



# The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework Toolkit:

Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children

Developed by: The Maryland Family Engagement Coalition



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Coalition and the Workgroup included a statewide network representing the range of early childhood educators and providers – family childcare, center-based child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, early intervention, Family Support Network, and public schools. In addition, the Coalition and Workgroup included members with deep expertise in key areas of concern such as social and emotional development, quality learning environments, and cultural competence, as well as members representing the broader range of children, home visiting and library supports and services.

We would like to thank all of Maryland's early childhood educators, providers, and families for their insight and contributions which can be found throughout this document. This project was a collaboration of Maryland families and providers sharing their best tried and true effective practices. It is this sharing of knowledge and experiences that will allow educators and providers to support each other as they work to improve their family engagement practices.

This toolkit and project was led by Cyndi La Marca Lessner of the Maryland State Department of Education. Valuable input and advice were received from Coalition and Workgroups members from around the State. We would like to give specific thanks to the following for their contributions to the Toolkit: Maria Torres, Nora Morales Pamela Hamlin, Sharon Holloway, Wendy Baysmore-Dantzler, Tresa Hanna, Traci Verzi. Linda Zang, Jena Smith, T.J. Bennet, Liz Kelley, Nancy Vorobey, Robin Hopkins and Alexis Washington. Lastly, we would like to show our appreciation to Rolf Grafwallner for his ideas, expert advice and continued support throughout the development of this toolkit.



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Imagine the following scenario, a common one in early childhood settings. A parent meeting is being held at your program. You have spent the past several days or even weeks coordinating the event. You have coordinated with teachers to provide childcare during the meeting. You have made sure pizza was being delivered for the children and families. You have created colorful fliers and sent them home in the children's backpacks once a week for the past three weeks. You have hung fliers on the doors so parents see the meeting announcement as they pick up and drop off their children. You have even posted them on the bus. You have asked teachers to remind their parents of the meeting and you have included it in the monthly newsletter. Parents have told you how excited they are for the meeting and that they will be attending. What is the result? It is 15 minutes after the start of the meeting and there are only two parents present, both looking like they would rather be anywhere else but at your meeting.

You are feeling frustrated. You have held the same meeting every year for the past several years and parents always attended before, but each year the number of parents attending gets fewer and fewer. You go ahead with the meeting, thinking, "Oh, well. I had to have a parent meeting and I did. It's not my fault if only two parents showed up."

Have you ever thought about what the parents that showed up were thinking? They could be wondering why they came when they have so many other things they could be doing. They may be thinking about how they could be spending time with their children instead of coming to your meeting. But they want to be involved and show the school they care about their children's education. They may be wondering why they keep coming to these meetings to please the school and get information they could have looked up or received some other way.



Have you ever thought about why parents don't show up? Maybe they couldn't come because they didn't have time. Maybe they didn't come because they don't feel welcome at the program or maybe they didn't come because they didn't feel the information was useful to them.

In fact, these are the very things that act as barriers to parents being more engaged in their children's education. According to the W.K.Kellogg Foundation, the most significant barriers to **family engagement** are lack of time, lack of understanding of the material and lack of communication between the schools and the family.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to understand these barriers so that we can look at our current family engagement practices and improve upon them. Family engagement is critical to promoting **school readiness**. Without it, children will not be fully prepared to enter school and will most likely always be working to catch up. The question then is: does your program contribute meaningfully to encourage parents to be more engaged?

As early childhood educators and providers, it is necessary that we not only understand the importance of family engagement, but that we continuously work with our families to ensure they understand how important their role is in their child's education. We need to move beyond telling parents they are their child's first teacher and move towards engaging parents to find and apply the skills to be their child's first and best teacher.

So, where do we begin? Begin by using this Toolkit to encourage parents to be more engaged.

## MARYLAND'S DEFINITION OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

*Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth into the school-age years; and it occurs across the various early care and learning settings where children are. Family engagement means building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and the ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike. It reflects **culturally competent** and universal design approaches, encompassing the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and activities of all families, as well as early care settings that support all children's positive development. Family engagement happens in the home, early childhood settings, school, and community. **Sustainable** family engagement operates with adequate resources, including public-private partnerships, to ensure meaningful and effective strategies that have the power to impact student learning and achievement.*

Sounds impressive, right?

**Let's break it down. The purpose of the Family Engagement Framework is to:**

- **Recognize the importance of family engagement as a core component of early care and education.**
- **Put forth a set of common goals for family engagement across the early childhood system and within individual early care and education providers.**
- **Offer family engagement strategies for early care and education providers and identify resources that support the implementation of those strategies.**

Pay attention to that last bullet. We put this toolkit together for direct service providers. This includes libraries, Head Starts, Judy Centers, family child care providers, and child care centers, as well as pediatricians and family physicians – all those caring, committed folks who work with families and –



who can engage families in thoughtful and creative ways to ensure children are well prepared for school.

Providers are early childhood educators, staff members, teachers, librarians, and professionals serving children and families. Families include parents, caregivers, and others that support children in the home environment. Early learning environments or settings can include classrooms, family provider settings, early learning programs, libraries or any program serving children and families.

The Toolkit is organized around the Family Engagement Framework. The Framework is the theory and the Toolkit puts the theory into practice. The complete document can be found on the MSDE Early Childhood website.

In the **first section** you will find information on how Family Involvement has **evolved** into Family Engagement and the distinct characteristics of the two.

The **second section** focuses on the goals of the Family Engagement Framework. We put the theory into practice in this section.

The **third section** contains information regarding Toxic Stress, Cultural Proficiency, and English Learners. We know these areas have an effect on children and families and impact our relationships with them.

In the **fourth section**, you will find Effective Practices. Like all good teachers, we borrow ideas. These activities have been collected from across the state and beyond, and they are proven effective in building relationships with families and staff and increasing family participation. The practices are a sampling of the many activities that can be utilized to foster family engagement.

The **last section** includes a self-assessment you can use to see how far you have come. This tool will help programs and staff determine where their strengths are and where to go next.

## ICON LEGEND



QUICK TIP, STRATEGY OR CONCEPT



REFLECTION



DEFINITIONS



## THE GOALS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Figure 1 outlines the seven goals of family engagement in Maryland.

While the first goal suggests ideas for promoting family well-being, the second goal suggests ways to promote positive parent-child relationships.

For the next two goals, we will share suggestions for promoting families as lifelong educators of their children as well as ideas to promote the educational aspirations of parents and families.

With the fifth and sixth goals, we will share tried and true ways of supporting families through **transitions** and connecting families to peers and community resources.

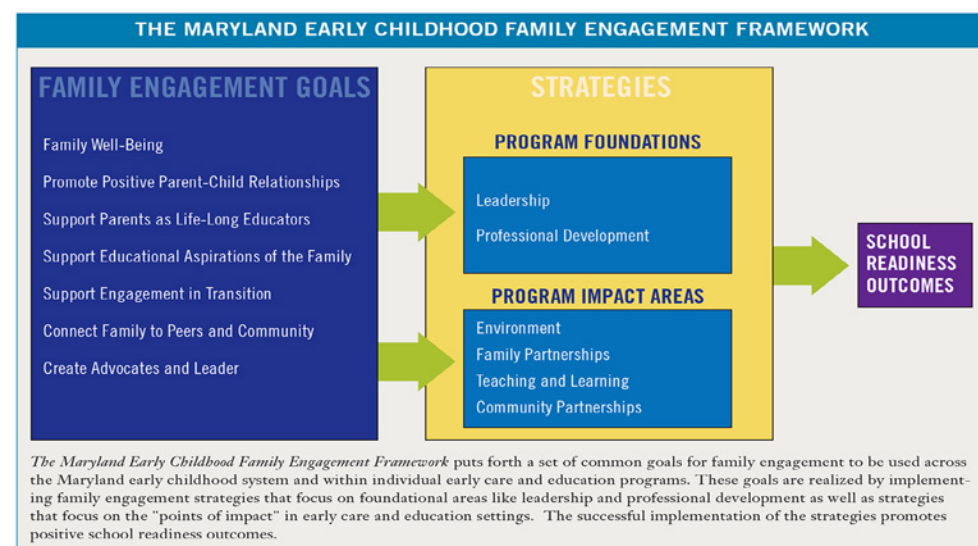
Lastly, the seventh goal will offer ideas of how programs can help families develop as leaders and child advocates.

All of the information in the Toolkit will be on cards (like this one) and on each card you will find the goal and its definition as well as strategies to reach this goal. There are several examples from families, educators and providers showing family engagement strategies that they have found successful. Also included are additional web links and resources in the resource section located in the back of the Toolkit so that you can easily find more information.

Use the cards the way that makes sense for your program - everyone will benefit, especially the children.

Now that we have outlined the Toolkit, let us get back to the family engagement theory that underpins all of the strategies. Here is a handy visual to help explain what we mean when we say family engagement.

Figure 1:



As with anything new in a program, a firm foundation of support from management and administration is crucial, and strong leadership is essential. Effective leadership includes professional development for all staff. This impacts all program areas and leads to supportive environments,

productive and reciprocal family partnerships, high quality teaching and learning and strong community partnerships. When the program foundations are in place, all program areas will be positively impacted, which will support programs in meeting their family engagement goals.

Family engagement is so important that we need to say this again. It is not something that only teachers do or something that is done monthly as a supplemental activity; it is an essential part and the core function of your program. It is our hope that programs will use the Framework and the Toolkit to increase their program's understanding of family engagement and to use this approach in their day-to-day practices.

## FROM FAMILY INVOLVEMENT TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The idea of partnering with families is not new. For years, early learning educators have sought ways to involve families in programs. Information is given to parents regarding their child's development at parent meetings and parent teacher conferences, scheduled annual events are held each year, and nearly all programs have an open door policy for families to come in and observe or participate in the classroom. These are all examples of *family involvement*.

Family Engagement is different. It is the next step - one that represents a more active partnership between home and school for the benefit of all involved. Family engagement is about early childhood educators and families working together in intentional and reciprocal ways to support quality learning experiences.

The above examples of family involvement are easily modified for family engagement. Conferences become a discussion between parents and teachers where information is shared regarding the child's development and everyone works together to create goals for the child. Annual events are held based on the parent's interests and needs. If parent participation for these events is low, programs can assess their families' needs to determine how to improve their parent engagement activities. Finally, programs can promote their open door policy to families and welcoming and involving them fully in the classroom when they volunteer or visit. Family engagement is achieved when programs purposefully plan with parents on improved participation, which in turn helps to develop a relationship *with* parents and also demonstrates to children that their parents care.

Now, think back to the teacher in the introduction who organized a parent meeting only to have two parents show up. The teacher simply gave up and checked it off her list as a completed task. What could she do next to truly engage her families? She could survey the parents to determine their interests or assess the program and their family engagement practices to determine what could be done better. She could also consider that low attendance is not a sign of failure, but rather as an opportunity to recognize the ever-changing needs of families and to make adjustments to meet these needs.

We know that moving from involvement to engagement takes time and practice. To help with this transition, here are several examples to get you started.



## Parent Involvement Becomes Family Engagement

PARENT INVOLVEMENT	FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
Program/school leadership develops a statement on home-school partnership.	Families and program/school leadership come together to develop a statement on family engagement, define goals for the year related to the statement, brainstorm activities/events that can be implemented to achieve the goals, create a work plan, and form a group of family members and school representatives to carry out the work, including additional families along the way. Together, families and program/school leadership reflect on what is working and what needs to be changed to further grow family engagement.
Parents participate in program/school events and activities offered by the program/school.	Families -- in partnership with early childhood educators and program leadership -- co-create opportunities for families to support their children's learning.
Parents attend parent-teacher conferences where they receive reports about their child's progress.	Early childhood educator's visit one-on-one with families to get to know the child and families, inquire about the goals the family has for the child, and develop a portfolio that travels between home and program at key intervals to update and record milestones. Families also participate in parent-teacher conferences, where they both receive and share information about their child and strategies for how any challenges will be addressed both by home and program.
A designated staff person is assigned as the parent-liaison and is responsible for outreach to parents.	All staff are trained in family engagement strategies and are provided with support and guidance so they can most effectively engage families in ways that benefit the child, family, and the program/school.
Programs and schools are primary consumers of data on children.	Families are regular consumers of data about their children and receive information for what they can do to support learning as a result of the data.

You will notice as you go through this Toolkit, that each of the strategies and activities are guided by the four key principals below. This ensures that programs are better able to focus on their partnerships and help families to recognize their role in preparing children for academic success.

## Four Key Principles to Family Engagement according to the Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium:

1. Welcome all children and families.
2. Allow for community building and networking.
3. Provide a "nugget of knowledge" and allow time for modeling and practice of new information.
4. Tie family engagement to school readiness goals to improve outcomes for children and families.



## GOAL 1

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING

Maryland's vision for family engagement is a two-generation strategy. Families are the key to a child's early development and learning. A goal of family engagement initiatives must support family well-being. Maryland's family engagement initiatives and the family engagement practices of early care and education providers should promote the safety, health, and financial security of families so they may successfully parent their young children.



#### TWO GENERATIONAL APPROACH

A focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of children and their parents together. For more information on the two generational approach, see the Resource section.

It is necessary to be aware of family concerns, priorities, and resources because this helps us better support them. For example, you may have attempted to reach out to a parent regarding the child's behavior, only to leave the conversation with several unresolved issues. Perhaps the parent was even dismissive about your concerns. When you met with the parent, you discovered that the family was going through a difficult move or was struggling financially. Maybe the parents were not dismissive of your concerns for the child but, at the time, had other priorities. To effectively work together, we have to be aware of each other's concerns and priorities. When this happens, not only do parents feel validated but we are establishing a give-and-take relationship with families that will lead to improved outcomes for all.

#### CPR - Concerns Priorities Resources

To effectively partner and build relationships with families, we must be aware of and validate their concerns, priorities and resources.

These sound like some pretty lofty goals, right? However, sometimes it is the simple things that we can embed into our programs and our interactions with families that really give families the support they need.



### FAMILY VOICE

"Being homeless a few short years ago I got into the routine of bringing my children into the library each day. One day before we got to the library, Miss Sue (from the check-out desk) was walking down the street on her lunch break. She greeted us saying, 'Hello, how are you? Will we see you in the library later today?' 'She talked to us as if we were any other family that goes to the library. That conversation was a turning point in my life. I began to think of myself in a more optimistic and confident way. In time, I was able to get out of a troubled marriage and move into an apartment with my children.'

- Parent, Library Cafe, Carroll County Public Library

### FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

#### PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

As stated before, family wellbeing is critical to children's success. However, recognizing when families need assistance and knowing how to approach a family can be difficult. Programs need to have systems and supports in place that focus on high-quality professional development, continuous improvement, program environment and community partnerships to ensure they are supporting a family's well-being and providing them with appropriate resources. What does all that mean? Programs that are invested in improving a family's well-being will have specific policies and procedures in place to provide professional development opportunities in this area. Also, policies regarding community partnerships will be necessary to support the program as they help families meet their individual goals.

For example, programs that are accredited by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) collaborate with the community and use community resources to strengthen programs, promote family and child learning, and address the needs of families. A unique aspect of Maryland's early care and education system is the presence of Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers (Judy Centers). Maryland's Judy Centers are another great model for community partnerships. It is through these partnerships that Judy Centers are able to offer services or parent trainings that are designed to meet the specific needs of parents they are serving.

For more information on MSDE Accreditation and the Judy Centers, please see the Resources section.

### EDUCATOR VOICE

The Charles County Judy Center has numerous useful and reliable community partners; however, the University of Maryland Extension partnership has strengthened our Judy Center in five of the 12 component areas the Judy Centers must meet. The Maryland Extension teaches nutrition lessons to Judy Center children but also provides professional development to our teaching staff as well as parent trainings. Parent trainings are always at times that are convenient to our working Judy Center parents. The Maryland Extension can always be counted on to offer an

activity for our family nights throughout the year as well. Families always enjoy the activities and the food samples. When we discuss and plan take home projects, the Maryland Extension provides free materials that can be incorporated into a developmentally appropriate parent and child home activity. This partnership as well as many others helps to provide an array of services to our families.

- Charles County Judy Center

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE'S JUDY CENTERS

Judy Centers are located at or near Title I schools, and provide access to high quality early childhood education programs, as well as comprehensive family support services. Judy Centers serve families with children birth through five years of age that live in designated Title I school zones. The goal of these Centers is to support school readiness. Judy Centers are unique because they promote school readiness through collaboration with community - based agencies, organizations, and businesses. This integrated approach promotes program and service delivery that is conveniently located under one roof at or near the schools, ensuring that young children who may begin school at a **deficit** are given opportunities to start their formal education on a level playing field with their peers. The focus on family wellbeing (Goal 1) and an Adult Education Component (Goal 4) are key aspects of the Judy Center model. Judy Centers must meet 12 Component Standards that are deemed essential to children's school readiness. Component V is Family Involvement. The Judy Center's role in family involvement is centered on the family's ability to participate in and support their child's early learning. Supporting positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2), families as lifelong educators (Goal 3), and family engagement in transitions (Goal 5) is accomplished through a host of different activities that may include Parent Cafés, programs for dads and other significant men in the lives of children, playgroups, puppet and children's theaters, story time, and family field trips. Activities and events are focused on the seven **domains of learning** used to assess school readiness when children enter kindergarten. Family activities provide social networking opportunities that connect parents and caregivers to their peers and community (Goal 6) and support family empowerment and child advocacy (Goal 7) through event planning, volunteer opportunities, and membership on Judy Center Partnership Steering Committees. The family engagement services provided at a Judy Center depend on the collaboration of all the partners and the specific needs of the children and families. Judy Center staff communicates on an ongoing basis with parents through face-to-face contact, home visiting, regularly published newsletters that include calendars of events, flyers and brochures that include information about their programs and services, and many have websites. There are currently 51 Judy Centers located throughout Maryland.





