BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:
PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME® OVERVIEW

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) defined Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time® early in the organization’s life and has subsequently examined its implementation among diverse parents and children—from preschool through elementary school—across the country for more than 20 years. Throughout this journey, PACT Time has been consistently affirmed as an essential strategy to maximize the benefits of families learning together. Whether in the context of a comprehensive family literacy program, a family engagement program, or as stand-alone activities designed to model family learning in the home, school, and community, fidelity to the PACT Time model can deepen the impact of family learning activities. Support for structured and purposeful dual and multi-generational learning approaches rests firmly on an expansive research base drawing from the domains of parent engagement, parent self-efficacy, dual and multi-generational approaches to learning, and family literacy.

DEFINITION
NCFL has defined PACT Time as parent-child interactions, including bringing children and parents together to work, play, read, and learn. Such interactions can take place in the classroom, at home, or in the community and can lead to positive language, literacy, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Jacobs, 2004). Today’s families place a premium on learning skills necessary for college and career readiness that result in lifelong success. Parents want to learn about topics that help them to care for their children and gain upward mobility. Similarly, children and young adults request relevant learning that has an immediate impact on their daily lives. Technology and media are increasingly interwoven into the fabric of the family structure itself (Livingstone, 2002). Vulnerable families have more access to technology than in the past, particularly mobile devices (Livingston, 2011; Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Technology can be a motivator and incentive for new learning.

The NCFL PACT Time model is poised to embrace these changes and serve as a way to structure family learning in the future. Children serving in the role of “media brokers” has placed them—especially those from low-income and ethnic minority populations—in the precarious space between helping their family and completing those tasks necessary to reach their full potential (Katz, 2010). Since one of the intended outcomes for PACT Time is to improve student achievement, it is important to include digital literacy as a theme that cuts across a revised PACT Time definition. Based on this information and evolution, a more contemporary definition of PACT Time is as follows:
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE: PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME® OVERVIEW

PACT Time is a dual- or multi-generational approach to learning that includes parents, children, caregivers, and extended family members in reciprocal learning in both physical and digital environments. PACT Time is a deliberate attempt to structure family learning using the five components of an effective PACT Time experience.

Activities can include families coming together to work, play, read, learn, engage in interactive media experiences, and volunteer.

PACT TIME APPLICATIONS

PACT Time as an effective strategy to foster family learning is poised for embedded replication in at least four categorical approaches to improving family well-being: dual and multi-generational family change models, general parent engagement initiatives, programs focusing on parent self-efficacy, and comprehensive family literacy programs. Encouraging structured PACT Time activities as focused family learning activities throughout these categorical approaches to family-based services provides a reliable and actionable model for improving student achievement and family well-being.

- **Dual and Multi-Generational Change**: Dual- and multi-generational approaches to family change have been supported as interventions with the potential to improve family well-being (Shonkoff, 2013; Katz 2010). PACT Time activities are, by their very nature, dual- and/or multi-generational.

- **General Parent Engagement**: An ever-growing pool of research supports the benefits of increasing parent engagement in schools, including, but not limited to, improved student achievement for all students and for students from culturally diverse backgrounds in particular (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2005a; as cited in Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). PACT Time experiences engage parents in the lives of their children, schools, and communities. Implementation of PACT Time activities holds promise as a systematic approach to parent engagement.
• **Parent Self-Efficacy:** Parent engagement activities have been shown to improve parent self-efficacy, which promotes student literacy performance and augments overall high school graduation rates (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Chappell, O’Connor, Withington, & Stegelin, 2015). When parents participate in PACT Time with their children and other family members, they can become more confident in their ability to be effective parents. The results of PACT Time expressed during “debrief” and “transfer to home, school, and/or community” serve as relevant examples that can help build parent self-efficacy.

• **Comprehensive Family Literacy Programs:** NCFL has developed, implemented, and continuously improved PACT Time within the laboratory of its four-component family literacy model (Darling, 2004; Darling and Lee, 2003; North Dakota Department of Instruction, 2005; as cited in Timmons, 2008, p. 96). PACT Time is widely considered to be the essential intervention for a successful family literacy program. The model is consistently ready for implementation in comprehensive family literacy programs.

**PACT TIME AS AN INDEPENDENT ACTIVITY**

When PACT Time outside of a formal family engagement program is implemented with fidelity to the five components—planning, preparation, experience, debriefing, and transfer to home, community, and school—tangible outcomes for families can be expected. Such outcomes could include:

• Improved academic achievement for PK-12 students
• Improved graduation rates for high school students
• Increased pro-social behavior among PK-12 students
• Improved literacy and numeracy skills among PK-12 students
• Higher rates of parental self-efficacy
• Overall growth in family well-being
• Growth in parent and child digital literacy
• College and career readiness for both parents and children
REFERENCES


