring program, incentive programs, and managed enrollment increase adult education hours (2005-06 46.9 hours) to exceed the retention standard?
How can I improve relations with the local elementary school? <i>(General area, only)</i>	To what extent will identifying and collaborating with a point person (kindergarten teacher) and preparing "educational profiles," based on our assessment results shared in terms of school language for each school age child improve the partnership with the school district and lead to early diagnosis and remediation of learning problems. (IEP by Dec., not April)

**Try your question now.**

- **Your problem area:**
  
- **Your baseline:**
  
- **Your goal:**
  
- **Your intervention(s):**

**Your question!**

#### **Step 4: Observing the Intervention**

- Carry out your intervention plan
- Collect data and analyze. Reflect at each monthly SEQUAL meeting.
- Change or add interventions if it doesn't seem that you are getting the results you want. (PAR is cyclical and evolving, so feel free to adjust as you go.)
- Bring in another person to your PIT, if necessary.
- Collect more data. Check progress.
- Document along the way. Keep journals. Keep all records.
- Think about what you want to include in your Poster Show.
- Decide when to stop collecting data and begin analyzing your data and reflecting on what it means.
- Keep these questions in mind as your work through your project:
  - Am I staying true to the initial plan? If not, why?
  - Am I collecting the data I said I would?
  - Am I keeping track of changes as we work through the project?
  - Is my PIT team monitoring progress through regular meetings and meaningful conversations about our research project?

**Please Note:** Programs will be expected to respond at least 3 times to questions/issues raised on the SEQUAL listserve.

## Step 5: The Reflection

Look at the data with your PIT. It's not enough to say, "It seems to be better." Studying the data and figuring out what they mean is the most important step. Use these questions to guide your reflection.

- What do the data tell us? What were the results?
- Did our intervention(s) make a measurable difference?
- If so, did we meet/exceed our criteria for success?
- If not, how far were we from attaining them? What could we have done differently?
- What do these results mean? Did the changes accurately reflect what happened? Did something else happen to affect the outcomes?
- What will we continue to use to support our program?
- What can we change to make this idea even better?
- What was less helpful that we can discard?
- How can we repeat this (or have others repeat it) to develop more validity for this intervention?

## **Step 5: The Reflection**

### **Sharing Your Results**

#### **The Poster Session**

At the Spring SEQUAL events, we expect each program to come with a poster display that highlights its SEQUAL project and results. Be creative! Use photos, documents, videos to showcase your work. At minimum, the poster should include the following items:

- Your question and why it was an area for program improvement
- The IPQ(s), Performance Standard(s), and/or “wonderings” that informed it
- Your intervention(s)
- Your methods for data collection
- Your results
- Your interpretation or analysis of the results
- Lessons you learned to be shared with the field

## **Step 5: The Reflection**

### **Sharing Your Results**

#### **Report for the Website (See APPENDIX D for a sample)**

##### Title Page

- Title – A statement of your question
- Name of Family Literacy Program
- PIT member names
- Date of monograph
- Contact email (if someone wants more information)

##### Abstract (1/2 page): Summary, very brief

- Question statement
- Baseline
- Intervention
- Methods of data collecting
- Results

##### Question Posing Stage (1/2-1 page):

- The topic area and question
- Data that informed the topic area (Performance Standards, IPOs, and others)
- Background to the problem

##### Planning (1 page):

- Members and positions of your PIT
- Intervention(s)
- Baseline
- Criteria for success
- Start and finish time
- Data collection methods

##### Intervention (1/4-1/2 page):

- Who, what, when?
- Problems encountered, if any
- Changes made in the course of the action (intervention or data)
- Beginning and end date

Results and Reflection (1-2 pages):

- Summary of data and results (Met criteria for success?)
- Interpretation and analysis of what it means
- Success or failure and why
- Impact on your program
- What would you do the same or differently
- Plans for future (Institutionalize it? Write a journal article? Share at PAACE or other?)
- Lessons to be shared with the field

Appendix: Could include:

- Questionnaires
- Focus group or interview questions
- Surveys, forms, etc. that you created
- Anything that would be useful to others