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since we are talking about professional development, we should talk about what kind of training is most helpful for staff regarding family wellbeing. If we are truly supporting families, then specific training on *how* to partner with families is essential. High-quality professional development should not only include knowledge of community resources, but should also be supported in cross-cultural responsiveness and strength-based perspectives, meaning that staff need to be self-aware and value child and family cultures and experiences. Using this approach, staff can begin to build strong, respectful relationships with families. The following are examples of different types of staff training that are useful when engaging families:

- Professional Ethics (confidentiality, boundaries and self-determination)
- Diversity
- Child Development
- **Developmentally Appropriate Practices**
- Trauma and its effect on children and families
- Family and Youth Engagement
- Relationship building
- Collaboration with families
- Communication
- Collaboration with communities

Training can be obtained through local resource and referral agencies, accredited colleges and universities, and approved community trainers and training organizations. Training is developed and aligned to *The Knowledge and Competency Framework for Child and Youth Care Professionals*. For a complete copy of *The Knowledge and Competency Framework* and more information on training, see the Resource section.

IMPACT AREAS

When programs have quality professional development and strong leadership that supports family well-being, you will see the improvement in the impact areas, or more simply stated the services you provide.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

First and foremost, you want your program to be welcoming of all families – of all family structures, sizes and arrangements – and will hold the family in high regard and partner effectively with parents. Relationships between providers and families will be receptive, responsive and respectful.

THE THREE R’S



When working with families, relationships should be built on the Three R’s:

- **Receptive** - families and staff will listen and be more accepting of what is being said or given to each other.
- **Responsive** - families and staff will react in a positive manner to what is being said or given to each other. Staff and families will be more open to suggestions and sensitive to each other’s needs.
- **Respectful** - families and staff will behave in a way that shows regard for each other.

Programs should establish family-friendly environments with pictures and materials that **affirm** and accept all families and allow opportunities for families to connect with other parents or staff for reflection, information sharing, ideas and support. Materials and resources, including information for children with disabilities and special health needs, should be available to connect families to the community resources they may need. Specific examples of this include:

- Providing opportunities that support parents’ needs to connect with other parents for reflection, information, ideas, and support. This can be done through parent nights, parent meetings and Parent Cafés.
- Having information and pamphlets available on community resources available for families.

HEALTHY FAMILIES BULLETIN BOARD



Create a bulletin board for families with information about vaccination clinics, doctor’s offices, dentists, mental health providers, state insurance information and other relevant news.

EDUCATOR VOICE

*Head Start conducts home visits prior to enrollment to get a brief assessment of the family’s concerns and priorities. We then come together as a team, staff and parents, and develop a plan for that family, if needed. These types of policies not only support families and their wellbeing, but are the reason Head Start has been successful for 50 years. Head Start understands that for children to truly be successful, families need to be engaged with their children. Head Start ensures parents understand their role as their child’s first and most important teacher.*

- Union Baptist Baltimore City Head Start

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Family partnerships will look different in various programs, but to be successful, providers and educators should look at their families as teammates. When you partner with someone for work or for a project, you are working together because they have information and an area of expertise you need. The same applies to families. When we partner with our families, they provide us with information about their child that will help us work together for that child’s success.

Just like we look to families for news about their child, they look to us for information as well. We need to be prepared to help families identify their needs and develop individual goals as well as provide resources and information to help accomplish the goals.

Helping families identify their needs seems like it could be a bit challenging, but it can be a lot easier than you think. To help families feel comfortable and start to open up, some providers use Conversation Starters.<sup>1</sup> Asking families about typical daily routines such as bedtime, getting ready for school, or doing homework, is a great way to gather information from families and helps to identify difficulties so that providers can help problem solve with families. By taking the time to check in about their day and offering suggestions to help make their day a little easier, you are listening to them and validating their concerns. This often leads to more in depth conversations where providers can continue to encourage family growth and development.



The following are some examples of conversation starters that can be used to help support families.

BEDTIME CONVERSATIONS



When a parent expresses concerns about their child’s bedtime behaviors, a mini-assessment of the bedtime routine could help to identify some areas that you could provide support.

Begin by telling the parents that you are going to review the bedtime routine step-by-step. In order to do this, you will need to ask open-ended questions. Here are some examples of open-ended questions you could use:



Bedtime Conversations:

- Tell me more about bedtime.
- How does your child know that it is time for him to go to bed?
- What happens first?
- So when you tell him it is time for bed, what is the first thing that she does?
- What is everyone else in the house doing at this time?
- Who usually helps your child get ready for bed?
- If you have stairs to go up, how does your child get up the stairs?
- How does tooth brushing go?
- How does dressing/undressing go?
- Does your child have any favorite books or songs that you read/sing prior to bed?
- Does your child sleep in a crib or a bed?
- Does your child sleep in his own room, or does he share with someone else?
- Does your child have a favorite toy, blanket or pacifier that she uses to help her fall asleep?
- Once your child is in bed, does she stay in bed?
- If not, tell me more about what it looks like when he is getting out of bed?
- Does he leave his room?
- Once your child is asleep, does he wake up again during the night?

Once you have exhausted all of your questions, identify those things that the parent has sounded concerned about, or things that sound to you like it is a concern. Make a list of these things, and ask the parent if they agree. Also ask the parent, if they had to choose one thing they would like to focus on, what would it be? After this is identified, then together with the family, number in order of priority the other items. This will help to identify if it is sleep related issues, routine related issues, or behavioral issues. That should then point you in a direction for where to go next.

*Contributed by Mary Hendricks, M.S. Certified RBI Trainer.*

Special Educators, who are certified in the use the **Routines Based Interview** (RBI) approach, help families with identifying what works well and what challenges they have within their daily routine. This method helps to determine the routines in which to embed interventions and learning opportunities. For more information on RBIs, see the Resource Section.

Some programs use home visits or parent conferences to discuss family concerns and needs and then identify appropriate resources. Many times, families are not aware of the supports and resources that are available within their family, their neighborhood, and the larger community. The **Eco-Map**, developed by Robin McWilliam, is a tool that can be used to help identify these resources for the family. Providers can use this tool to gain additional information about the family and identify the family's formal and informal supports.

WHAT IS AN ECO-MAP?

An Eco-map is a graphical representation that shows all of the systems at play in an individual's life. Ann Hartman developed these ecological maps, or eco maps, in 1975 as a means of depicting the ecological system that encompasses a family or individual (Hartman, 1995). ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eco-map](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eco-map)).

Robin McWilliam, Ph.D., began using eco-maps as a component of his Routines Based Intervention approach. In his article Understanding the Family Ecology (2001), Dr. McWilliam calls the eco-map the “most important activity of the intake visit”. It provides the team with the family’s “perceived informal, formal and immediate supports.”

The team member explains to the parent that they want to get an idea of all of the people involved in the family’s life in order to know where they might need additional information. The team members begin by asking about all of the people living in the house with the child. Questions are asked so as not to make any assumptions. The question may be posed as, “Who else besides you and your child live in the house?” The names of the people living in the house are recorded in a box or a circle in the center of the paper.

Once the members of the home are recorded, the team member asks about other people involved in the child and family’s life. It is important to be sure that you are clear that this is about the entire family. Specific questions about relatives and friends are phrased in a sensitive manner, such as “Do you and your child’s father have family that live close by?” Once family is established ask, “How often do you see them/talk to them?” Other areas explored are the parent’s friends, places of work, and regular weekend activities. You might ask if there are special people in their lives form any of those activities. Questions are asked about the child’s service providers, health care providers, support groups and community activities. You might ask about the relationship with these professionals by saying “Can you talk easily with them?” or “Do you like them?”.

As the parent is talking, you are determining based on the amount of time they see or talk to, as well as how they are describing the relationships, whether these are sources of stressors or support. This is indicated on the eco-map by thick lines, thin lines and broken lines.

An eco-map should not take any longer than 10 minutes. It is a way for the team working with the child to get a good picture of the support that the family has, as well as supports that the team may need to help the family to access.

The eco-map ends with the provider asking the question, “If you have news to share, whether it is good news or bad news, who is the first person you call?”. The team member then thanks the family and once again explains that the information will be helpful as they assist the child and the family during the intervention.

For more information on Eco-maps, see the Resource section.

*Contributed by Mary Hendricks, M.S. Certified RBI Trainer.*

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

Many programs develop contracts or agreements with other community agencies to enhance or expand their services and meet families’ needs. When early learning programs and other community organizations share parents’ concerns and interests, partnerships will develop that can enhance opportunities, including training, for families.

An example of this would be the Local Child Care Resource Centers. They collaborate with various programs and agencies to ensure that educators, providers and families are getting needed training and information. For more information on your Local Child Care Resource Center, see the Resource Section.



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

A MOU is a formal agreement between two or more parties. Companies and organizations can use MOUs to establish official partnerships. MOUs are not legally binding but they carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect. An MOU will outline the responsibilities of each agency for their roles in how they will each serve children, families and staff.



EDUCATOR VOICE

*In Early Head Start, the family engagement practices that support family wellbeing are provided by the Family Services Coordinator and by teacher led classroom experiences. Parents share ideas that can help families raise strong, happy children by attending Parent Cafés. The March of Dimes Mama and Baby Bus comes monthly to educate parents about health services for their families and provide screenings. Parents have daily opportunities to volunteer in their child’s classroom. During this time, parents are involved and learn how to understand and address the children. They also gain understanding about how caregivers provide growth in physical, behavioral, social, and cognitive areas.*

*- Pre-K teacher, Centro Nia, Takoma Park*



MARYLAND CHILD CARE RESOURCE NETWORK

The Maryland Child Care Resource Network is administered by Maryland Family Network and began over 25 years ago with three pilot programs. Today, this Network continues to provide professional development and technical assistance services to child care providers, as well as resource and referral services to families. Consisting of 12 regionally located Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs), the Network serves all licensed and registered child care providers within the State of Maryland. Through a comprehensive and systematic approach, the Network works to ensure that child care programs have access to the resources and supports needed to improve the quality of care for children birth to 5 years. With professional development, child care providers are offered a series of high-quality training workshops, conferences, and other opportunities to increase their knowledge base and build new skills and strategies. These opportunities are aligned with local initiatives and national standards and are based on adult learning principles to ensure providers are able to implement the knowledge and strategies learned. Research has shown that training is not enough to change behaviors so the CCRCs also provide comprehensive technical assistance services. These coaching and mentoring opportunities assist providers in implementing developmentally appropriate and research-based practices which work to ensure that all children have access to high-quality care and the opportunities necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. Technical assistance is provided in one-on-one and group settings at the CCRC, the child care program, and virtually (by phone, email, and webinar) based on the identified and expressed needs of the child care providers and program. Additionally, the Maryland Child Care Resource Network provides a free resource and referral service to families called LOCATE: Child Care. Families may call the community line and speak to a referral specialist who will assist the family in understanding high-quality child care (what it is and how to identify it), connect families to resources, and assist in identifying child care programs that meet the expressed needs of the family. The referral specialists search an extensive database of all licensed/registered child care programs to help families find the care that meets their needs, such as location, hours, and cost. LOCATE: Child Care Assist is a website which families may utilize to search for child care with criteria determined by the family and accessing the same extensive database. For families seeking care for children with special needs, the referral specialists provide additional support in finding child care such as contacting child care programs to determine if there are openings.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

The family’s wellbeing has a direct impact on the child and how their behavior may influence the classroom. Because of this, teachers and providers may be the first to recognize when a family may be dealing with challenges. Teachers may not know what the family is experiencing all the time but they often notice changes in the child or even the family’s routine that may indicate that there is a concern. For instance, teachers may notice changes in:

- Attendance
- Health
- Mood
- Schedule
- Interests
- Eating habits
- Family situation

When teachers and providers notice these changes, they should take the time to talk with the family and identify the problem. They may be able to help the family problem solve or give them the resources they may need.

SCENARIO

Charles is a three-year-old boy who has been attending your program for just over a year. Lately, Charles has not been coming to your program as regularly as he did in the beginning, and when he does arrive, it is in the middle of the morning circle time. Sometimes, your assistant teacher has to give him breakfast when he arrives, so he misses a lot of the activities and interactions during that time. You barely even have a chance to wave to Charles’ dad when he drops him off. You also notice that Charles has been losing his temper more often and he does not seem to want to participate in quiet activities anymore, preferring to build towers in the block area and then knock them down. You have tried to spend some individual time reading and talking to Charles, but he seems anxious and does not want to participate.

You have noticed many changes in Charles recently and you realize something must be going on. You arrange to have your assistant handle circle time so you can walk out with Charles’s dad after drop off to have a chance to talk with him. You tell him that Charles seems to be on a new schedule, and ask if there is a reason that the schedule has changed. He tells you that Charles’s mom lost her job, so now she is taking training classes that require her to travel much further away from home. Charles’ dad now has to get all three of the children to school before he gets to his own job and many times the children do not have time to eat breakfast before they have to rush out the door.

Charles is dealing with changes or challenges to family wellbeing in several areas:

- **Financial Security** – Charles’s mom lost her job so they are bringing in less income while she takes training classes.

- **Mental Health** – Charles is dealing with changes to his schedule and to the absence of his primary caregiver. Charles is acting out in response to the stressful situation.
- **Food security** – While Charles’s family may be able to provide meals and food, they have not yet worked out an adequate morning schedule to allow Charles time to eat. Charles is hungry by the time he gets to your program.

By taking all of these factors into consideration, you will be better able to support Charles and his family through this stressful time. You might suggest to Charles’ dad that if he can get him to your program 30 minutes earlier, Charles can have breakfast with his friends. This strategy can help alleviate stress at home and also provide a more consistent meal time for Charles.

Charles’s parents now see you as a source of support instead of feeling guilty for being late. By helping to reduce the burden or stress related to security, health and safety, you help them focus on positive parenting strategies.

EDUCATOR VOICE

*“During our Professional Development, we are always told that we need to understand our parents’ priorities. We don’t know what they are experiencing and our priorities may be different. As a teacher, this has helped me to be more aware as I’m working with my children and families. I look and listen for clues that something may be different. For example, when a parent picked up her child, I noticed that her car was packed full of clothes and furniture. I spoke to the Family Service Worker, who had a relationship with the family. We were able to help the family with housing and food and not only did I know the family was safe, but I knew the child would be able to come to school rested, fed and ready to learn. “*  
*-Teacher, Howard County Head Start*

FAMILY VOICE

*“When my child has been sick, the staff have checked on her and also provided helpful information to help her feel better. It leaves a good feeling to know the staff cares about our well-being.”*  
*-Parent, Greenbelt Children’s Center, Prince George’s County*

REFLECTION



Many early childhood educators and providers have no idea of the extent of the impact they have on families and that it all starts with relationships. Taking the time to simply check in with a family and make them feel welcome is the start of a relationship that can make a significant difference in that family’s life.







## GOAL 2

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENT - CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

*Research clearly documents the link between competent parenting, strong parent-child bonds, and positive school readiness outcomes. Supporting this begins by developing warm, nurturing relationships among adults, including between staff members, and between staff and parents and other adult family members.*

Promoting positive parent child relationships seems like an overwhelming task. What does that mean and how as providers and teachers can we help a family? What we often don't realize is that by working with children and families, providers are doing this already.

Remember CPR from the first goal? When we recognize parents' **C**oncerns, **P**riorities and **R**esources, we are supporting them in their relationships with their children. For providers, it is important to remember that this relationship starts early, even before birth, and is often when parents need even more support. It is this support that gives families the tools to better engage their children emotionally and **cognitively** by being caring, nurturing, and responsive through actions and words. This in turn gives children the confidence, the motivation and the support they need to be successful in school.

**Children entering kindergarten without the social and behavioral skills needed to be successful may face long term effects. By the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, these children are<sup>1</sup>:**

- Up to 80% more likely to be retained in their grade.
- Up to 80% more likely to receive services and supports through an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or a 504 Plan.
- Up to 7 times more likely to be suspended or expelled at least once.

By promoting nurturing relationships between family members and caregivers and children, children are provided with a strong foundation to help them enter school fully prepared with the critical skills necessary to be successful.

When children have a secure **attachment** to their families or parents, they are more likely to get along with adults and peers, have increased academic performance, and have higher self-esteem. This is also what contributes to a child's **resiliency**. When someone is resilient, they are able to identify problems, find ways to address challenges and recover quickly and move on. A resilient person will have many protective factors – characteristics, people and supports that help a person get through tough times<sup>2</sup>.

### PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Protective factors are circumstances or characteristics that can help reduce or eliminate risks families face to the health and wellbeing of their children and family. Protective factors help parents find and use resources, supports, or strategies to help them effectively cope, even in stressful times.<sup>3</sup>

As educators, we want children to develop protective factors and characteristics. When we effectively support our families, we are building their protective factors. The Center for the Study of Social Policy developed the Protective Factors Framework as part of their Strengthening families Approach<sup>4</sup>. The protective factors include:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

### STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PARENT CAFÉS

Child care is a diverse system, mostly offered by private individuals, programs and organizations and paid for directly by families. Because the system must be so responsive to the needs of working parents and adults in school who have young children—some of the busiest people—child care providers report that supporting children's primary caregivers by offering parent engagement activities can be challenging. One promising approach being implemented through Maryland's Child Care Resource and Referral Centers (CCRCs) is the Strengthening Families Parent Cafés. These are guided conversations designed to share the collective knowledge of families and build a network of community support among them. These events promote family wellbeing (Goal 1) and connect families to their peers and to the community (Goal 6) by fostering social connections and parental resilience. Parent Cafés can support the development of families as leaders and child advocates (Goal 7) by engaging parents, child care professionals, and other community members in conversations about the needs of families, how to meet those needs, and the role each neighbor can play in strengthening families and communities. In Maryland, staff members from the CCRC network have been trained as Facilitators to conduct Parent Cafés for parents and providers of children from birth to age five, based on the five protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. During a Parent Café, a group of 20-30 parents and other community members take seats, five at a table, set café-style. A unique question is discussed at each table for approximately 20 minutes. Then participants move to another table, where the Table Host presents the question, brings the group up-to-date on what

the last group discussed, and facilitates the conversation about the question available at that table. Participants visit at least three different tables. The process concludes with a list of themes identified by the participants and of next steps for future Cafés. The group may come up with some resources that meet identified needs, ideas or approaches that respond to common concerns, decide on a specific topic for the next discussion, or identify a speaker to invite to their next Café to address something they would like to know more about. In this way, Parent Café conversations harness community knowledge and address specific needs. Child care providers who facilitate Cafés report that the experience helps them understand what parents are facing and get useful ideas about how their programs can support families whose children are in their care. For more information about Parent Cafés, see the Resource section.





## FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

### PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Promoting parent child relationships is essential to any early childhood program and family serving agency. Encouraging positive relationships in early child care programs start with program leadership that understands and emphasizes the importance of strong nurturing relationships among children, families and staff.

Programs that are accredited by the Maryland State Department of Education follow specific criteria to promote and model positive interactions with adults and children. By addressing supportive relationships in policies and procedures, its significance is highlighted; ensuring staff make it a priority and intentionally model appropriate working relationships as well as professional relationships with parents. This is the first step to promoting positive parent child relationships. For more information on MSDE Accreditation, see the Resource section.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To support parent-child relationships, it is crucial to understand that families' experiences and cultural differences impact parent and child relationships. Additionally, staff need to be aware of their own backgrounds, knowledge, and biases and how that impacts working with children and families. The following training topics address these concerns and help to prepare staff to work with all families:

- Relationship building that is grounded in cross-cultural responsiveness and strengths-based perspectives.
- Reflecting on daily practices and personal experiences to increase self-awareness and effective relationship-building with families.
- Professional ethics in the areas of confidentiality, boundaries, and self-determination.
- Engaging fathers; how mental health and wellness affects families; trauma and its effect on relationships; communication styles; and relationship building.

The Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) program follows the pyramid model which has four levels – nurturing relationships, supportive environments, social emotional practices, and targeted intervention techniques. The base of the pyramid addresses an effective workforce and positive relationships as being the foundation for social and emotional development for children. This helps providers understand both the importance of relationships with others and how our own experiences impact our work with children and families. This is essential to understanding how to promote positive relationships with families. For more information on SEFEL, see the Resource section.



## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING (SEFEL)

SEFEL is a nationally recognized framework of evidence-based practices that support the social and emotional development and school readiness of children birth through age five. In 2012, twenty-two of twenty-four school systems in Maryland used the SEFEL framework. The SEFEL Pyramid Model is organized around universal promotion, secondary prevention, and tertiary intervention practices that can be incorporated into everyday routines and relationships.

- **Universal promotion** includes practices that ensure the promotion of social development of all children.
- **Secondary prevention** includes targeted supports for children who are at risk of challenging behaviors.
- **Tertiary intervention** includes individualized and intensive interventions to the very small number of children with persistent challenges.
- A competent, confident workforce of early childhood educators is the foundation of the SEFEL Teaching Pyramid.

### FAMILY VOICE

*Our early care program promotes positive parent-child relationships and offers positive parenting classes and Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) parent modules. Every week we were encouraged to do the activities from the book. This changed my view on my child's education. Knowing how he learned opened my eyes and helped me to understand when he was having trouble learning something new.*

*- Parent, Union Baptist Head Start, Baltimore City*



## IMPACT AREAS

### PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

To support positive parent-child relationships, staff must first establish a relationship with the family. Once the relationship is established, families will be more engaged in their child's program and their education. Programs can focus on relationship building by modeling open communication between staff, families and children and by sharing information with families about the benefits of strong relationships and the importance of early bonding. The program environment can reflect that sense of partnership. Maintaining and promoting the open-door policy, encouraging families to actively participate in the program, and providing resources that make families feel welcome and valued as partners in their child's education will go a long way in building these positive relationships.

Remember that your relationships will look different with every family. Differences in needs, schedules, personalities and responsibilities will impact how families and providers interact with one another. You may have families that are very engaged with the program and volunteer on a regular basis, but this may not be the case for every parent or family. It is important not to judge that family and assume they are not interested in their child's education. They may have supports from family and friends or feel comfortable with their child's progress. As providers, keeping the lines of communication open and checking in with families is a supportive family engagement practice that lets parents know we are here to support them when they need us. Consider whether your program is providing opportunities for partnership to meet the scheduling needs of all of your families.

### FAMILY VOICE

*As a single mom, I was never able to fully participate in the activities that were offered at the school. I had to work during the day and had other things that I had to do when I got home at night. I always talked to my son about the importance of education and staying on top of him about his schoolwork – I may have even been a little hard on him – but I wanted him to know how important it was. Just because I couldn't be there all the time didn't mean I wasn't as interested. I felt like the moms who could participate in all of the events or volunteer at the school or go to all the PTA meetings were favored sometimes. The teachers that I remember most were the ones who took the time to send an occasional email or call me to tell me how my son was doing or just to see if there was anything I needed. When he was younger, I would ask for things that I could do with him at home since he didn't have a lot of homework then. This made me feel like we were working together as a team.*

*- Parent, St. Mary's County*



## TECH TIP

Strong family engagement begins with communication, and today's families often use technology as their preferred mode for staying in touch. In the United States, 92% of all people aged 18-34, the age-group most likely to have children in care, own a smartphone<sup>5</sup>. Among families below the federal poverty-level, 91% have access to internet, with nearly a third of those only accessing information through mobile technology<sup>6</sup>. With so many of the families we are serving using web-based technologies, in particular mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, family-focused child care providers must have familiarity with these tools.

Luckily, there are many low or no-cost tools available to make communication between families and child care providers easy, organized, efficient, and secure. For example, WhatsApp allows you to send text messages and make phone calls using the internet – called Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP) – for free without using your text, or phone minutes on your mobile device (WhatsApp messages may impact plan data use). WhatsApp is available for iPhones, iPod Touch, and iPads; all Android devices; and over an internet connected computer.

WhatsApp is a great way to communicate with families. Here's what you need to do:

- Install WhatsApp on your device and ensure it is installed on the family's device, too. We suggest downloading the installation directions from the WhatsApp website to distribute to families along with your WhatsApp username.
- When families add you, or you add them, via searching for their username, you will be able to send text messages, files, and make phone calls wherever you have internet access. If you are on Wifi, this doesn't cost you any data minutes either!

The other advantage is you can do group chats – being able to talk with a number of families, family members, or colleagues all at once. Think about it – you could have a family outreach session where everyone is sharing tips on best practices right from your phone!

The other great feature about this tool is WhatsApp allows you to set your privacy settings, so the families with whom you are communicating do not see your actual phone number, and the messages they send you are kept separate from your personal communications. This helps you keep boundaries, protect your privacy, and be in control of the access the parent has to you.

*Chris Swanson, Ed.D., Senior Director for Quality Care and Education & Associate Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Center for Technology in Education*

## FAMILY VOICE

*Our child care provider promotes my relationship with my child and my family. They have provided me with a private room to nurse my daughter at lunch time, every day. If I am not nursing, I have enough room to play with my daughter and spend time with her and her providers. This has been critical to my success in returning back to work. We also receive texts, videos, and pictures on a weekly basis and the communication lines are always open, which makes me feel comfortable that I am a part of my child's first moments even though I am at work.*

*- Wonder Friends Learning Center, Baltimore County*



## FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When programs fully understand the importance of the parent-child relationship and promote it, they will recognize certain characteristics in their children and families, such as:

- Children will display open communication between parents and providers
- Parents and families will identify and attend to a child's needs quickly
- Children will seek help from their parent or provider
- Families will establish rules or guidelines for behavior

But, what happens when families are experiencing challenging behaviors? This is a common concern and many times, providers and families are experiencing these concerns together. That is why it is even more important to work together to support the family and the child.

Children being suspended or expelled from early childhood programs is a problem that impacts the relationship between the parent and the program, and can also lead to a negative view of school that children and families carry with them throughout the rest of their lives. Additionally, parents may have difficulty finding adequate alternate care for their child, which adds to their stress.

There are no easy answers when it comes to challenging behaviors, but there are things that providers can do to help support families when experiencing challenging behaviors.

- Be sure to talk with the family as soon as there is a concern. Often, behaviors may have resulted from a change in the home or a disruption to their routine. Families and providers can work together to come up with strategies and solutions. Sometimes, knowledge of the situation

or the circumstances gives providers the information to be more understanding and empathetic to the behavior.

- Do not be judgmental. Providers know about best practices, child development and developmentally appropriate practices and we often assume our parents know these things, too. Many times, they do not and are learning as well. By listening to them and offering strategies that support their efforts, we can often eliminate challenging behavior.
- Share resources and strategies that are effective in the classroom. Many of the strategies can be used by parents in the home. Providers can support parents' efforts by making materials or showing them the strategies they use and helping them to modify them for the home. SEFEL is a great resource for parents and offers strategies that both providers and parents can use together.
- Listen to the family to learn about their concerns. Parents may be hesitant to talk about their child's behaviors for fear of being expelled from the program or because of deeper concerns they may have. Sometimes behaviors stem from an undiagnosed disability. This can be very difficult for a family, emotionally and sometimes financially. Providers must be empathetic and supportive to help them.
- Don't forget to take a look at your own program and practice. Sometimes a simple change in the environment, how transitions occur, or just the daily schedule can help children with behavior issues. There are resources available for programs and staff to have another opinion of how best to deal with challenging behaviors. The Maryland Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMH) Project can be a valuable resource for programs. For more information, see the Resource section.

**Families and providers who have concerns regarding a child's development can use the following resources and should contact their local or office for more information.**

- Early Intervention Services through the Local Infants and Toddlers Program - Early intervention is a system of coordinated services for children with disabilities, ages birth to three, that supports families in promoting the child's age-appropriate growth and development. Early intervention services are provided to the child through and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Preschool Special Education Services through the Local School System - preschool special education services are provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to children with disabilities, ages three to kindergarten. Special education and related services continue to be available through an IEP for eligible children and youth from kindergarten to age 21.
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program (ECMH) - Behavioral consultants provide parents and providers with support and strategies for children with challenging behavior. If you have concerns about a child's behavior in your program, contact your local Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project partner or your local CCRC. They will work with you and the family to develop a solution.



The following are a few additional resources to help with challenging behaviors.

Resources	Description
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	This is a behavioral screening that providers and parents can do to identify concerns in their child’s behavior. Providers can work together to identify goals and strategies to teach appropriate behaviors and skills.
Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL)	SEFEL has a parent module that helps parents teach social emotional skills to their children and offers specific strategies to use. Materials are available through the website for free. Teachers also use SEFEL to teach social emotional skills and by working together, skills are reinforced at home and at school.
Making Access Happen	Making Access Happen was designed to support providers in addressing behavior challenges with young children. Each of the behavior support segments uses a video scenario of a challenging behavior to support the learning, discussion, and resources that will follow. Providers can personalize their experience by engaging with one or more segments as they consider what information to explore, how much information to engage with, and what tools and strategies to adopt in their experiences with young children.
Behavioral Support Plans	Behavioral Support Plans can be beneficial as parents and providers are working together to develop goals and strategies that are effective for the child, parent, and the provider. Components of a Behavioral Support Plan include prevention strategies, teaching replacement skills, responding to challenging behavior, person responsible/ timelines. SEFEL reviews and provides guidance for effective Behavioral Support Plans as well.

Collaborating with families is essential when developing **behavioral support plans**. Parents have information that may help to understand the child’s behavior and many times, parents and providers may be experiencing the same concerns. By working together, goals and strategies can be created that can help reinforce these new skills at home and in the classroom, ensuring positive outcomes for the family. The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Development for Young Children provides resources for collaborating with families and the behavioral support. See the Resource section for more information.

QUICK TIP



Here’s a quick tip that can help providers and parents with behaviors.

**Strategy** - Describe what children are doing well so they know to do it again and they feel good about their accomplishment.

**Descriptive Praise** – For example, be specific in your praise for a job well done. Instead of saying, “Good Job” when children remember to clean up their area after playing, tell them, “You remembered to clean up your area after you finished playing! That’s awesome!”

**Result** - When children know what they did well, they are more likely to do it again!

Children who experience the deployment of a parent for military service often show higher levels of stress and anxiety than their civilian friends. Younger children may not have the tools to understand where mom or dad has gone or when they’re coming back. Older kids feel the burden of having to worry about the absent parent while they take on extra responsibilities at home.<sup>7</sup> Providers may not always know what to do or say in situations like this, but remember that just checking in with families to see how they are doing or if they need anything is a family engagement best practice. Below are a few tips from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).<sup>8</sup>

- Maintain consistent schedules and routines.
- Be more alert to children’s behaviors, feelings, and conversations during play, routines, and other activities, indoors and outdoors. Through observation, teachers can identify children who are experiencing adjustment difficulties and may need additional assistance, such as counseling.
- Respect diverse family structures and living arrangements, such as children living with grandparents. For example, address correspondence to “Dear Family” rather than “Dear Parent.”
- Recognize and validate feelings children may experience during a deployment, such as guilt, resentment, fear, anxiety, confusion, and anger. A teacher might say, “Carl, it’s hard to be away from your dad. Would you like to write him a letter?”
- Display photos of the deployed parent at work in uniform.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

By participating in community meetings and committees, programs increase their capacity to respond to the needs and interests of their families. It can be overwhelming to keep up with all of the events that may helpful to families, but it is important for programs to be aware of these activities so they can appropriately refer their families.

Many providers and programs do not have the ability to offer additional programs, events, or workshops for their families, but programs may be able to enhance what they offer to parents through strong partnerships. For example, a local child care program may not have the funding or the staff to offer parent workshops. However, the program could partner with the local Judy Center which would allow the families of the child care program to attend a Judy Center workshop. This enables the Judy Center to reach more families that may need services, but also helps the child care program meet the needs of their families. When programs work together, we are supporting all children and families and ensuring their success.

Various types of programs may be limited in the services they can provide; therefore, it is essential to have strong partnerships within the community to improve our family engagement practices. The Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils (LECAC) are a great place to find resources and partners within the community and also become aware of new early childhood initiatives. For more information on the LECACs, see the Resource section.

FAMILY VOICE

*When we first enrolled, I wasn’t that active, but now I am more active. The reminders from the school helped. I am able to be more engaged with my daughter and the activities. The program has really helped me to be more motivated with parenting. I have a child that’s willing to learn and that encourages me.*

- Parent – Arlington Judy Center, Baltimore City







TEACHING AND LEARNING

As providers, one of the easiest ways we can support families in their relationships with their children is by talking with them about their child’s development and behavior. By sharing information, we can help them overcome behavioral challenges and help them to better engage with their children. Ensure that families feel welcome to join and observe in the classroom and participate in home visits. It is these experiences that help families become part of their child’s learning and development, and also gives them an opportunity to practice these skills as well. However, providers need to ensure that they are reaching the families that do not have the opportunity to come into the program. Many programs use monthly newsletters that highlight events and activities being offered. Programs may also send home weekly updates of classroom or program events. Providers can support families and children even further by offering activities that families can do together.

More and more programs are using technology to communicate with all of their families and share ideas and resources. Families feel connected to the program when they receive regular updates, announcements and reminders. By keeping families informed, providers are working to support their families and children.

TECH TIP



Another tool for your toolbox is the app Remind. The app Remind allows communication with individuals or groups, but it also offers a unique feature to structure people within classes so you can blast out reminders about upcoming events, things that are needed for the next day’s activities, or any other reminders that you want. The great feature is you can schedule these in advance, and the system will automatically send them out to the groups you designate. So if you have a message for your three-year-old class and a different one for your four-year-old class, you can use Remind to send the information to the appropriate group. And if a child moves, it is as simple as a touch and drag to change your groupings. Remind also offers automatic translation into an ever growing list of languages and dialects.

The app also protects your privacy – creating a separation of your personal information like your cell phone number – from the parents, but allowing you to still have two-way communication that is stored and organized separate from your personal texts. Remind is available on all Apple, Android, and web-connected devices.

*Chris Swanson, Ed.D., Senior Director for Quality Care and Education & Associate Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Center for Technology in Education*

REFLECTION



Positive parent/child relationships are part of the foundation for school success. As a child care provider, you can promote positive parent-child relationships through your daily interactions with families, children, colleagues, and community partners.





GOAL 3

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT FAMILIES AS LIFELONG EDUCATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN

Parents and family members are their child’s first teachers (i.e. The first ones in line to support their children’s learning.). Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should create collaborative relationships with a variety of service entities to support and empower the family in its role as first teacher.

For children and families to be successful, early childhood educators and providers need to support parents in their understanding of the importance of the earliest years in a child’s education. These early years set the foundation for a child’s success in school and in life. When parents recognize the importance of providing early learning experiences, they are more involved and engaged in their child’s learning from the very start.

