

**Title:** “Let’s Talk” Campaign

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**Description:** Recent literature highlights the importance of talk in promoting language and literacy development in young children.<sup>1</sup> The “Let’s Talk” Campaign, administered through the Cambridge Public Health Department, is aimed at increasing the vocabulary of young children and consequently better prepare them to read and learn once they enter school. This campaign is part of the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative and is funded through the Cambridge Health Alliance and the U. S. Dept. of Health and Human Services – Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grant.

Cambridge families with children 0-5 will be recruited through The Cambridge Hospital, Cambridge Health Alliance clinics, and The Newtowne Court/Washington Elms and Jefferson Park housing sites to participate in this campaign. These families have been identified as needing additional academic supports. In 2002, approximately 68% of 10th graders living in these developments failed the MCAS exams.<sup>2</sup> Only 11% of Cambridge Public School Grade 4 students were considered “proficient” in the English Language Arts Section of the MCAS in the year 2000.<sup>3</sup> Through community workshops, reading parties, and role modeling, this initiative will provide support to parents and primary caregivers in their efforts to create a home environment that encourages and supports literacy development in children.

**Goals:** The aim of this initiative is: 1) to assess parents’ knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding language and literacy development; 2) to educate parents about activities that they can do with their children in order to foster language skills and vocabulary and 3) to determine whether parents’ behavior changes as a result of campaign education and events.

**Methods:** Evaluation will be conducted by the Institute for Community Health under contract to the Cambridge Public Health Department. A review of the literature showed very few studies that examine parents’ knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about language and literacy development in young children, particularly in relation to behavior. This study’s pre/post intervention assessments are designed to focus specifically on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior change. Analysis of the self-reported changes in parental behavior will utilize the framework of Prochaska and DiClemente’s theoretical model of behavioral change.<sup>4</sup> The information gathered by the study will lead to greater knowledge about the appropriate interventions in this arena and assist the Literacy Program with evaluating the effectiveness of its current interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> McConnell, S. R. and Rabe, Holly LS. Home and community factors that promote early literacy development for preschool-aged children. [http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/family/development\\_components/7286-05.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/family/development_components/7286-05.html).

<sup>2</sup> Communication from Workforce Program, Cambridge Housing Authority. Fall 2002

<sup>3</sup> “MCAS 2000 Summary and Analysis Report,” Cambridge Public Schools, Cambridge Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup> DiClemente, C.C. Prochaska, J.O., Fairhurst, S.K., Velicer, W.F., Velasquez, M.M., Rossi, J.S. The process of smoking cessation: an analysis of precontemplation, contemplation, and preparation stages of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 1991: 59 (2); pp. 295-304.