**YOUR PRACTITIONER ACTION RESEARCH  
PLANNING GUIDE**

**GUIDED: COHORT 2**

## Guided Practitioner Action Research

### What is Practitioner Action Research (PAR)?

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There are four Main Phases that we have broken into smaller steps. The phases include:

- Question-Posing
- Planning
- Observing the Intervention
- Reflecting

### Step 1: The Program Improvement Team (PIT)

Identify administrators, teachers, collaborators and even parents to serve on your team. The PIT may change as the question is identified and the intervention is implemented. Keep in mind that sometimes it's good to have someone outside the “topic” on your team for fresh eyes. For example, if the question/problem is about adult learning gains, it may still be effective to have an early childhood partner on your team.

Ask yourself:

- “Who should be on my PIT? Why?”
- “Who else might assist?”

My potential team will consist of the following (name and position):

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## Step 2: The Question

Programs that have chosen to be in the Guided PAR cohort already have the question defined. However, you need to think beyond this pre-determined question to see why it is a problem for your program to investigate.

Your question:

***To what extent can parents increase the receptive oral language development of their children as measured by the PPVT, using the following tool?***

- ***Talking about Wordless Picture books curriculum***

Other tools for the intervention also may be used and are described in the Planning section.

**This question, as you see, explains the area for program improvement (children's receptive oral language), the intervention, and the measures. Now, think about WHY this is a problem first. As a PIT, talk about the questions below.**

### **"Question Posing"**

#### ***Analysis***

"What is happening now?" "What is the question area?"

"Why is this an area for program improvement?" "How do we know it's a problem?" (Can be informed by *Performance Standards* or IPQs or other data or wonderings.)

"What are the real underlying reasons for this question and area for program improvement?" (Dig deep on this one. It may take more time than we have here today.)

Since you have chosen this question, make sure that it is one you want to tackle. Consider these:

### ***Commitment***

- "Is this a question we want to spend time on?"
- "Are there other more pressing issues that need our attention?"
- "Will others agree to help?"

### ***Feasibility***

- "Is it possible to create one or more interventions (specific actions) to address the question/problem?"
- "Will we be able to implement the interventions?"

### ***Management***

- "Will we be able to manage and observe the implementation?"
- "Will we be able to complete it in the program year to see results?"

### ***Prior Research***

- "Are there other studies on this issue?"
- "What does the literature/research say about this?"
- "Have other programs experienced the same as us?"
- You may want to check the "Learning from Practice" section on the ABLE website to learn what other adult educators have done previously ([www.able.state.pa.us/ableresource](http://www.able.state.pa.us/ableresource))

### **Step 3: Planning the Intervention(s)**

***The primary intervention for programs in the Guided Cohort has already been established. It is:***

***Talking about Wordless Picture Books: A Tutor Strategy Supporting English Language Learners. (National Center for Family Literacy, 2006).***

*This intervention provides instructional activities around ten topics that help parents (native English speakers and ELL) build and practice conversational skills to improve children's receptive language skills. ([www.ncfl.org](http://www.ncfl.org) Tools for Literacy Programs, Free Teacher Resources, scroll to end.)*

***Additional interventions you might want to try consist of materials you received in 2006-07:***

***1. Language is the Key: Video-based Early Language Programs: Talking and Books and Talking and Play (Washington Learning Systems, 2004).***

***2. Reading and Talking Together: 2 DVD Set of the Seminar Presentation***

***The afternoon session of the Fall Kick-off event will include discussions about how these interventions may help your families in language and literacy development. It is hoped that as parents learn to read wordless picture books with their children they will engage in higher quality interactive practice and that this will, in turn, support the receptive oral language of their young children.***

As your PIT explores these tools, think about and discuss the following questions:

- "What are possible implications or side effects for these interventions?"

[Probes: What might we have to do differently? What adaptations will we need to make?"

- "What other resources will we need?" (Human or other)
- "How do we involve the learners in the research? How do we get their buy-in to try our plan?"