EDUCATOR VOICE

While working with families from other cultures, I have gained an awareness of how other cultures view teachers. For example, with some families, a teacher is held in very high regard and families do not feel that education is their role. They feel their child’s education is the teacher’s responsibility, not theirs. When we tell them the parents are the child’s first teacher, they do not understand what this means. It is my responsibility to help my families understand their roles in their child’s education.

- Taken from the Ready at Five, Symposium, April, 2016



FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

When programs recognize a family’s needs and how to support them, they have a true partnership which supports early childhood learning. The mission of a program should include supporting staff as they bring parents into an educational partnership.

The chart below is a helpful guide to establish your goals and strategies to support families:

To support parents as their child’s first teacher, <u>programs and providers</u> need to:	To be effective first teachers, <u>parents and families</u> need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Build relationships with families so that they see you as resource and a trusted source of information.</li><li>▪ Provide parents with resources and skills so they feel empowered in their roles as parents and teacher.</li><li>▪ Develop a consistent message about ways in which parents can help.</li><li>▪ Ask and listen to what parents and families need to provide learning opportunities for their children.</li><li>▪ Provide professional development to support staff to appropriately engage with families and collaborate with families.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ An understanding of how and when children learn, including an awareness of <b>developmental milestones</b></li><li>▪ Ideas for supporting and planning spontaneous and intentional learning opportunities</li><li>▪ Knowledge of the benefits of early learning</li><li>▪ An environment in which learning is encouraged and supported</li></ul>

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To support families in learning about their child’s development, early childhood educators and providers will need to expand their skill set as well. Teachers are responsible for informing families about children’s progress, skills, and abilities, the **curriculum**, activities to reinforce learning at home, and even behavior modification, but do we support teachers in their efforts to do this? Staff receive training on how children develop and learn, but if teachers are being asked to educate families, then programs need to ensure that their teachers and staff have the skills to do this. The following is a list of training topics and strategies that will help teachers and staff to inform and support families.

Training Topics	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Relationship building</li><li>▪ Communication</li><li>▪ Partnerships</li><li>▪ Professional ethics (confidentiality, boundaries, etc.)</li><li>▪ Cultural Proficiency</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Create “<b>learning communities</b>” for staff. (This is discussed further in Goal 6.)</li><li>▪ Include teachers/teacher assistants in parenting education sessions so parents and teachers can share information about child development and program curriculum.</li><li>▪ Create safe and respectful environments where adults - staff and parents - can learn from each other and ask for the kinds of information they find helpful.</li><li>▪ Become familiar with education and training opportunities available to families within the community.</li></ul>





IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Early childhood educators often use phrases like “*parents are their child’s first teacher*” and “**teachable moments**” but we do not often think about how parents interpret these phrases and what they mean to them. Depending on a family’s experience, background and culture, these phrases may mean many things. Early childhood educators and providers need to be more intentional when using certain phrases and terms so that families know how to best support their child.

When you use the phrase...	Also say...
Parents are a child’s first teacher	A parent or family is teaching throughout their day. Children learn through their interactions and experiences with their family and also through the behavior they see and hear.
Teachable moments	These are times when your child is more likely to be open to learn something or be made aware of something. These are great opportunities to build skills, reinforce lessons and it also offers an opening for parents to communicate with their children. <sup>1</sup>
Children learn within their daily routine	To keep your child engaged and help to build skills, use the opportunities that occur in your day-to-day routine. For example, have your child help sort the laundry. They learn colors, build math skills through sorting and classifying, build language skills, and also learn responsibility by helping with daily chores.
Developmentally Appropriate Practices	What I’m doing with your child every day is just right for your child’s age, background, and personality.

By ensuring parents understand our messages, we are building relationships and supporting parents as they learn about their role in their child’s education. When speaking with parents, be sure to pay attention to the things they do and say. It helps to look for cues to ensure they understand your message.



TEACHABLE MOMENT

As a provider, one of the most important skills for you to help parents gain is the ability to recognize and capitalize on “teachable moments” in everyday life. A teachable moment can happen almost anywhere - in the supermarket, when picking your child up from child care or school, walking through a shopping mall or setting the table for dinner. Chances are that many of the valuable moral lessons that you learned from your parents as a child were not consciously taught at all. Rather, they were learned in the midst of casual moments of real life, just as our children’s real lessons come from being, living and interacting with us in a hundred different ways we could never predict in advance.<sup>1</sup>

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When parents and families take pride in their roles as their child’s first teacher, they are becoming your partners in education. Starting this partnership in the early years and nurturing the relationship by listening to what parents and families have to say will help build a strong network.

Listening to families and gathering information about their family and child is the first step to supporting parents in their role as their child’s first teacher. Providers can use that information to make families feel included in the program, and also as a guide for the types of suggestions and strategies to offer the family. To expand our understanding of how this can be done, let’s look at the following example:

*A father you have been working with really wants his child to do well in school. He came in to talk with you because every night he sits with his four year old daughter, Liv, for 30 minutes and they practice writing her name, but she gets upset and refuses to practice. It seems every night they end up in an argument. He wants Liv to do well, but she just doesn’t show any interest in her school work.*

This is a common complaint for parents and one that many times can be easily solved. It may be necessary to first help the parent understand what is developmentally appropriate for that age and for that particular child. Parents may have the best intentions, but may be putting unrealistic expectations on their child or not fully understand how the best way their child learns a new skill.

Give parents specific strategies to help reinforce learning that can be done throughout the daily routine. Families are often not aware that they do not have to do anything new; they just need to include their children in the things they are already doing. These simple routines provide a lot of learning for children. Use the following chart to help families identify activities that they can do with their children and the skills they are building.

Activity	Skill
Sorting laundry	Identifying colors, math skills (classification), language, fine and gross motor skills (picking up, carrying)
Bath time (filling and emptying cups)	Language, math skills (measurement, comparison), fine motor skills (squeezing, pouring)
Helping to cook (as appropriate) mixing, stirring, setting table	Language, fine and gross motor skills (mixing, stirring, pouring), math skills (sorting and classifying)
Walking to the bus stop or driving to school or other places and pointing out letters and numbers, colors and shapes of signs	Language and literacy (identifying letters), identifying colors, math skills (identifying numbers and shapes)

QUICK TIP



Parents often feel that having children help with the chores around the house is not appropriate for young children, that it may take too long, be too difficult or not be done “right.” Parents may think, “It will be easier if I just do it.” We can help parents understand that by taking the time to teach children these routines and activities, they are supporting their child’s learning, building their confidence and helping them be successful. Another benefit – they are more likely to help with the chores as they get older if they learned how to do them when they were young!

FAMILY VOICE

*We come every week. You can see in every center that learning is the goal. After coming here, my child asks me to help sort socks and tells me about the colors. She also talks about different types of food at the grocery store.”*  
*- Parent, Storyville, Baltimore County Public Library*

There are also many free apps and websites where parents can receive daily ideas for learning activities. Programs can support parents by creating a list of these free online resources for families. Here are a few to get you started.

App or Website	How it Works
Vroom - <a href="http://www.joinvroom.org/">http://www.joinvroom.org/</a>	Vroom offers activities within the daily routine that encourage skill building.
I Learn With Emotions (available in the App Store)	Children are encouraged to watch short videos or animated clips of real world scenarios and then are asked to identify the emotions felt by the characters by choosing the right emoticons. Children learn how to help engaging characters work through their emotional situations.
Counting 1,2,3 (available in the App Store)	Through four mini games, children learn how to count and recognize the numbers from 1 to 10. Games also focus on color names and on the pronunciation of numbers.
FitnessKids (available in the App Store)	FitnessKids contains 25 animated exercises that can be performed independently or in groups. Each exercise has buttons for music, movement and speed.

The Center for Technology in Education (CTE) at Johns Hopkins University developed *Tech for Tikes* which is a list of apps that promote learning and development in young children. *Tech for Tikes* was created to help parents and teachers identify which types of apps target critical areas of development and learning during the preschool years.<sup>2</sup>



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community organizations can play a huge role in providing parents with the knowledge they need to support their children's learning and be effective first teachers. Many community programs offer ongoing events and resources to give families fun ways to build skills together. For teachers, it is important to become familiar with community programs and what they offer. This information is valuable to parents and shows them different ways to engage their children in learning.

Local libraries and museums offer a variety of activities and play groups that provide learning experiences for children, but also encourage parents as they learn ways to support their children's learning.

### EVERY CHILD READY TO READ @ YOUR LIBRARY

Public libraries in Maryland implement a number of strategies designed to meet the goals of the Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework. A signature initiative of the public libraries is Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library, a research-based early literacy outreach education program for parents and caregivers. The program enlists parents and caregivers as partners in preparing young children to read and provides them with effective tools and strategies, thus supporting families as lifelong educators of their children (Goal 3). The program also puts library resources into the hands of parents – connecting families to their communities (Goal 6). Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library supports families by engaging them in meaningful learning activities that provide a unique context for promoting positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2). Through the workshop(s), parents and caregivers learn strategies for developing emergent literacy skills through engaging parent-child activities that incorporate singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing. These practices are all familiar to parents and caregivers, which makes them easy to use and integrate into everyday life. Through the Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library program, families gain access to knowledge, resources, and community supports that help them engage in positive parent-child interactions and foster their young children's emergent literacy skills. Through the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant, every library system in Maryland received a copy of the Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library toolkit. Library staff are trained on the program and parents and providers are encouraged to talk with their local librarian about how their library is making use of the resources that Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library provides. For more information on the national program, see: <http://everychildreadytoread.org/>



## EDUCATOR VOICE

*Through programs and activities, such as Every Child Ready to Read, or in the Library Café discussions, we are offering a learning structure for parents to think about how to be their best. For example, we give tips to parents encouraging them to ask questions of their young children when they are in the grocery store – “What is the name of this fruit?” When families are driving in the car – “Let’s sing The Wheels on the Bus song.”*

- Cecil County MD Public Library

## LEARNING PARTIES

One effective family engagement initiative implemented in Maryland is Learning Parties, created by Maryland's Ready at Five. Guided by a trained facilitator, the interactive, hands-on, parent-child parties promote positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2). Based on the belief that parents are lifelong educators of their children (Goal 3), Learning Parties teach parents how to make everyday moments learning moments through playing, singing, talking, reading, and engaging in fun, developmentally appropriate learning activities. Learning Parties also connect families to their peers and community (Goal 6) by cultivating social networks and enabling parents to meet, talk with, and learn from other parents/families. Often, Learning Parties are held in schools and bring preschool children and their families into a school environment prior to being enrolled. As such, they support the goal of family engagement in transitions (Goal 5). Ready at Five has developed a Learning Party Curriculum in seven key Domains: Language & Literacy, Math, Science, Social Foundations, Physical Well-being and Motor Development, Social Studies and The Arts. Additionally, Ready at Five has developed the Learning Party curriculum to be aligned to the Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment Through Stories (VIOLETS) program, which they also developed. This program is often offered to children and their parents/families enrolled in classrooms implementing the VIOLETS Read Aloud Program. Health Learning Parties, developed by the School of Medicine, University of Maryland and Ready at Five, are offered in the University's Health Clinics. The Learning Party series for each domain includes curriculum for four 90-minute Learning Parties (for a total of 28 across all domains) during which parents learn a variety of techniques and strategies for supporting children. While parents are learning, their children are in another room building their skills and abilities while participating in activities related to the content that is being provided to their parents. At the Learning Parties, parents have an opportunity to practice the activities with their children while trained Learning Party leaders provide positive feedback and constructive suggestions. Parents are also given activities to complete with their children at home, as well as a variety of books, developmentally appropriate materials, and educational toys to start a learning library in their home. Learning Parties have been offered to hundreds of parents and children throughout Maryland's 24 jurisdictions at no cost to participants. For more information, see the resource section.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Classrooms and early learning settings are often the best place for parent's to learn how to support their child's learning. When families feel welcome and a part of the school or program community, they are engaged in their child's development and learning.

To support parents as they become familiar with their role as their child's first teacher, programs can provide many opportunities in the classroom or learning environment. For example, some programs have a parent job board when parents come in to volunteer. Similar to a child's job board, it provides a list of several activities that parents can do in the classroom or child care setting. By spending time in the child's setting, families have opportunities to practice these skills and then apply them at home as well. Here are a few that activities that parents can do in the classroom or child care setting and also use at home.

- Read a story to children- Parents learn how to read stories to children and how to ask questions about the story.
- Helping children in small group activity (art, writing, etc.)- Families learn how to help children with their activities and learn the importance of **scaffolding**. For activities to do in the classroom, Johns Hopkins CTE, created a Pinterest page with all kinds of engaging activities across the seven domains of learning. For more information, see the Resource section.
- Helping children in classroom centers- Families practice **facilitating** children's play and to follow the children's lead. They also learn about the skills children are developing during their play.

Providers often hear from families that “children just play.” It is important to let parents and families know what skills children are developing through play so they recognize its importance and value. To help parents understand what children are learning, Purdue Extension created a *Block Party*. Teachers and providers set up their classroom with different types of activities that children do in the block area. They included all types of blocks of different sizes, colors and textures. Families would rotate through each center which had different types of blocks. Each center had a poster explaining what skills children were developing and how the parents could engage with their child during the block play. Parents left with an understanding of why play is important and how their children learn. They also left with new skills to support their child's learning at home.<sup>3</sup> For more information on this activity see the Resource section.

When providers invite families into the classrooms and early learning settings, families not only discover new ways to encourage their child's learning, but they also learn about their child's development. This helps parents recognize their child's developmental milestones, and also gives the parents opportunities to discuss any concerns or address questions they have with the provider. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is a simple screening tool that parents can do with their children to identify their child's strengths and weaknesses and identify any areas that might be of concern. This tool can also be a great way to start conversations between the provider and the parents where they work together to establish goals for the child. For more information on the ASQ see the Resource section.





EDUCATOR VOICE

Parents are asked to do the Ages and Stages Questionnaires as their child is enrolled in the program and teachers do them as well. This gives them a developmental perspective of their child. Parents are encouraged to ask for suggestions if they are having difficulties with child rearing. We also share a Backpack Connection Series each month. The Backpack Series provides a way for teachers and parents to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. The monthly handouts help the parents to stay informed about what their child is learning at school and offers specific ideas on how to use the strategy at home. We encourage parents to embrace their role and know that we will work with them to do what is most beneficial for the child.

- Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center, Baltimore City

QUICK TIP

Remember – Learning begins at birth. Simple activities such as supervised tummy time helps build fine and gross motor skills, cooing and babbling are the beginning stages of language development and responding to a child’s cries sets healthy foundations for social and emotional wellbeing. Sharing this information with families can also help them support younger children they may have at home.

REFLECTION

We often assume that parenting is automatic for families and they naturally know how to support their child in all areas of development. While parents are the experts on their child, they may need more support to help their child be successful. We must ensure that we are supporting, encouraging, and helping parents gain the skills and knowledge needed to ensure their success in the role as their child’s first teacher.





GOAL 4

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Research has documented the link between parental education – particularly maternal education levels – and positive school readiness outcomes. When parents and other adults in the family strive to achieve their educational goals, they become a positive example to their children regarding the importance of education. Therefore, a goal of Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should be to support parents and families to advance their own interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

Programs such as Head Start, Maryland Family Support Centers and Maryland Judy Centers follow the two generational approach, which addresses the education and wellbeing of both child and parents. When programs help to educate families and empower them with skills to help them economically, they can help change the future for that child and family.



EDUCATOR VOICE

I worked with a young mom who had three children in our program. I noticed that she always worked closely with the Family Service Worker (FSW). The FSW said it wasn't always that way. It took a while, but eventually this young mom became more comfortable with the FSW and they worked together on many things. The FSW helped her with parenting strategies, effective discipline for her children and helped her to find classes to go back to school. She also helped her with things like clothing and food for the children; she really supported this mom however she could. I've worked at Head Start for a long time and this is one of the parents that have always stayed in touch. The mom now has her Master's Degree, a job she loves and she just bought a house. Her children do really well in school, too. The little boy in my class graduated from high school last year and has joined the Army. His little sister, who was also in my class, will be graduating high school soon and going to college. Whenever someone asks me why I like teaching so much, I tell them about this family. Together we supported the whole family – the children and the parents – and because of this, they continue to be successful long after our program.

- Anonymous – Head Start Teacher

HEAD START PROGRAMS

One of the defining features of Head Start is a strong emphasis on family engagement. In fact, the *Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework* served as a model for the development of the *Maryland Family Engagement Framework*. Head Start programs in Maryland are designed to meet all of the goals of family engagement outlined in this Framework. Some ways in which Maryland's Head Start programs meet the family engagement goals include providing numerous parent trainings aimed to promote family well-being (Goal 1) and connecting families to their peers and to the community (Goal 6) through opportunities to network and share experiences. Families are also empowered through the adult education component that supports the educational aspirations of parents and families (Goal 4) as well as through participation in Head Start Policy Councils, which support the development of families as leaders and child advocates (Goal 7). Head Start programs strive to engage families in a variety of ways. Programs offer many opportunities for parents to build their skills as members of the workforce (e.g., English for Speakers of Other Languages and computer trainings) as well as attend trainings on topics such child development, abuse prevention, parenting techniques, and kindergarten transition. Furthermore, programs seek to connect families to resources to meet their individual needs, inviting families to attend collaborative forums with other community agencies and connecting families with food pantries, clothing, mentoring, social services, and job training. Programs are required to have a Policy Council, a form of shared program governance in which parents discuss issues and make decisions on program policy, budget, and curriculum; perform community outreach; and give testimony at county council and board of education meetings to advocate for Head Start and all preschool programs. These examples of family engagement take place in all programs operated by the state's 19 federally funded Head Start grantees. For more information, see the Resource section.

FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

There are many reasons that families choose different early learning programs. Many of those reasons are practical – parents work and they need someone to take care of their children. However, many times families choose an early care or early education program because they value the educational experience their child will receive. To create a high quality learning environment, programs must value continued learning for staff and families. When education is valued for all, staff, families and children are encouraged and motivated to learn and grow. These programs establish standards or policies that allow for opportunities for adult learning and are aware of community programs that can support their program's and parent's goals.

For example, MSDE accredited programs ensure that staff meet the qualification requirements outlined in the accreditation standards and continue pursuing professional development opportunities. Early childhood teachers in a MSDE accredited program are required to have at least an associate's

degree and hold a Maryland Child Care Credential. To achieve a credential, staff must complete a specific number of hours of Core of Knowledge training, have a number of years of experience, and earn professional activity units. For more information on MSDE Accreditation and Credentialing, see the Resource section.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing professional development is essential for staff to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field including new programs and practices, routines, pending policy, legislation and regulatory changes. Professional development is also needed for staff to develop skills to help support families in meeting their learning goals. Staff should be prepared to engage with families appropriately at all times and should develop knowledge about different kinds of education and training opportunities available for families such as:

- ESL programs or classes
- GED classes
- Computer skills training
- Trainings or programs at the local college

UNITED WAY FAMILY CENTER

The United Way Family Center, operated by the Ben Franklin Center for Community Schools at Ben Franklin High School (BFHS)utilizes various interventions in their multigenerational model to engage and support families. While Family Center staff provides child care to infants and toddlers, the Family Services Coordinator and interns from the University of Maryland School of Social Work provide direct services to parenting students to support them educationally and enhance their parenting. These services include case management, counseling, psychoeducation, groups, and play sessions. Lunch groups are held daily to facilitate building a strong bond between parent and child.

The Family Center engages the entire family unit from intake throughout their time in the program to create strong relationships and support students in gaining new skills. Using a comprehensive approach to defining family allows anyone that the student identifies as their family to participate in services. Non-student parents and the students' parents, grandparents, and guardians are encouraged to tour the Family Center with the potential student to ensure that everyone understands expectations and their role in the model. They are also able to participate in daily activities, such as lunch groups. The Family Services Coordinator conducts home visits with students and their families. Home visits are an important opportunity to learn more about a family and engage parents that may not be able to participate in Family Center activities due to work or other barriers. Quarterly evening events are also held to engage with parents and family members that work during the day. The Center provides transportation to family members for these developments. A partnership with Women, Infants and Children (WIC)was developed to deliver services on site for parenting and expectant services.



Below are snapshots of Workforce Development (WFD) services provided to parents/guardians of the children who attend Ben Franklin High School.

ESOL

Mrs. Garcia\*, Latino parent of a BFHS student and a WFD participant, came for assistance in improving her command of the English language. Her daughter currently interprets for her. Mrs. Garcia works at a hotel. Her daughter explained that her mother is not paid consistent wages and feels that her mother is being treated unfairly. Mrs. Garcia wanted to learn conversational English to increase her opportunities for better employment. She enrolled in ESOL class at the Ben Center and has shown improved command of English.

GED

A former BFHS student, Kevin\* and his child participated at the Family Center. He enrolled in the GED class at the Ben Center while his son continued to visit the Family Center. Kevin maintained almost perfect attendance in GED. His post-test scores for Spring 2015 reflected an 18 point gain in Reading and a 4 point loss in Math. When tested at the end of the Fall 2015 class, Kevin had an increase in Reading of 9 points and 8 points in Math. Every 5 points gained is equivalent to a grade level.

Workforce

Ms. Johnson\*, the maternal grandmother of a BFHS student was referred to WFD from the Family Stability Program for assistance with finding employment. Ms. Johnson had already earned her GED and had several years of work experience in food preparation. She said cooking was her passion along with caring for her grandchildren. Ms. Johnson was unsuccessful in finding employment on her own and was becoming discouraged. A review of her resume revealed that it needed to be updated. Once updated, the workforce development coordinator assisted her in filing the online application to several adult assisted living communities. Ms. Johnson obtained an interview and was subsequently hired full-time at \$10.00 per hour with benefits including health insurance. Ms. Johnson has since maintained that position for over a year.

Teen Parent Support and Early Childhood Development

Karen\*, a teen mother that utilizes the Family Center for child care for her son, participates fully in all services provided. Her grandmother works with Workforce Development and will often meet with the FSC or other center staff to check in on progress for her granddaughter and great grandson. She also has participated in lunch groups multiple times and attended evening activities. The student's mother is unable to take part in many activities due to her work schedule, but meets with the FSC during home visits and has some phone contact. The student's brother also attends Ben Franklin, and while he is not parenting, also checks in with Family Center staff to support his sister and nephew.

\*Names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.


IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Supporting parents and families to achieve their educational goals may seem overwhelming, but programs can make minor changes that will make a big difference. For example, Judy Centers always include an announcement in their newsletter listing a contact person and phone number for the local Community College. This simple practice allows families to contact someone directly about any questions they may have in pursuing their education and career goals.

JUDY CENTER ADULT EDUCATION

Many programs have parent meetings or offer parent trainings. Programs can survey the parents to determine their interests and offer trainings or workshops that meet their needs. This not only ensures that parents will be more engaged and participate more, but will also support their interests' and goals.



Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The Judy Center is planning parent education for the upcoming school year. We would like feedback from parents on topics you would like to see. **Please check all that apply.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Safe Sleep
<input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition	<input type="checkbox"/> English Classes
<input type="checkbox"/> Health Related Topics	<input type="checkbox"/> Children with Disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> GED/Continuing Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance/Budgeting
<input type="checkbox"/> School Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer/Internet Assistance
<input type="checkbox"/> Mealtime Troubles	<input type="checkbox"/> Potty Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Bedtime Routines	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Days and times you would like for playgroup.

Please select the day you prefer most:	Please select the time you prefer most:
<input type="checkbox"/> Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> 9-11
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> 12-2
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday	

When offering parent meetings and trainings, programs can do the following:

- Ensure that meetings and trainings are announced routinely and held when families are available – Send home fliers, put announcements in newsletters, sometimes even calls or texts home can be friendly reminders for families about upcoming events.
- Ensure announcements are inviting – Announcements should feel friendly, welcoming and inviting. Try to send fliers out in multiple languages so all families feel included.
- Ensure that language is not a barrier to parent participation – Try to have interpreters at meetings so that all parents can access the information. Having interpreters also helps parents feel welcome and part of the group.

Many programs create information or job boards. Parents and families can look for resources on classes, training, and job opportunities that support their personal growth and career development. Having this information readily available allows opportunities for families to not only connect with resources in the community, but it also allows for opportunities for families to connect to other families with similar personal or professional goals.



EDUCATOR VOICE

One of the most simple and free things we do to help families is to identify the parents that do not have a high school diploma and then call them to offer GED/ABE classes. In March of each year parents come into the schools to register their children for Pre-K and Kindergarten. On the registration page there is a space where parents are to list their level of education. We review all applications and list those parents who note that they did not graduate from high school. We call those parents and ask if they are interested in completing their diploma. If they agree, we give their information to the Adult Educator coordinator and they contact the parents. This is a very easy and no cost activity that really helps our parents.

- Allegany County Judy Center



FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When families want to pursue their education or career goals, they may look to their providers to help them because of the relationship that has been established with them. Knowing how to help parents in this area can be difficult so it is necessary to be aware of the community resources available so that appropriate educational and training referrals are made. An easy way to support families in reaching their goal is to create a list of community resources and keep them nearby so that you can refer families quickly and easily.

List of community resources

- Judy Centers
- Adult education/Training classes
- ESL classes
- Job Training
- Workplace Literacy
- Communication

These are just a few ideas to start a community resources list to support parents’ and families’ personal growth and career development.

Many times parents are overwhelmed with wanting to go back to school or wanting additional job training, but they do not know where to start. Breaking down their goal into smaller steps can make this daunting task seem achievable. For example, Family Support Centers and Head Start programs use Family Partnership Agreements to create goals for families. If a parent’s goal is to go back to school to complete their GED, they may break this down into smaller tasks, like contacting the community college for information for the GED class; getting a schedule of classes; and determining how to pay for the GED class. When it is broken down into steps, it feels less overwhelming. We are providing encouragement and supporting parents in taking the steps necessary to reach their goals. Assisting families in developing their own education and training goals not only helps families to achieve their personal and professional goals, but it helps to link families to the necessary supports they need to accomplish these goals.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The family partnership agreement process refers to the set of opportunities offered to families to develop and implement individualized goals. This process includes the responsibilities of families and staff, timelines, and strategies for achieving those goals. How to set goals, implement them, and document the process can be different for each program and each family. A family partnership agreement is not just a form to fill out; it is the process through which you support families. Therefore, it is an interactive experience that happens over time and can include many different types of interactions, such as: helping families identify and reach their goals; identify and use their strengths and resources; and advocate for their children; offering

opportunities for family members to enhance their skills or build new ones; providing access to community resources; emergency or crisis assistance when needed; and supporting any pre-existing family plans.<sup>1</sup>

What are some of your strengths?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What skills would you most like to learn?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**FAMILY GOALS:**

My family goal(s) for this year is:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the steps needed to achieve this goal?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What barriers might prevent you from achieving your goal?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

FSW Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

3

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Having community partnerships is helpful to build the capacity of a program, particularly when the goal is to increase educational and training opportunities for families. By forming partnerships with educational resources, including higher education institutions and adult educators, programs are better able to respond to parent’s needs and interests. Programs can invite representatives from different educational programs to speak at parent meetings to introduce them to a variety of programs and provide additional information. Also, by working together with community partners, programs can create or enhance their trainings specific to the needs of their parents.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR PARENTS

The Carroll County Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) conducted a Parent Leadership Training by bringing together different community partners. The facilitators of the training, directors from the Carroll County Family Support Center, Judy Center, Head Start and the Parent Educator from the Public School, gathered families from all programs with similar interests and needs. The training discussed school readiness and the importance of preparing children for school and how parents can be involved in their children’s learning including working together with their schools and programs. The training also provided an interactive communication activity. Parents were given opportunities to practice essential communication skills needed in their everyday life, their

professional life and with their child’s school. Parents left with skills and materials they could use immediately, helping them to feel more confident.

By working together as community partners, the LECAC was able to give parents a training that supported their interests and goals and connected them to their peers and community.

For more information on Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, see the Resource Section.

FAMILY VOICE

*Many parents assume that is the teacher’s responsibility to take care of everything when it comes to education and school, but parents need to be involved, too. Our children’s education is just as much, if not more, our responsibility as it is the teachers and we need to set that example for our children.*

- Parent, Carroll County Parent Leadership Training



EDUCATOR VOICE

*At our program, we have an innovative, short term, for credit program, for pregnant or parenting high school students. The program is designed to address the needs of pregnant teens and teen parents who are having difficulty with attendance, related to securing appropriate child care and/or are having social issues related to pregnancy. It allows students to continue to earn high school credits and avoid dropping out of school due to a lack of appropriate supports. The Family Center provides child care, case management, and all other support services to the parent and child. The public school provides education staff, curriculum oversight and some transportation for students. While attending the program at the center, students are encouraged to locate appropriate child care and develop network of supports systems that would allow for the student to return to public school.*

- Washington County Family Center





**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Supporting parents and families in meeting their education and career goals is a necessary part of school readiness for young children. When families value education, they will be more engaged in their child’s education and learning. Programs can support parent’s learning by offering trainings in early childhood education and development, but also by including parents as volunteers in the classroom. Parents will learn strategies and skills for their children that can be reinforced at home, modeling the importance of education for their children.

**TIPS TO HELP ENGAGE PARENTS VOLUNTEERS**

- Provide simple lesson plans for the parents to do so they can participate in the life of the classroom.
- Talk with your parents about their interests and their specific skill set. Provide a lesson plan that is appropriate for the parent’s interests and skills. This helps them to feel confident when working with the children.
- Have a Parent Committee that works with the teachers to identify a project, event or a need for the school so that they can work together with program staff.
- Include a Family Engagement idea of the month in the monthly newsletter.

Families may not feel comfortable to volunteer if they are not clear on their role. When programs give parents specific jobs or responsibilities, parents understand their purpose in the classroom and become more comfortable, confident and engaged.

**REFLECTION**

Children learn by example and the best way to encourage their learning is by being a positive role model and valuing education. When programs provide an environment that encourages learning for all, families and children are successful.





GOAL 5

TRANSITIONS

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT FAMILIES THROUGH THE CARE AND EDUCATION TRANSITIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

*When a child transitions to a new early care and education provider or to the formal education system, the child and the family change setting, teacher, and learning culture. These transitions are challenging for parents and families, and often for providers and teachers, to **navigate**. Therefore, Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should support families as they make transitions with their children to new learning environments.*

We talk a lot about transitions and try to support parents in the many transitions families have: Kindergarten, daily routines, into and out of different early care and education programs. What is meant by transitions and why can this be so challenging? Transition means change. Change can be difficult for many people, especially young children. For example, in a **structured environment**, young children are expected to stop playing and move easily into the next activity. They may be expected to transition into new programs or different activities that may be unknown to them because there are different rules; therefore, they do not know what to expect. This can be difficult for children and sometimes for their parents as well.



DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS

Changes in educational providers, programs, situations, or age/grade levels.



PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

To ensure transition strategies are in place to support all families and all types of transitions, effective leadership is essential. Program leadership can create and promote policies and procedures to ensure smooth transitions.

For example, early childhood programs that are accredited through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are required to develop transition plans for children entering and/or moving to a new group of children or program that communicates children’s individual strengths and needs. Specifically, programs need to show the following:

- A written plan/policy for drop off and pick up.
- A system of noting when children and youth arrive, when they leave, and with whom they leave.
- Written plans/activities with local schools to connect school and child care staff.
- Evidence that staff and families are engaged in practices that encourage children’s smooth transitions when entering a program and throughout the program.

For more information on MSDE Accreditation, please see the Resource Section.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Families have many different options available within the child care community. Child care providers should be aware of the range of services available in their area, including early intervention services and public pre-k, and share these resources with families as needed. This helps support families as they learn to navigate these educational systems and advocate for their children. The following is a chart providing strategies and resources to help programs support parents during transitions.



Type of Transition	Strategy/Resource
Daily Routines <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Classroom transitions</li><li>Within program transitions</li></ul>	<p><b>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions with daily routines.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Maryland Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) website, created by the University of Maryland, provides a vast amount of information and specific strategies for transitions, including printable <b>visual aids</b> and <b>social stories</b>.</li><li>Training for staff and parents is also available through this website.</li><li>Your local Child Care Resource Center also provides training and resources for transitions.</li></ul> <p>For more information on the University of Maryland’s SEFEL and Local Child Care Resource Centers, see the Resource Section.</p>
Between Programs	<p><b>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions between programs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Partner with local school and child care programs with dually enrolled children and set up transition plans for teachers, child and family.</li><li>Communicate on a regular basis about the progress and/or concerns of dually enrolled children.</li></ul>
Special Education Services	<p><b>Provide staff and parents information regarding Early Intervention and Special Education services.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Partner with the Local Infants and Toddlers Program (LITP) and Local School System Child Find Office to learn about programs and services for children with disabilities, ages birth to kindergarten, and their families.</li><li>At the request of the family, participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to foster positive communication between programs, early intervention providers and preschool special educators.</li><li>Communicate regularly with early intervention providers and preschool special educators to contribute information about strategies that have worked in your program for the child and to add to information shared by the parents.</li></ul> <p>For more information on early intervention and preschool special education services, see the Resource Section.</p>
Kindergarten and School Readiness	<p><b>Provide staff with training and information on Kindergarten Transitions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Be aware of and refer parents to Kindergarten workshops in the community.</li><li>Partner with local schools and have Kindergarten teachers present at a parent meeting about the Kindergarten transition.</li><li>Plan a field trip to the local school’s Kindergarten classroom.</li><li>Meet with the local school or the local early childhood advisory council meeting to discuss transitions and how to work together to plan for them.</li></ul> <p>For more information on Local Early Childhood Councils, see the Resource Section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>The Second Step Curriculum</i> provides information and resources to teach young children the self-regulation and social emotional skills they need to be successful in school.</li><li>The <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> define the key aspects of development and learning that are the foundation for a child’s school and life-long success. These Standards act as a guide for educational and programmatic decisions by child care providers and early childhood educators. For more information on <i>Second Step</i> and the <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> see the Resource Section.</li></ul>



SOCIAL STORIES



- A Social Story can be a written or visual story that describes various social situations, interactions, behaviors, skills or concepts that children may be developing.<sup>1</sup> Social Stories help to:<sup>2</sup>
- Teach students routines, expectations, and behavioral standards in an alternative way
  - Reinforce correct behavior
  - Present information in a story format
  - Provide visual examples of behavior expectations
  - Provide a more personalized and tailored behavioral intervention
  - Involve students in the learning process
  - Individualize learning for all children with different abilities

IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Programs that have established policies and procedures regarding transitions purposefully partner with families in their transition planning. Staff helps families identify the different types of transitions children and families may experience, what families can expect during transitions, and how to plan for them. Common transitions in early childhood programs that families may experience are:

- Moving into different classrooms in child care program
- Changes in a caregiver or a teacher in a child care program
- Transitioning from home to a child care setting or from a child care setting to home
- Transitioning from one child care program to another
- Entering Kindergarten or a structured school environment
- Transitions from Infants and Toddlers Program to Preschool Special Education

To ensure smooth transitions, many programs collaborate with families to develop specific transition plans. These plans make children’s transitions more successful by bringing together the families and staff who support the child. These plans allow for a gradual timeline allowing the child to acclimate or adjust to new staff, a new environment, and other children.

