



Computers for Youth

Building a Home Learning Field

Computers for Youth (CFY) believes that the home holds the greatest untapped potential for improving children's academic and life-long success. Compared to the classroom or the after-school center, the home has received the least attention from policymakers and educators. It is also where children spend the greatest amount of time and where children interact with the adults most interested in their overall success—their parents or guardians.

A NATIONAL PROBLEM

As a nation, we have long recognized the importance of the Home Learning Environment for preschool children. Each year, millions of dollars are invested by private foundations and government to help low-income families compensate for shortfalls caused by poverty and lack of parental education. This funding supports educational resources for the home, such as books and television programming, as well as training in parenting skills. The goal is to help low-income and minority children be school-ready by the time they start kindergarten.

Yet once children enter school, our nation's focus shifts almost exclusively to classroom learning. This shift is stark—less than 2% of federal education funds go toward home learning programs and a mere 1% of Title I education funds are earmarked for family-involvement activities. It is also in sharp contrast to the fact that students spend only 13% of their waking hours in the classroom.

Definition of the Home Learning Environment

The Home Learning Environment is the combination of educational resources in the home and learning-related interactions between children and their family members.

CFY has been working to address the discrepancy between the attention given to the Home Learning Environment in K-12 education and its importance. To that end, it has made the strategic decision to build a Home Learning field within the larger education sector. Developing a Home Learning field has come out of strategic discussions with CFY's board of directors and outside experts in the fields of education, policy, psychology, and economics.

KEY FINDINGS

Academic research supports CFY's position that the Home Learning Environment is just as critical as the school environment in developing a child's academic potential. Two key studies conducted within the past five years are:

University of London Research about the Home Learning Environment

This longitudinal study followed 3,100 children in the United Kingdom from the ages of 3 to 11. The researchers determined the following:

- The strength of the Home Learning Environment was one of **the strongest predictors** of achievement in reading and math for 10 and 11 year-olds.
- For math, **a strong Home Learning Environment has the same size effect** on 10 year-olds as the combined influence of attending a better preschool and primary school.
- **The Home Learning Environment exerts a greater influence on educational attainment than parents' education and household income.** In fact, "low-parent-education" homes sometimes score highly, and "high-parent-education" homes sometimes score poorly on the Home Learning Environment measure.
- The results for the Home Learning Environment indicate that **it is the frequent occurrence of learning activity in the home that is particularly important.**

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Harvard Meta-Analysis on Parental Involvement

William H. Jeynes of the Harvard Family Research Project investigated 40 years of research on out-of-school learning. He found a critical link between parental activities and student achievement, including the following:

- **Family factors in the home environment account for two-thirds of the differences** across states in achievement tests.
- Of the 14 factors related to the achievement gap, family and home environment account for eight of them.
- The parental activities that have **the greatest impact on a child's academic success** are those directly tied to learning – such as helping with homework and doing learning activities at home.
- Disadvantaged children appear to benefit even more from family involvement than their more well-off peers.

Experts in education and learning have long known of the importance of the Home Learning Environment for schoolchildren. As far back as the 1980s, researchers investigated the viability and value of home-based models. This research includes the following benchmark study:

University of Chicago Study on Closing the Achievement Gap

In 1984, pioneering education psychologist, Benjamin S. Bloom, analyzed cost-effective techniques to raise student achievement. While the bulk of his study relates to classroom learning, some of his important findings focus on home learning, including:

- “Intervention in the home environment” was one of 12 types of interventions that Bloom found had a strong effect size on student achievement – **the average student performed better than 69% or more of the students in the control group**
- Bloom cites a study in which **a home intervention resulted in the average student performing better than 84% of the students in the control group**
- Bloom believes a home intervention can be powerful because it will have **an additive effect** when combined with a school-based intervention – something not true of two school-based interventions
- **Educational software developed since this study now allows some of the most effective interventions Bloom lists to occur in the home**, including feedback-corrective teaching techniques and student time-on-task measurements

CONSTRUCTING A VIBRANT HOME LEARNING FIELD

CFY envisions a future in which support for the Home Learning Environment is fully integrated into the national paradigm of K-12 education. To arrive at this point requires building a vibrant Home Learning field within the education sector.

The Home Learning field will eventually include the following:

- A diversified range of direct service programs including numerous delivery partners and innovative program models targeting learning in the home.
- Academic research that focuses on the effects of the Home Learning Environment on student achievement and parental confidence, and a central repository of studies available to research partners nationwide.
- An effective public policy arm that will mobilize grassroots advocates and leverage partner organizations to gain the support of opinion leaders, policymakers, and elected officials.
- A multi-channel communications and marketing strategy that capitalizes on current events to create clear and consistent messaging around the Home Learning Environment for local and national media sources.



LEADING THE FORMATION OF THE FIELD

CFY is positioned to lead the formation of a new Home Learning field. The organization has a 10-year track record of strengthening the Home Learning Environment for school children across the country, as well as the following strengths:

- A service model that incorporates training and technology and has a proven positive impact on the lives of thousands of school children and their families.
- An infrastructure nationwide, with programs in five cities (New York City, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area) and 23 affiliates in 16 states plus the District of Columbia.
- A robust and growing set of relationships with researchers and institutions.
- A management team with key expertise in education, program development, low-income communities, technology, fundraising, communications, marketing, branding, and advocacy.

CFY is currently pursuing philanthropic investors, research partners, key collaborative organizations and advocates to assist us in bringing about the social and educational change that CFY envisions. 🍌