### Step 3: Planning the Intervention(s)

#### Developing the Measures

- What is the baseline? (If you want to have a sense of “better,” you need to know where you started. Better than “what?” The baseline is the “what?”)

***The baseline consists of PPVT scores from the previous program year. If a child does not have a PPVT score, then the child should be assessed with the PPVT PRIOR to the start of the intervention as a pre-test.***

- “What are our goals? How will we know if we reached them?” (What are my criteria for success?)

***An average increase in PPVT scores (using the percentile rank, Appendix C).***

- “What is the time frame? When shall we begin? End?”

***Begin in November 2007  
End in March 2008***

- What methods will we use to collect data to tell us if it worked?

***We will use the PPVT in a pre-post to measure change in children’s receptive oral language development.***

***We will use reflection sheets between parents and teachers to document home practice of the methods.***

- What other ways might we observe and document action and change?” (See Appendix B for methods.)
- “What constraints might we encounter? What can we do about them?”

## Step 4: Observing the Intervention

- Carry out your intervention plan
- Collect data and analyze. Reflect at each monthly SEQUAL meeting.
- Change or add interventions if it doesn't seem that you are getting the results you want. (PAR is cyclical and evolving, so feel free to adjust as you go.)
- Bring in another person to your PIT, if necessary.
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**Please Note: *Programs will be expected to respond a minimum of 3 times to questions/issues posted on the SEQUAL list serv.***

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- Anything that would be useful to others

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
**Program Performance against State Standards**

<b>Performance Standard</b>	<b>Benchmark 2006-2007</b>	<b>2006- 2007</b>	<b>2005- 2006</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1.1 Administrative Reporting	100 %			
1.2 Enrollment	95%			
2.1 Adult Education—Retention	50 hours			
2.2 Parenting Education—Retention	25 hours			
2.3 PACT—Retention	35 hours			
2.4 ECE – Retention	150 hours			
2.5 School Age Children—Attendance	85 %			
2.6 Home Visits (ES only)	1per month			
2.7 Adult Education Pretest	95%			
2.8 Adult Education Pre and Posttest	50%			
2.9 Pre School Children Pretest	70%			
2.10 Pre School Children Pre & Posttest	50%			
2.11 PPVT III Pre-test	70%			
2.12 PPVT III Pre & Posttest	50%			
2.13 PALS Pre-K Pre	70%			
2.14 PALS Pre-K Pre & Posttest	50%			
2.15 Parent-Child Literacy Activities Pretest	95%			
2.16 Parent-Child Literacy Activities Pre & Posttest	80%			
2.17 End of School Year Progress Report	60%			
3.1 Educational Gains – Adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TABE Reading</li> <li>• TABE Math</li> <li>• TABE Language</li> <li>• BEST original &amp; updated Literacy</li> <li>• BEST Plus</li> <li>• CASAS Reading</li> <li>• CASAS Listening</li> <li>• CASAS Math</li> </ul>	35 pts. 41 pts. 40 pts. 12 pts. 12 pts. 5 pts. 5 pts. 6 pts.			
3.1B Completion of EFL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beg. ABE Literacy</li> <li>• Beg. ABE</li> <li>• Low Int. ABE</li> <li>• High Int. ABE</li> <li>• Low Adult Sec.</li> <li>• Beg. ESL Literacy</li> <li>• Low Beg. ESL</li> <li>• High Beg. ESL</li> <li>• Low Int. ESL</li> <li>• High Int. ESL</li> <li>• Adv. ESL</li> </ul>	33% 40% 42% 38% 45% 41% 29% 27% 40% 36% 18%			
3.2 GED Achievement	51%			
3.3 Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	50%			

3.4 Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	52%			
3.5 Placement in Postsecondary Education/Training	33%			
4.1 ECE (age 4) Reading Readiness—PPVT	4 pts.			
4.2 ECE Reading Readiness--PALS-Pre_K	Dev. Score			
• Name Writing	5			
• Upper-Case Recognition	12			
• Lower Case Recognition	9			
• Letter Sounds	4			
• Beg. Sound Awareness	5			
• Print & Word Awareness	7			
• Rhyme Awareness	5			
• Nursery Rhyme Awareness	6			
4.3 School Age Reading on Grade Level	60%			
4.4 School-Age Promotion	90%			
5.1 Parent Reading to Child	60%			
5.2 Parent Talking to Child's Teacher	40%			

## APPENDIX B METHODS FOR COLLECTING DATA

Try to have at least three methods for reliability (triangulation). Here are some suggestions.