TRANSITION PLAN



- A transition plan should:**
- Identify the type of transition (between home and school, between classrooms, transition to Kindergarten, etc.)
  - Identify who is involved in the transition (families, staff members, children)
  - Develop a timeline for the transition
  - Identify supports and strategies for children and parents
  - Anticipate possible behaviors and concerns
  - Identify appropriate responses to behaviors
- Head Start provides great resources for planning transitions in programs, with families and across agencies within the community. For more information see the Resources Section.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When we are working with families we may find that they are struggling with specific transitions. They might seem overwhelmed and not know where to begin. We want to make them feel as prepared as they can be when they are navigating educational services or entering new programs.

- When transitioning to new programs or different services, families often need help identifying and understanding quality criteria in early childhood settings. One simple way to help families with this is by referring families to Maryland EXCELS and showing them how to use this resource. This helps parents understand the programs in their area, if the services offered are right for their family, and if they are a high quality program. For more information on MD EXCELS, see the Resource Section.
- Families may have questions about early intervention or preschool special education services for their child. Providers can connect families with their local Family Support Services Coordinator, a parent of a child with disabilities who has direct experience with their child receiving services and who is knowledgeable of their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). For a directory listing of local Family Support Services Coordinators, as well as information about parental rights under the IDEA, please see the Resource Section.
- Navigating the early intervention and preschool special education systems can at times feel challenging and overwhelming to families. You can support families by offering to attend an IFSP or IEP team meeting with them, as both a “second set of ears” and to contribute important information you have about how the child functions in your program. IFSP and IEP team meetings can sometimes feel intimidating, so here are a few tips you can share with parents to make them feel more comfortable and prepared.

TIPS FOR IFSP AND IEP MEETINGS



- Share a list of common acronyms and suggest that they ask the IFSP or IEP team to clarify any unfamiliar term.
- Suggest that parents create their own agenda with their purpose for the meeting along with a list of questions they may have before they go to the meeting. Providers can offer to help parents with this task.

**COMPLETE THIS BEFORE THE MEETING - Bring it to the meeting to share**

**The Good News:** (Something that is going right. Something your child has accomplished this year. Someone that is working well with your child. A strategy that has been successful, etc.....)

**Our frustrations:** (Something that you would like changed. A problem that has arisen or that has been not been addressed. A strategy or tactic that has not been tried or implemented. Something that is not being done that is already in the IEP, etc.....)

**Our child's frustrations:** (Something your child is challenged by or struggles with. A subject that is particularly difficult. A scheduling concern that your child has trouble with, etc.....)

**What our child needs:** (The solution to your frustrations and your child's frustrations. A strategy, implementation, proposed schedule change, a creative solution that has not been tried, etc....)

(Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy 2012)

Example of at the meeting worksheet<sup>3</sup>

- Teachers can work with parents on determining and providing back up documentation and strategies to support child strengths and weaknesses.

FAMILY VOICE

*The teacher at my son’s school spoke to me regarding my son’s listening skills and asked if I had his hearing checked. I had it checked and his hearing was fine, however, after the evaluation, we found out that he had speech concerns. He is now enrolled in a Prekindergarten program that picks him up and brings him back to the center seamlessly.*

- Parent, Raspberry Children’s Center, Charles County, MD



FAMILY VOICE

*Having a child on the autism spectrum brings many new challenges to both the child and the parents, as everyone is introduced to the rigors of attending the school system at an earlier age than the child’s peers. While the parents understand the benefits of early education and support, it does not change the fact that it can be intimidating knowing your child needs to be on a school bus on his way to an Intensive Structured Learning Environment (ISLE) classroom, while other kids his age might be laying down for nap time.*

*During Pre-Kindergarten years, my child attended half-day sessions in an ISLE classroom (along with a small number of other special needs children) and the other half at Kid’s Campus Early Learning Center with typical aged peers. I felt this was a “best of both worlds” scenario, as my son was getting the early education he needed with the school system and he got to “be just a regular kid” at day care...all in the same day.*

*We made an extra effort to introduce the ISLE classroom teachers to the day care teachers, where they could discuss common goals for my child. This collaboration and information sharing proved to be greatly beneficial to my child’s development. This included social, educational and building personal confidence in him. Day care staff were invited and happily attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to listen to educational goals for my child and made the extra effort to incorporate those goals into daily activities.*

*The IEP school staff was rather surprised when we invited day care representatives to participate in the meetings, but the joint efforts between teachers of the ISLE classroom and day care have paid immeasurable positive dividends in development for my son. Daily lesson plans and exercises from the ISLE classroom were shared, repeated and reinforced at day care during the pre-Kindergarten years. Those extra joint efforts from both early learning environments were absolutely crucial to my son’s success.*

*After the transition to Kindergarten, my son began attending full school days and only attends after care hours at the day care, but the social development that was encouraged in his younger years with the typical peers is clearly evident now. Classmates include him in games, encourage his participation and make sure he gets a turn with activities they do. “Inclusion” is what any parent wants for their child, but for a parent of a child with special needs... it’s a dream come true.*

- Parent, Kids Campus Early Learning Center, Calvert County, MD

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Often times, early childhood programs and services work with some of the same children and families. Therefore, it makes sense to work together and establish community partnerships to truly be effective when supporting effective transitions. Here are some ways that providers can work together in the community to support families.

- Attend and participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interests of families.
- Help coordinate services for children and families as they transition from one early childhood setting to another, private or public, child care or elementary school.
- Work together with **the Local** Infants and Toddlers Program and **Local School System Child Find Office** to share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities, **including any special health care needs**. Remember *Memorandums of Understanding*, known as MOUs, are a good practice. Form a written partnership agreement as to how programs in the community will work together to support transitions for families and children.

Your local Early Childhood Advisory Council is a great place to meet representatives from all child and family serving agencies. By participating in these meetings, you can learn information about community partners such as **preschool** special education and early intervention services, health services, Judy Centers, or Child Care Resource and Referral Centers. You can also network with organizations and programs to form partnerships to better support your families with transitions. For more information on Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, see the Resource Section.

By working with your community partners and communicating between programs, you can find ways to ensure smooth transitions for children and families.



TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Preparing families is essential as children transition from early childhood programs to a formal school setting and throughout their school age years to support students’ academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. As we already know, fostering a relationship between home and school helps to build relationships with families that support their well-being, sustain strong parent–child relationships, and provide opportunities for ongoing learning and development.

When families are equal partners, students have better attendance, better academic performance, and a more successful pathway into a formal classroom setting. Early childhood programs must be intentional and culturally responsive in their efforts to engage all families, just as schools must be as equally intentional to reach out to early childhood programs to support families in this process.

Children and families may experience the following when transitioning into kindergarten:

- Being the youngest students in a large elementary school
- Riding the bus or walking to school for the first time
- Meeting teachers and peers
- Being responsible for completing homework
- Adjusting to a longer day
- Eating in the cafeteria
- Remembering to bring multiple items to school

To help alleviate the stress of the transition to kindergarten, teachers and providers can:

- Identify the elementary schools in your area for your parents
- Find out about any transition activities at the school or at the library and refer parents
- Bring school system representatives to your program to talk about the transition to kindergarten
- Ask children and families to share their questions and concerns about the transition to kindergarten
- Let children practice being a kindergartener by providing school materials in the dramatic play area
- Organize a field trip to the local school to let children see a kindergarten classroom and the cafeteria




## ARTICULATION

Articulation means providing information between early childhood programs. For example, some preschool programs fill out articulation forms for the new Kindergarten teachers. It gives a quick snapshot of the children's abilities as they enter Kindergarten, helping to prepare the teacher with a little information about the new student.

The following is an articulation form from Howard County that was developed through a collaboration with early care and family providers as well as the the local school system.<sup>4</sup>

## Learning Progress Form



### HOWARD COUNTY

GEORGIA

**Child's Name:** Last \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**Elementary "School" where child will attend kindergarten (Howard County only):** \_\_\_\_\_  
 ("Elementary school" can be found using school locator at <https://hcpss2.securix.net/SchoolLocator/index.jsp>  
☐ Child has IEP ☐ Child has IFSP

**Parent/Guardian #1 Name:** Last \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian #2 Name:** Last \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_

**Language(s) Spoken at Home:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Completed by: (Your Name):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**Program Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Program Phone Number:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Program Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Program:** ☐ Head Start ☐ Child Care Center ☐ Family Child Care ☐ Private Nursery School ☐ Public PreKindergarten

**Parental Consent Form "Signed to release this information" ( )** ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 ("If the Consent Form with sending program, do not send to receiving school")

**Learning Styles (please check all that apply):**  
 Prefers to play: ☐ Alone ☐ With a friend ☐ In small groups **Is capable of working** ☐ Independently ☐ In a group

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this form is to articulate the child's readiness in preschool and readiness for kindergarten.  
 - Identify the child's overall progress within each domain as Satisfactory or Needs Support.  
 - Check specific items where the child is Satisfactory.  
 - Write a comment for areas that you would like to share additional information.  
 - Return completed forms for children attending an HCPSS kindergarten to Early Childhood Programs, Howard County Public School System, 10910 Cantelero Plaza, Ellicott City, MD 21112.  
 Detailed information about the learning domains can be found in Supporting Every Young Learner: Maryland's Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy (Birth to Age 5) (<https://www.hcpss.net/Portals/0/EarlyChildhoodPedagogy.pdf>)

Learning Domain	Progress	Comments
<b>Social Foundations:</b> The Social Foundations domain focuses on children's personal and social development, including their engagement in learning and interactions with others. It includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Awareness and expression of emotion*</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Relationships with adults*</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> - Seeks help, as appropriate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation with peers*</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> - Listens to others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> - Is respectful of others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Self control               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintains attention during an activity</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Persistence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Working memory               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Responds to directions</li> <li>- Follows routines independently</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Initiative               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Willing to try new things</li> <li>- Shows eagerness and/or curiosity</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><small>Guides and Pedagogy: 22.02.04, Appendix 13.0-16.0            *Items are assessed in the Early Learning Assessment</small></p>		

HCPSS 5/16

## EDUCATOR VOICE

*At the George Washington Carver Judy Center, we provide two different transition events for families. The first transition event involves Prekindergarten 3, Prekindergarten 4, Kindergarten and First Grade. The event is planned in the form of a carnival and all of the children and their families are invited into their rising grade. They are able to explore the classroom and have one-on-one conversations with the teacher to address any concerns or questions they may have. This results in less stress for the parents for the upcoming transition. Families feel that many of their questions have been answered and leave feeling more secure for the coming school year. The families also receive a summer packet with activities to enhance learning over the summer. Local child care programs are also invited to this event.*

*The second transition event is Kindergarten Transition Night. The students and families are able to come to the school and visit the Kindergarten and first grade teachers. The teachers have materials available for the students to explore and the parents can ask questions regarding their child's education and upcoming transition.*

- Judy Center, St. Mary's County

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

We all understand how having transition strategies help in the classroom, but how does this impact teaching and learning? When parents have prepared their children for their transitions, whether it is within their daily routine or moving between programs, children will come to school more confident and ready to learn. We can continue this support in the classroom by:

- Giving families opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child's strengths and challenges relevant to their transitions to and from the program, their daily routine, which can include information about other early care and education settings. This gives the provider an opportunity to give the parent needed information and resources and also helps the parent problem solve if needed.
- Helping parents understand how they can help prepare their child for school. Share information with families about activities and everyday interactions with children that promote school readiness as outlined by the Maryland Early Learning Standards. For more information on Maryland Early Learning Standards, see the Resource Section.
- Providing families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

## EDUCATOR VOICE

*Kid's Campus Early Learning Center supports transitions for children by easing both children and parents into new routines and expectations and by collaborating with the local school system in support of the child.*

*Strategies used to make this happen include allowing the child to spend time in the new classroom prior to the permanent move. This allows children some time to get to know the teachers in the next room, meet new friends or reacquaint with old ones, and ease into a new environment. It allows the teacher to gain a little more insight into the child's development or to plan instruction. We provide the parents a transition document that tells them what to expect in the next room. While some rooms have little differences in routines and expectations, others can be quite different. For example, we teach children to drink from a small cup rather than a sippy cup in our two year old room and that is information the parent should know and anticipate prior to the move.*

*As children move on to kindergarten, we partner with the local school system and take children to a kindergarten visitation day. In advance of the visit, we read books to the children about going to public school, riding the school bus, making new friends, and meeting new teachers. Our goal is to get them excited about their new adventure. We provide kindergarten registration and kindergarten orientation dates to parents in an effort to help remind busy parents about important timelines. This, in turn, helps the school to effectively staff kindergarten rooms rather than hire a teacher at the last minute. On the first day of school, we invite our parents to come and take pictures and see their child off as they ride the school bus to kindergarten. In advance of the first day, we notify parents of the bus number so that they*

can help their child memorize it. We also create labels for the child to wear on their shirt with their bus number for the first week of school.

*Transitions also occur for students with special needs who may be transitioning to public school for additional supports prior to kindergarten or children that are already in school and attend our before and after care program. It is very important for child care providers, families, and the child's teacher to communicate about the needs of the child. We often ask our families to inform us of any IEP meetings so that we may also attend and learn what supports the child is receiving at the school level that we may also be able to duplicate in our program. We have found this communication to be extremely beneficial for the child as it helps establish continuity in routines, forms of communication, and strategies or supports to meet their needs. Even though the child may be served in different settings if all the partners are working to help the child (parents, child care teachers, school teachers, doctors or therapists), we see significant developmental gains.*

*The positive effects we see from these practices include children who are able to transition more easily into a new routine and may even be excited about the change, parents who are at ease knowing the expectations of what comes next, and educators and doctors who are able to help a child make developmental gains by having insights into development in different settings.*

- Kid's Campus Early Learning Center, Calvert County, MD

## REFLECTION

Children and families go through transitions every day and they can be challenging. This is an opportunity for us to engage families by asking about and responding to their needs, collaborating with teaching and program staff as well as other community programs, and building relationships between all members of a child's educational support system – all to ensure a child's success!









GOAL 6

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD CONNECT FAMILIES TO THEIR PEERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Personal networks are a key source of support for families with young children. Learning from one another and sharing common experiences can inform parent and families about resources, expand parenting strategies, and offer a source of comfort. Maryland initiatives and the family engagement practices of early care and education providers should support parents and families to form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and enhance social well-being and community life.

We have all heard the expression, “It takes a village to raise a child.” However, these days it seems more parents are left on their own to figure out appropriate parenting. Families are bombarded with information, but how do they know which information is credible? Social media is one of the most favored ways to communicate, yet comments from these websites on certain parenting practices can be harsh and critical, making parents feel they have to be perfect all the time. How can this be expected of new parents? How can this be expected for moms who are working and taking care of others in their families? To help families through day to day struggles and difficult situations, teachers, educators and providers are often there to listen and understand, but sometimes more help is required and we need to be prepared for those times. To help families when they are in need, providers should be aware of, and share information on available community resources. Also, a “learning community” can be created where families and staff feel comfortable sharing and learning from one another. Our children learn from their parents, their neighbors, their teachers and the community in which they live. Although it may not always seem like it, it still does take a village to raise a child.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Ellen Galinski, author of Mind in the Making<sup>1</sup>, defines learning communities as groups “of people who come together to learn with and from each other and then seek to act on what they learn. Their reason for being is ongoing inquiry for the sake of improvement.” This emphasis on learning with and from each other, and then taking action from that shared teaching and learning, truly speaks to the power of collaboration.

By building and acting as a community, participants from all different areas of early childhood education (e.g., teachers, parents, and administration) can come together to enact new policies and design new practices in response to family and community needs that are tied directly to children’s development.

FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Early childhood classrooms are viewed as communities. Children are taught to look at their classmates as friends and children have jobs in the classroom to teach responsibility. They work together to take care of each other and the classroom. The same is true for early childhood programs and family serving agencies. Programs that support good family engagement practices provide environments where families feel welcomed and included as part of a larger community of parents and families. Family engagement efforts should build connections between families, peers and the community and support families’ interests and needs. Community partnerships enhance programs and enable programs to better support and connect families to community resources. The following programs are great collaboration models.

- Judy Centers  
May partner with other agencies to provide adult education, parenting classes, child development programs, health services, good nutrition etc.
- Libraries  
May work with local child care providers and other child care programs and agencies to plan library visits, storytimes, and share additional community resources for families.
- Head Start and Early Head Start Programs  
May partner with other agencies to provide services to families regarding good nutrition, adult education, financial stability, child development, parenting classes, etc.
- Local Child Care and Resource and Referral Centers  
May partner with programs to provide information on quality early childhood practices and training for staff and families.

MOUs

MOUs should address what services will be provided for staff and families and how services for each program will be delivered.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Creating a learning community - an environment that is safe and respectful where all adults, including staff and parents, can learn from each other – is important. Everyone can ask for the kinds of topics/information that they need and find helpful means for investing in high quality professional development and coaching. This is needed to support staff as they develop skills to engage children and families in appropriate ways at all times. Parents will participate differently because of past experiences, cultural reasons, and their personalities. Staff must be prepared to recognize and build on parent strengths.

10 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES<sup>2</sup> ARE THAT THEY:

1. Bring new players together.
2. Seek to reach the most “in need”.
3. Focus on learning from and with each other and share a belief that there is expertise amongst everyone.
4. Focus on active learning that is experiential and engages participants in **self-reflection** and self-discovery.
5. Use new media to connect in creative ways.
6. Actively create new curricula based on sound principles of child and adult learning and development.
7. Focus on assessment, but tie assessment to child development.
8. Reframe teaching as teaching AND learning together.
9. Connect policy to practice.
10. “Pay it forward.”





IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Programs that employ good family engagement practices will welcome and value families, but also recognize the support that families need to be successful and help to build those systems and connections. According to the Head Start Research to Practice Series on Family Outcomes, there are two key competencies that allow families to actively participate in their child's school:

- **Cultural Capital** –refers to the knowledge and skills needed to understand and participate in educational or other systems in a particular culture, or more simply, institutional or formal knowledge and support.
- **Social Capital** – refers to the relationships that help provide resources or information, more simply, relationships and support networks.

Parents need both social and cultural capital to engage in a program, but what does this mean? For parents to be actively engaged in a program, they will need peer to peer support as well as community resources and support. Use the following chart for examples of both.

Social Capital (relationships and support networks)	Cultural Capital (institutional knowledge and support)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A neighbor or family member who can transport to or from the bus stop.</li><li>• A neighbor who keeps the key to your house in case of emergencies.</li><li>• A Mommy or Daddy Weekly Support group.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of school start and stop dates.</li><li>• Kindergarten transition information.</li><li>• Awareness of adult education classes and information.</li><li>• Early Intervention and Special Education Services.</li></ul>



FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Families look to their child care programs and schools for a certain level of support. They often seek information from these programs regarding their child's development and parenting strategies. They also look at these programs as a safe and secure place for their children while they are at work. Providers should recognize the formal and informal types of support systems that parents rely on and help them to not only recognize the supports they have in place but to utilize them when needed.

Formal Support Systems	Informal Support Systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Doctors and Pediatricians</li><li>• Early Child Care and Family Care programs</li><li>• Local School Systems</li><li>• Libraries</li><li>• Other family serving agencies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family members and extended family</li><li>• Neighbors and friends</li><li>• Recreational groups</li><li>• Religious institutions</li></ul>

When providers bring these systems and families together, they create opportunities for families to build support networks and strong relationships that can support families through their child's entire educational career. Strong support systems are especially important in **migrant** communities where families might rely on each other for assistance with language, or for navigating new and unfamiliar educational systems, or social services. These support systems may simply provide needed emotional support during a transition period.

SCENARIO

Jennifer recently had a beautiful baby girl. She had a two year old toddler and a six year old at home. Her husband worked long hours and was gone for most of the day. The first few nights being at home were very difficult and the baby was soon diagnosed with a disability and was medically fragile. Jennifer was extremely overwhelmed with the amount of care needed for her newborn and her two older sons. She felt that she often was doing it alone since her husband was gone for most of the day.

Jennifer's provider worked closely with her and listened as she described how difficult everyday seemed for her with the doctor's appointments, medical care and the normal day to day life with three children. After asking her a few questions, the provider recognized that Jennifer's sister and friends lived nearby and had been helping to baby sit and get the older child to and from school while Jennifer was at the doctor or caring for her newborn (informal supports). Jennifer was really overwhelmed with not understanding how to help and support her newborn and who to go to for all of her questions and concerns. The provider was able to get her information regarding special education, as well as support groups in the area where she could meet other parents of children with disabilities (formal supports). By helping this mom to recognize the supports she already had in place, the provider was also able to identify additional supports she needed and then give her useful information.

The mom looked toward her provider as support and a safe place to ask questions. It opened the door to a larger support network that not only helped the family during a difficult transition period, but provided one that will continue to be a support throughout their children's education.

FAMILY VOICE

*It's important to have a school and organization like the Judy Center to care so much and do so much for your children and family. It makes a world of difference especially when you have five kids and your husband works extremely long hours. To know that the school and the Judy Center work together along with the community makes you feel good and a part of something special. My family has been to many of the Judy Center events – Family Nights, Harvest Fest, field trips and many others over the years. I have been able to meet and build relationships with a lot of parents I probably would not have known if it was not for some of the trips and events the Judy Center offers.*

- Parent, Charles County Judy Center





TEACHING AND LEARNING

We often think of the child’s classroom when talking about teaching and learning, but remember, in a learning community, staff, parents and children are learning. When programs create peer networks for parents, they feel comfortable to participate in the program more fully, including in the child’s classroom. They will be more likely to ask questions of the teachers and staff regarding their child’s development. To fully support families in this area, staff can:

- Encourage parents and caregivers to participate in training opportunities regarding child development and social and emotional development, (e.g., Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning).
- Parents, teachers and staff can exchange information about their children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. This includes talking about the importance of the home language (with families of children who are dual language learners).
- Encourage parent-to-parent support when participating in parent meetings about children’s learning and development.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Strong community partnerships enhance early learning programs and support parents in a variety of ways. To continue to build on your community partnerships:

- Participate in community meetings and initiatives that will build your program’s partners and increase your ability to respond to parent needs. Your Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) is a great place to start to build those connections with other early childhood educators and family serving agencies. For more information on your LECAC, see the Resource Section.
- Enhance family experiences with community resources that support children’s learning and development, such as libraries and museums. Reach out to the local library for activities and events in the area that you can share with parents. You may also find that you can schedule periodic trips or story times for your program and build a partnership.
- Share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities and special health needs. Connect with early intervention and preschool special education offices so that you can give parents updated information and help to support families with children with disabilities.

TO BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY WITHIN YOUR PROGRAM:

- Schedule events at your program that bring together families, staff and community representatives.
- Help establish relationships between staff members and families. This helps staff quickly identify each family’s needs.
- Find families who are knowledgeable about the community and ask them to participate at events and meetings with parents.

EDUCATOR VOICE

*We had Mr. Kofi’s Wolf Trap Parent Involvement Workshop at our program and had everyone participate; all of our parents were involved and were able to appreciate each other a little more. These events help our program become a community beyond its identity as a learning institution. Cooking with parents, attending behavior training, attending Parent Café’s, all allow parents to empathize with the fact that they all have similar problems and can get to know and help each other. These activities have helped parents build rapport with each other and have promoted supportive friendships between parents. Sometimes parents just need someone else to talk to who shares the same concerns.*

- Greenbelt Children’s Center, Prince Georges County

EDUCATOR VOICE

*Seventy-seven parents and children showed up at our first Library Café. We partnered with the Judy Center and the Early Learning Division at our local school system focused on the Title I areas. Many of the families had not been to the library before. All staff were on deck, including our library director, staff and volunteers, to meet and greet families, guiding them through the evening’s activities. Our volunteer coordinator happens to be a culinary arts school graduate and prepared a special array of refreshments. Every Child Read to Read’s five practices were at the heart of our activities – four activity stations were set up in the library with one take-home activity-one activity per practice –talk, sing, read, write, and play. Our goal was to create a pleasant experience with the hope that parents would want to come back. We believe we’re moving in the right direction because we had several crying children who didn’t want to go home.*

- Wicomico County, MD Public Library

MARYLAND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Maryland Public Libraries offer a wide variety of programming for children from birth to age five and for their caregivers. Our researched-based early literacy workshops and programs support parents and caregivers in their roles as their child’s first teacher. Literacy rich story times are designed to foster a love for language and the library through age appropriate stories, music, finger plays and movement. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to try these activities with their child at home. By talking, singing, reading, writing and playing with their children, parents and caregivers help build the strong literacy foundation necessary for school readiness. In addition to books and music, many libraries have early literacy themed backpacks for checkout. Other library programs may include bilingual story times, art, music, dance, STEM activities, as well as fun and informative Library Café’s for preschoolers and their families. Activity centers, found in the children’s areas at many libraries, encourage free play, which is how young children learn best. Please check out the State Library Resource Center to access many library services and resources.

REFLECTION



When programs support family engagement practices to build community and peer networks, the entire program and community benefit. Relationships that children, families and the community build support one another not only in education, but in all other areas of life.









GOAL 7

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILIES AS LEADERS AND ADVOCATES

*When parents and families are empowered, they can be a strong force for positive change in their child’s education and in many other areas of life. Therefore, family engagement practices of early care and education providers should support families to participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, and community and state organizing activities to improve children’s development and learning experiences.*

Families often look to their child care provider and school as the experts for their child’s education. They may not feel comfortable telling teachers and providers what is needed and what they feel is best for their children. It is important to work with, and empower, parents when preparing children for school. When parents understand their child’s development and how learning occurs, they not only help them learn at home, but are then able to recognize and ensure their child receives quality education experiences. Parents develop the skills to participate fully in their child’s program, advocating for what is needed. As the child continues through school, parents continue to advocate for their families, contributing to their success.



FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We know it is important to empower parents or caregivers in becoming leaders, but how do we do this? We often tell them to participate at meetings and to voice their opinions, but it is not enough to simply tell them what to do, we must teach relevant skills. Educators and providers can do this by modeling leadership skills and allowing parents and families opportunities to practice these new skills in their programs. This builds the parent’s confidence so that they might advocate for their children in other settings. To do this, program management must intentionally plan for parental participation in program planning, such as:

- Parent Meetings or Parent Councils – These are parent led meetings. Staff need to train the parents to coordinate and run the meetings, ensuring parents have a voice in all program decisions.
- Mentoring – Many programs will work closely with parents, and as they gain new skills, they then become mentors to new parents. This gives parents an opportunity to practice leadership skills with their peers.
- Planning activities – Many programs will allow parents to plan center events or committee meetings, giving parents leadership roles in the program.

EDUCATOR VOICE

*We will often have parents who have been attending the program for a while help new parents who have just started to attend. This gives parents an opportunity to act as mentors and explain the program to new families, making them aware of the program’s services and other community programs.*

*- Kent County Family Support Center*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When supporting families as they grow into leaders, providing professional development and training for both families and staff is essential. Staff members need to be aware of how they can provide support and can help to coach and teach families the skills they need to help their children. Ensuring the program is supportive of training for both staff and families can be challenging. To meet everyone’s needs, programs can:

- Provide staff training in the following areas:
  - Professional Ethics (confidentiality, boundaries and self-determination)
  - Diversity
  - Relationship building
  - Collaboration with families
  - Communication

- Form partnerships with adult educators who creatively enhance education and training opportunities for families.
- Provide advocacy training and opportunities for families to develop and use advocacy skills in the context of their child’s lifelong learning and in other ways of interest to the parent.

More information on professional development is available in the Resource Section.

MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Maryland Family Network, Inc. (MFN) has developed and offered Parent Leadership training since 2000. The curriculum and service delivery has changed over the years, and has been shaped to meet the needs of families. However, the underlying concept has always been that parents are their children’s first teacher and who better to advocate for their children than their own parents (Goal 3).

The goal of the Leadership Program is to provide parents the opportunity to recognize, build, and enhance the skills necessary to take an active and effective leadership role within their families, schools, and communities. As a result, parents are able to influence policy and program service delivery within the systems in which they participate (Goal 7).

The program is comprised of introductory and advanced level trainings. Each training consists of two, six-hour days of skill-building for a total of 12 hours. The introductory level training is designed to increase parents’ self-confidence, discovery and enhancement of leadership abilities and style, and to develop an awareness of the impact they can make through advocating for the needs of themselves and their families (Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

The Leadership Institute for Parents curriculum is designed to strengthen the leadership abilities of parents and to increase the confidence and ability of parents to advocate. Parents get to meet other parents from around the State, affirming their needs and dreams while joining collaboratively with their peers. The Leadership Institute Curriculum (Part I) offers seven core topics that serve as an introduction to the skills necessary for advocating effectively and expanding parents capacity to get their needs met. Parents develop an awareness of their “power”, responsibility for making effective decisions, and serving as change agents in their communities (Goal 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7).

The Leadership Institute for Parents curriculum—Part I provides training and practice in the following areas:

- Understanding leadership
- Active listening
- Critical thinking
- Decision-making
- Communicating with impact
- Public speaking and advocacy; and
- Action planning.



The curriculum provides opportunities for parents to master the definition of leadership and to dispel any related myths—the goal being that they can all be leaders! Parents engage in activities to sharpen listening skills, make informed decisions, and strengthen abilities to effectively communicate with others. The training involves actual practice with public speaking within small and large groups. Incentives/prizes are provided to stimulate active participation during the various individual and group activities. By the second day, these incentives are no longer needed as participants willingly engage in the myriad of activities (Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

During the action planning session, parents are tasked with deciding how they will use the learned skills. Parents can decide on a project or an activity to demonstrate use of their leadership skills.

Advanced Leadership Institute for Parents is held during MFN’s Annual Staff Development Conference (Goals 1-7). It is also conducted for two days, six hours each. Topics include:

- Review of Leadership Concepts
- Managing Stress
- Maintaining Healthy Relationships
- Positive and Negative Self-Talk
- Looking Like a Leader—Presenting and Dressing for Success
- Closing Exercise

The highlight of day two of the training is the closing exercise. Parents present what they have learned in leadership training to the network staff. Some of the parents showcase the projects they developed after attending Part I. Others conduct role-plays or skits demonstrating the use of leadership skills. A number of parents give speeches focusing on what leadership and the related training has meant to them. Staff are inspired by the participants and what they have learned. The closing exercise is also an affirmation to the staff as to the strengths of their participants.

The practice and use of leadership skills is pervasive in Family Support Centers (FSC) and does not begin and end with the training. Family Support Centers are required to provide formal leadership training in the FSCs on a quarterly basis. Other opportunities provided to parents are inclusion of at least two parents on the Center’s advisory board. Also, FSCs have parent committees. The committees meet monthly and are facilitated by parents with assistance by staff. Agendas and minutes are generated by the parents. The purpose of the committees is to provide parents a venue for input into FSC operations, particularly activity and program planning. A fundamental philosophy of Family Support is that all parents have strengths. Underlying the Parent Leadership Training is that “Parents do make the difference!” (Goals 1-7).



FAMILY VOICE

*“If I can speak up for myself here, with all these people, then I can do it anywhere else for my child because I need to.”*

*- Parent, Maryland Family Network Parent Leadership Training*

EDUCATOR VOICE

*“Parent Leadership Training is so important. This training gives parents a safe place to practice these skills.”*

*- Instructor, Maryland Family Network Parent Leadership Training*

IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

As parents are building their leadership and advocacy skills, they will become more comfortable and participate more fully in the program. Families will be more receptive to new experiences. To support families as they grow into these new roles, make sure to:

- Create events that give opportunities to practice new leadership skills.
- Ensure that parent meetings and trainings are announced routinely, that announcements are inviting, and that language is not a barrier to parent participation. Send announcements home in the family’s language, when possible, and provide interpreters for meetings. To cut down on cost, many programs use their partners to collaborate for parent meetings. For example, two programs can invite their families to a parent meeting. One program provides the food and location while the other provides the interpreters.
- Engage in honest dialogue with families about their expectations and staff/program objectives and have agreed upon understandings of how to partner and collaborate with each other. Many parents may not understand what their role is within the school or program so giving them specific jobs or responsibilities, such as typing up parent meeting minutes or creating flyers for family events, may be helpful.

Instead of saying...	Say...
Parents need to come to parent meetings.	We have monthly parent meetings. Parents help create the agenda by letting us know their concerns and interests. Please let us know what topics interest you so we can provide that for you.
We have an open door policy. You can come to the school anytime.	We have an open door policy which means you are welcome at the center anytime. While you are at the center, you can volunteer in classrooms, help us plan parent meetings, or help us create parent information boards, etc.
You are required to attend parent teacher conferences.	We view families as partners in the children’s education. Parents are the experts on their child and the information you have is essential to the child’s success. We review the assessment information and develop and achieve goals together.



Communication to families should include three types of information:

- Information about what is happening at the program (schedule changes, meals, policies)
- Information about important content (school readiness information, developmental milestone guidelines)
- Information about the child (sharing portfolios, anecdotal about the child’s daily activities)

Remember, communication is key! Both informal and formal communication is essential to family engagement.

Informal Communication	Formal Communication
Emails/phone calls (Be sure to find out the parent’s preferred method to communicate.)	Newsletters
Bulletin Boards	Conferences
Conversations at pick up and drop off times	Materials sent home

Communication from families can be spontaneous, elicited, or prompted. Let parents know the best way to communicate with you (emails, phone calls or face to face) and promote your open door policy (remember to be specific and tell them how to participate in the program). When asking parents or caregivers for information, here are some things to include:

- Medical and logistical information (allergies, emergency contacts).
- Parent observations about their child’s growth and development and any concerns they may have.
- Information about a child’s dislikes, likes and interests. This helps plan for children in the classroom and builds on their existing skills.
- Ask families what type of information they would like to get from the program or school and how often. When parents are given the information they need, they communicate more openly and are more engaged with their child’s school or program. Many programs use an All About Me form or activity. This may include questions about the child and the parents and gives teacher useful information about that family and their interests and needs.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Having strong family partnerships will support you as you work with families to help them become leaders and advocates. To start, you will need to assist families in identifying their interests, help them to articulate their strengths and needs, and work with them to develop and accomplish their goals. The following are a few tips to get you started:

- Assist families in using resources and systems of support as necessary and appropriate. Remember the EcoMap from Goal 1? Using this method, or a variation of it, can really help families identify their resources.
- Families with children with disabilities may need support as they navigate the special education system and advocate for their children. The first place to start is knowing and understanding their rights. Ensure that families are aware of services and know about their rights under federal and state laws, including their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Many times parents are just given the Maryland Procedural Safeguard Notice, which explains their rights under IDEA. Remember to help parents understand this document; it is not enough to just give it to them. Discuss the information and give clear examples of what is being explained so that parents understand the information. A link to the copy of the Maryland Procedural Safeguard Notice is available in the Resource Section.
- Provide opportunities for parents to identify their strengths as leaders/ advocates and to use them in the program and community. This could be as simple as having parents design the parent information board or having them collaborate with staff and coordinate meetings and events for the school.
- Share information with families about family peer networks and/or parent initiated school community efforts.
- Partner with parents to engage in advocacy groups that work on issues related to child, family, and community needs or on other issues of interest to parents. Remember to look to your county’s Local Early Childhood Advisory Council and other local advisory councils. Many of these groups invite parents to attend these meetings because the parent’s perspective is valuable to the work they are doing!