***E-data results:*** These correspond to your question/problem and the Performance Standards you were investigating. These would include, therefore, enrollment, retention hours, and educational gains for adults, GED, placement and retention in unsubsidized employment, educational gains for children (pre-K and school age), GED, and parent reading to child or talking more to child's teacher.

***Interviews or focus groups:*** These allow for interaction of the researcher with others. There are three categories:  
Structured: Useful when seeking specific information on a specific topic, with little room for discussion. ("How many times last week did you read to your child?")

Semi-structured: Involves asking more open ended questions, but allows the interviewee to go a bit further or provides some ideas they might not have thought about, using "probes." ("How did you learn about the program?" [Probes: friend, flyers, media]).

Open: Encourages more open discussion and room for wide-ranging opinions. ("In what ways has the program helped you grow as an adult?")

***Questionnaires:*** Like the interviews/focus groups, questionnaires can be closed or open.

Closed: Likert Scale, multiple choice, short response, seeking specific information. Little room for interpretation

Open: Asks for opinions with respondent providing their own words. Can be difficult to analyze.

***Document Analysis:*** Look at your and/or your participants' records, written reports, in-take forms, ILA records, letters, memos, journal entries, portfolios, writings. Analysis of these can also provide a baseline or inspiration for an intervention (e.g. inadequate home ILA forms did not capture the nature of the parent/child interaction and, therefore, did not result in hours. A revised home ILA form provided

rich detail and documentation, which allowed more hours to count and meet the ILA Performance Standard.).

**Anecdotal Records:** Written descriptive accounts of incidents, which are especially valuable for documenting classroom activity and behavior and are helpful in noting patterns.

**Field Notes:** Similar to anecdotal records, but also include the researcher's impressions and interpretations at the same time. Written on location.

**Case Studies:** A data collection method in which a single person, entity, or phenomenon is studied in depth over a sustained period of time and through a variety of data. The purpose of a case study "is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (Patton, 1990, p. 384). Selection of cases may be random or information-oriented (e.g., extreme or deviant cases, maximum variation cases, critical cases, paradigmatic cases) (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

**Logs:** Careful records of recurring activities. Often numerical (e.g. attendance, time off task, computer use, parent and child interaction during ILA, etc.) Commentary with the logs can be useful observational data.

**Journals:** Researchers keep reflections of the research process, which allow time to express feelings, anxieties, and ideas about the goings on. Journals are very useful at the reflection stage.

**Portfolio:** A collection of relevant materials compiled for a purpose. This is especially helpful when creating the poster show of your work. Photos, papers, grades, minutes—anything relevant should be kept.

**Audio and Video Recordings:** Valuable for getting an exact record. Require permission.

## APPENDIX C PPVT PERCENTILE RANK

### Helpful Information about the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test: Third Edition

The measure that will be used for the Guided Cohort #2 is the PPVT-III. This instrument, available at <http://ags.pearsonassessments.com>, is a leading measure of receptive vocabulary for standard English. It can be used for ages 2 – 6 through 90+, and takes about 10-15 minutes to administer individually. There are two parallel forms for pre and post-testing, and a training video is available.

For the purposes of your action research project, you will compare the child's *percentile rank* from the pretest to the *percentile rank (Norms Table #2)* from the posttest. This will answer the question "To what extent can parents increase the receptive oral language development of their children, as measured by the PPVT?"

Programs may also want to consider purchasing the *PPVT Letter/Report to Parents*, available from Pearson in both English and Spanish, which explains the purpose of this assessment and the significance of receptive oral language development.

**APPENDIX D – SAMPLE MONOGRAPH**

**(Title Page)**

**SEQUAL 2007-2008**

Establishing a Partnership with an Elementary School to Improve Parent Comfort and Participation in the School, Improve School Age Children Reading on Grade Level, and Provide Earlier Intervention to School Age Children with Learning Needs

**Program name**

**Program Improvement Team Member  
Names**

**June 6, 2008**

**For more information, contact (name, email, and phone).**

**Abstract:**

The 2006-07 SEQUAL team addressed the concern of relationship with the school district. The question was, "To what extent will establishing a partnership in an elementary school meet or exceed school age Performance Standards, provide intervention to children in a timely way, and improve relationships among parents, Even Start, and the school district?" Though the program had worked for several years to improve the partnership, little headway had occurred. To improve relationships, the team developed a number of interventions, including providing the school with a kindergarten preparation packet and information about Even Start, identifying a kindergarten point of contact, working with three families to support their school preparation and confidence, and creating an education profile for each child based on assessment results and couched in Title I terminology. Data collection included interviews with teachers and principals, attendance and promotion data, reading on grade level data, observation, and PPVT and PALS Pre-K data. The school became aware of how Even Start can help prepare children for school and appreciated the professionalism of the staff in the preparation of the Educational Profiles which then allowed children to receive earlier intervention in school. Students had better attendance, more were promoted, and more children read at the Advanced or Proficient levels to exceed the Performance Standards. Even Start will expand to other schools in 2007-08.

**Question Posing:**

The 2006-07 SEQUAL team identified "school partnerships" as the topic of their inquiry. The question was, "To what extent will establishing a partnership in an elementary school meet or exceed school age Performance Standards, provide intervention to children in a timely way, and improve relationships among parents, Even Start, and the school district?"

Data that informed the problem, included *e-data* for the following Performance Standards:

- 4.4 School-age children promotion. The standard is 90%; only 85% of school age children were promoted in 2005-06.
- 4.3 School age children reading on grade level. The standard is 60%; while 71.4% of school-age children were reported to be reading on or above grade level, there is room for improvement.

The following IPQ's were addressed:

- 1.5 The program attains or exceeds program performance standards, demonstrating effectiveness in improving adults' and children's literacy skills,
- 5.4 The program participates in joint planning with its partners to clarify the roles and responsibilities of their respective agencies in terms of program planning, delivery, and accountability.

Over the years the program had tried to establish a closer relationship with schools, intuitively knowing that this was an area of need, as more and more pre-school children head to kindergarten. Parents with school age children reported a discomfort in the schools and talking with teachers. Further, data suggested that not enough school age children from our program were reading on grade level or are being promoted to the next grade level. As our program was strong in the other components, we chose to focus on "partnership with elementary schools" as an area of concern, informed by data and IPQs.

**Planning:**

The PIT consisted of the following: name—Coordinator, name—Early Childhood Educator, name—Adult Educator, name—Parent Educator, and name—Kindergarten

Teacher from the school district. The PIT met every 6-8 weeks to accommodate other meetings and the schedule of the Kindergarten teacher.

Intervention(s) included the following: [Note: some were added after the initial Planning.]

1. Provided school district kindergarten contact with information about Even Start and the pre-school children who would be entering kindergarten in the summer.
2. During Kindergarten Assessment Days, provided packet for parents containing the book *You're Adorable*, skill builders (using scissors, color identification, Zaner-Bloser Alphabet sheet, beginning writing skills with tracing), A list of School Readiness Skills, and information about Even Start.
3. Chose three families as "case studies" and prepared and accompanied them to all school conferences. Copied report cards, talked with them individually, made time for them to use computer to access school district website and find information about their child's grades, homework, etc.
4. Invited schoolteachers to conduct writing activities for excused absences, making clear what is required. She also made clear the importance of regular attendance. Staff follow-up on attendance issues.
5. Provided incentives to those parents who listed attendance as a family goal.
6. Developed educational profile for each child entering kindergarten, using assessment data from Creative Curriculum (whole child), PALS-Pre-K and PPVT (language and vocabulary skills). Interpreted raw data to show developmental range for each child. Used school language (advanced, proficient, basic, below basic) in the profile. This was shared with the school district to identify areas of need and facilitate an early IEP and intervention.

Our baseline consisted of School Age Performance Standards for the previous years, lack of any partnership with the school district, parents' reported discomfort in the school.

Our criteria for success included, meeting School Age Performance Standards, getting three parents prepared for school conferences, and identification of one point of contact in the school district to assist with our SEQUAL goal.

We started at kindergarten assessment and ended the project in May 2007. We needed no approval from the coordinator, but did identify three families for the case study and got their buy-in with the project. We did not review current literature.

The following data were collected:

1. Interviews with kindergarten teacher and principals about partnership and value-added to Even Start and the elementary schools.
2. Attendance data.
3. Promotion data.
4. Reading on grade level data.
5. Observation of parents through the case studies.
6. Standardized data from the PPVT and PALS Pre-K.

**Intervention:**

The early childhood educator was the primary force behind the action, connecting with the school and finding an ally in the school teacher. The staff helped with preparation of the packets and worked with the three case study families. We encountered only success throughout. We monitored our interventions and changed

them. For example, we found out about the school website access to students' school information and helped parents use the computer to track their children's grades, scores, etc.

### **Results and Reflection:**

The program experienced the following results:

1. Schools became aware of the presence and value of Even Start in their community. Even Start participated in the K-Seals testing in four of the nine elementary schools in May.
2. Schools appreciated the professionalism in the data showing children's assessment results in terms of school readiness—their strengths and gaps—a heads-up for early intervention. This professional relationship has led to Even Start and the school district working together for early identification of special needs so that there is no lost time in the transition between Even Start and school. In the past sometimes it was not until April that a child was assessed and even later to receive an IEP and intervention. Note: Six children will be starting kindergarten in the fall.
3. Professional sharing of information about families' strengths and needs.
4. Getting other day care providers involved with the schools.
5. Increased attendance. Indeed, none of the 8 children had more than three unexcused absences, exceeding the PS.
6. Increased number of children reading at Advanced or Proficient to exceed the Performance Standard. 88% were reading at the Proficient or Advanced level, exceeding the PS. Only one child was at Basic; none at Below Basic.
7. Increased number of children promoted to the next grade level. All 8 of the children were promoted to the next grade level.
8. The kindergarten teacher attended the Spring SEQUAL event and will remain part of the PIT for 2007-08.
9. Even Start intends to expand to other kindergartens and attend Open Houses at the schools as well as be present for kindergarten testing days.

Reflections on the results:

We were pleased with this successful entrée to the school district. While it took time, we found the perfect partner in the kindergarten teacher, who came to understand and value what we can bring to her school. Convinced, she shared Even Start with her principal who provided further buy-in and promotion. Now understanding the support families have in Even Start, but chance to lose when the children enter public school, the district is intent on continuing to work with Even Start and the families to extend the support and communication. For example, we had one parent who wanted to help in the classroom, but who lacked the skills to be successful. Together, the school district and Even Start worked with her to gain the skills to succeed as a volunteer in her child's classroom. The school district agrees that together we need to be a part of the transition from Head Start or Even Start to the school district to ensure early processing of learning issues and to provide immediate follow-up support. We will track two of our families in year two and perhaps add a new one to see the long term effects of this intervention. We will continue our efforts and expand them in outreach to other elementary schools where we have school age children, hoping to find the connection we did this year, using this model. The success of this SEQUAL project has snowballed, with more elementary schools interested in how Even Start can support them, realizing that achieving Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) begins *before* Kindergarten and *must include* the parents.

**Lessons learned to be shared with the field:**

1. Find one contact who believes in the mission and value of Even Start and who can then be a voice and advocate in the school district. Show them how Even Start can support their efforts.
2. Work with parents to access school district on-line data so that they can track their children's academic work, assist them where needed, and be prepared to talk with teachers at conference. Provide support to those parents who need it.
3. Insist on high quality across the board as testimony to the value of the partnership.
4. Professionalize your data to share educational profiles of the children who are entering school and the range of their school readiness.