QUICK TIP



Remember it is not enough to tell a parent to attend a meeting or to just take them to the meeting. As staff, we must prepare them for the meeting so they know what to expect and how to participate.

- Tell them what the purpose of the meeting is and list two or three questions they can ask to help them participate.
- Attend the meeting with the parent so you can coach them and make them feel more comfortable.
- Sometimes just looking the part can help the parent feel more comfortable! Giving parents a notepad, pen, and a bottle of water helps them to look and feel more prepared. (Next time you’re at a meeting, look around the room. Nearly everyone will have these three items!)

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Leadership is important but how does it impact teaching and learning? Remember that when families understand their child’s development and understand the importance of their role in their child’s education, they work as partners with their teachers and provide information that is needed for the child’s success in the classroom. The following strategies will help parents be a part of their child’s education:

- Make sure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss child assessment data. This could be any screenings or assessments that are completed as well as the children’s portfolios (a collection of the children’s work throughout a period of time). This helps families to see how their children are progressing and gives them an opportunity to discuss specific developmental skills and milestones. Reviewing this information with them helps prepare families to initiate and/or participate in similar discussions with teachers in the formal education system.
- Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child’s strengths and challenges. This helps families and providers to work together to develop appropriate goals for the child.

QUICK TIP



Remember - Educators and early care providers may be the expert on education and child development, but the parents are the experts on their child. Their information is critical to ensuring children’s success!





COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are essential to a program’s success in supporting parents and families. Not only do these strong partnerships create opportunities to link families to community resources, but it also allows opportunities for parents to be involved in community organizing activities. This allows families to advocate for their children to improve their development and learning experiences. Programs can:

- Link families with support systems, peer-to-peer groups, and resources, like Parent Café’s and Library Cafes.
- Participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interest of families.
- Share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities and special health needs.
- Collaborate with community organizations that share parent concerns and interests.

Helping families to become leaders and advocates gives them a wide range of duties. Think of the several examples discussed. Family advocates can provide information to staff and to other families; they can organize events and assist in the classroom. Family advocates can also help raise awareness and participate in leadership meetings, and even testify in support of legislation around an issue.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Research shows that children are more successful in school when their families are involved in their development and education. For children with disabilities, the importance of parent involvement can be even greater.

Very often, parents are the only or best source of information about their child’s strengths and the impact a disability has on their child’s development or learning ability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that parent be equal members on the team that evaluates their child’s abilities and creates an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet the unique needs of their child.

The Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/ Early Intervention Services maintains a network of local Family Support Services coordinators that assist parents of children with disabilities to fully participate in planning early intervention and special education services for their child.

- **Family Support Network** coordinators for families of children ages Birth to three years
- **Preschool Partners** coordinator for families of children ages 3-5 years
- **Partners for Success** coordinators for families of children ages 3-21 years

Family support service coordinators are available in each Maryland jurisdiction to:

- Answer questions about early intervention and special education services
- Help foster connections among families
- Provide resources and lend library materials
- Organize parent trainings
- Facilitate parent support groups
- Support families in planning for transitions
- Informally assist parents in resolving concerns with local school systems
- Provide information about Maryland’s formal process for resolving disputes with local early intervention systems and local school systems

EDUCATOR VOICE

*Parent involvement is crucial to our program’s success! Our parents complete an annual survey on the center policies, procedures and educational philosophy. This feedback is essential for us as we grow and meet the needs of our community here at Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center.*

- Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center, Baltimore City

FAMILY VOICE

*The staff encouraged me to keep coming to the program, even when I didn’t want to. They encouraged me to get my GED and helped me to find a job. When I started at the Family Support Center, my goal was to get my GED before my daughter graduated high school. She not only graduated high school, but she is enrolled in college.*

- Parent, Our House Family Support Center, Maryland Family Support Network Spring Training

REFLECTION

Improving the outcomes for children and families takes more than just telling parents they need to be advocates for their children. Leadership and advocacy are skills taught through modeling, coaching and practice. When this is done successfully, parents have not only improved their family well-being, but they have modeled motivation, persistence and accomplishments for their children and have improved their family’s outcomes.





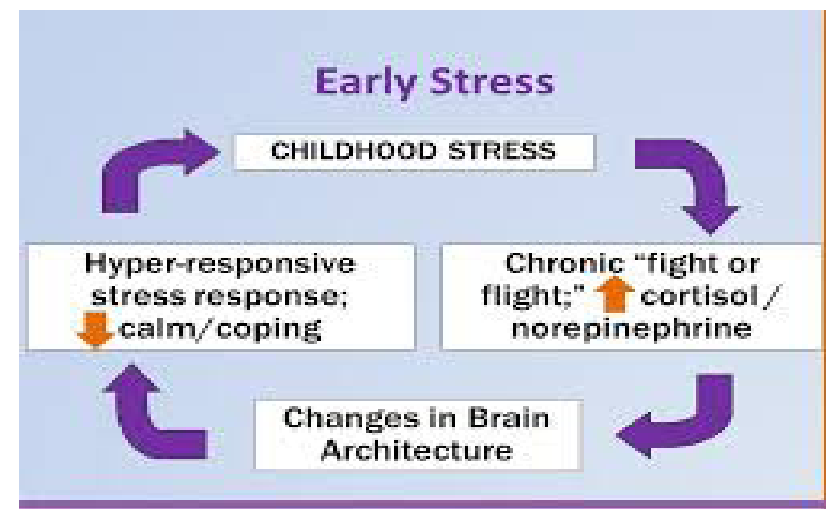
## TOXIC STRESS

One of the challenges of working with children and families is understanding that all of their experiences impact the child and their behavior—either negatively or positively. All families experience stress, which affects the children, but when families experience deep, chronic stress it not only affects the child's behavior it affects how they learn as well. As providers, it is important to understand this so we can modify our teaching strategies to accommodate for the different ways that children learn.

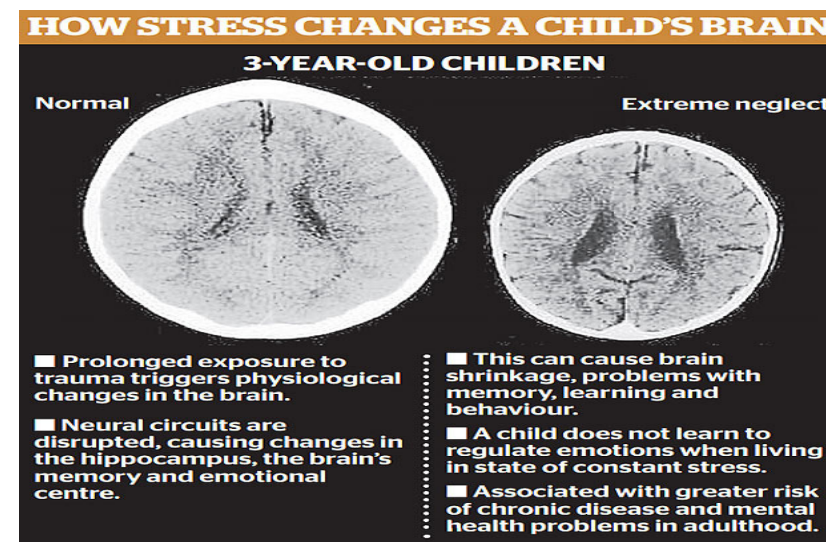
First, we must understand the difference between stress and toxic stress. According to Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child<sup>1</sup>, there are three types of stress:

1. The *positive stress* response is a normal and essential part of healthy development, characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels. Some situations that might trigger a positive stress response are the first day with a new caregiver or receiving an injected immunization. These are situations that we all encounter and although they may make us nervous or upset, they are brief experiences and we come through just fine and maybe with some new coping skills as well.
2. The *tolerable stress* response activates the body's alert systems to a greater degree as a result of more severe, longer-lasting difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or a frightening injury. If the activation is time-limited and buffered by relationships with adults who help the child adapt, the brain and other organs recover from what might otherwise be damaging effects.
3. The *toxic stress* response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years.

When children are living in chronic, toxic stress environments, they have increased levels of cortisol entering their developing organs and staying there for prolonged periods of time. This can damage developing brain architecture and create a short fuse for the body's stress response systems, leading to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health<sup>2</sup>.



American Academy of Pediatrics



<http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/a-toxic-legacy-20130706-2pj5z.html>

Children experiencing toxic stress may exhibit the following behaviors and learning difficulties:

- Problems with emotional regulation
- Delays in cause and effect thinking
- Difficulty with empathic responses (conscience)
- Inability to articulate own emotions
- More impulsive responses to experiences
- Lessened ability to encode stimulus into memory (learning)
- Lessened ability to recall stimulus stored in memory (remembering)
- Lessened ability to inhibit behavioral responses (impulsiveness)
- Depression

As providers, we cannot always change a child's circumstances, but we can change how we teach to more effectively help children and families. Below are several recommendations from Upside Down Organization to help all children, but specifically those children enduring toxic stress conditions.

**Provide time for regular physical activity.** Play and physical activity is an essential nutrient of brain development and young children need 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

**Immerse children in language.** Children cannot learn to explore or explain their feelings and emotions if they lack the language skills.

**Focus on skill building.** Skills needed are behavior, understanding of rules in different contexts, persistence, and cognitive support. Activities for skill building should be interactive as this contributes to brain development.

**Enriched experiences and environments.** Highly interactive and enriching experiences and environments increase cognitive development and learning efficiency.

**Help children manage stress levels.** Provide time for physically active play, provide healthy snacks and meals, increase predictability by following rules and routines and provide warnings when schedules change. Also, teach children how to manage their stress and their emotions. Resources like the Second Step Curriculum and Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) are very useful and effective in teaching children emotion management skills.

**Allow time.** Changing behaviors and helping young children to manage stress does not happen overnight. It takes a group effort and, most importantly, consistency. Over time, children will make improvements and will be successful.

**Inform parents and families.** Explaining to families the importance of sleep, nutrition, and consistency in rules and schedules allows them to make small changes that will have big and long lasting impacts on their children.

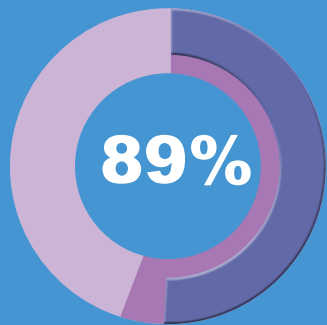




### EVOLVING AS CULTURALLY PROFICIENT EDUCATORS AND PROVIDERS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Statistics help us to understand who Maryland's students are, their racial/ethnic background, and the special services they receive to be ready to learn. Students' racial/ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, gender/gender identity and abilities can and should inform how we teach students and engage families in their children's development and learning. To honor and affirm every student and their family as valuable education partners, we must evolve as culturally proficient educators and providers.



In **2015**, out of **874,514** students enrolled in grades PreK-12 in Maryland, **56%** were students of color. **89%** of those students were receiving special services such as 504 plans, special education services, free or reduced priced meals, limited English proficient, migrant, and/or Title I.

#### What is cultural proficiency?

Cultural proficiency, as defined by Lindsey, Nuri, Robins & Terrell, is "honoring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of groups." What does this mean? This means that we view culture as an asset, not as a deficit and we recognize the strengths that every student and family brings into our programs. To be culturally proficient begins with a reflection on who we are as individuals and as part of organizations, it looks deeply at our assumptions about diverse students, and examines our expectations

about diverse students' academic potential and their families' potential to be meaningful partners for learning. There are **five core principles** that culturally proficient leaders follow:

1. Culture is a predominant force in people's lives; it exists everywhere.
  2. The dominant culture serves people in varying degrees—both good and bad.
  3. People have both personal identities and group identities.
  4. Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
  5. Each individual and each group has unique cultural values and needs.
- (Lindsey, Roberts, Campbell, Jones, 2005)



#### What does cultural proficiency look like in practice?

Cultural proficiency is a **mindset** that views diverse students and families as having assets that can contribute to their learning. So, what does being a culturally proficient early childhood provider or teacher look like? The culturally proficient provider: knows who their students and families are, their cultural backgrounds, can identify their assets, and understands how to meet their needs in a way that honors and affirms them (Gay, 2010). In an early childhood setting the center or classroom may display pictures or items representative of children's cultural backgrounds, bilingual books may be on hand, or staff may learn some key phrases such as "hello," "thank you," and "I can help" in the languages most spoken by the children and families they serve.

Therefore, the culturally proficient provider or educator will be able to:

- Establish cultural bridges between children, families, and staff who come from different cultural backgrounds and perspectives.
- Understand the benefits of diverse cultures and dual language learning.
- Combat deficit-thinking about a student or groups of students and/or families from diverse backgrounds and focus on the positive aspects of diversity.

#### What are the benefits of applying cultural proficiency principles and practice to learning environments for early childhood and family, school, and community engagement?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has stated "for the optimal development of all children, educators must value children's home language, respect (hold in high regard) and value (esteem, appreciate) the home culture, and promote and encourage the active involvement and support of all families, including extended and nontraditional family units."

Students succeed when they and their families have regular and positive interactions with school personnel and they participate in school activities (Crosnoe, 2013). Strong parent-community-school ties have been shown to improve performance on state reading assessments as much as four times and ten times more in math assessments than schools without strong ties (Bryk, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching is reflected by teachers' use of student's experiences and infusing it in the curriculum (Banks, et al., 2005). This may occur by selecting bilingual books that affirm children being dual language learners or incorporating traditional nursery rhymes and songs from a child's home culture. Children whose teachers use culturally-responsive practices with greater frequency are more likely to demonstrate stronger reading comprehension skill growth than were children whose teachers used culturally responsive practices less frequently (Underwood, 2009). Learning environments that allow students to make use of **cultural elements**, **cultural capital**, and other **contextual knowledge** to learn new content and information enhance their schooling experience and propel academic success (Howard, 2013). If students and families feel honored and valued as part of the learning process, students feel at ease and have more success transitioning into new learning environments because the teacher is using prior knowledge and cultural elements to help the child feel comfortable.





ENGAGING YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS

Fostering children’s language skills is a major focus of the early care, pre-school and prekindergarten experience. The number of “kindergarten ready” language guidelines indicates that early childhood educators and providers need to spend a significant amount of instructional time on language development. This is particularly true for providers and teachers of English Learners (ELs). Early childhood educators of ELs face the task of developing the communication skills of children in not just one, but two or more languages. These children have a dual challenge — they are learning language skills and content in their home language, while simultaneously acquiring language skills and content in a second language.

Early childhood educators must also consider each EL’s, or dual language learners, stage of **language acquisition**. Children at different stages have different instructional needs. When teachers and providers are aware of these stages and where each learner falls, they can establish realistic expectations for what each dual language learner is able to do.

Here are a few recommendations that will help early childhood educators and providers engage and challenge beginning-level dual language learners:

Consider Each EL’s Stage of Language Acquisition

Be aware of and understand the five stages of second language acquisition, identified by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in The Natural Approach:

- **Preproduction Stage:** can last up to six months; is also known as “the silent period” because an individual may not hear children speak any English during this stage
- **Early Production Stage:** characterized by children using single words or two-word phrases in English, as well as yes-or-no responses, names, and repetitive language patterns (i.e., “Have a good weekend!”)
- **Speech Emergence Stage:** children are able to speak in short sentences (i.e., “I walked to the movie.”)
- **Intermediate Fluency Stage:** children can express sentences of increasing length and complexity
- **Advanced Fluency Stage:** children demonstrate a near-native level of fluency

By understanding this process, providers can set realistic expectations for what each EL should be able to do. Although ELs need to be held to the same standards as native English speakers on what they know and understand, how they get there and how they demonstrate that knowledge may look different depending on their level of proficiency in English.

Characteristics of Verbalization at Each Stage

Once a teacher or provider knows a child’s stage of second language acquisition, he or she can pose questions about content that match the way a child in that stage is able to understand and respond. As the child progresses, prompts or formats should be increased to the next level to match the child’s stage—a strategy called “tiered questioning”.

Here are explanations of the five stages of Second Language Acquisition and corresponding examples of “tiered questioning”:

Stage	Characteristics of Student Verbalization: The student ...	Tiered Questions (Prompts)
Preproduction	Has minimal comprehension without support  May not verbalize  Nods “yes” and “no”  Draws and points	Show me ...  Circle the ...  Where is ...?  Who has ...?
Early Production	Has limited comprehension when scaffolding is not in place  Produces one- or two-word responses  Participates using key words and familiar phrases  Uses -ing verbs	Yes-or-no questions  Either-or questions  Who, what, and how many questions
Speech Emergence	Has good comprehension  Can produce simple sentences  Makes grammatical and pronunciation errors	Why ...?  How ...?  Explain ...  Questions requiring short-sentence answers
Intermediate Fluency	Has excellent comprehension  Makes few grammatical errors	What would happen if?  Why do you think?  Questions requiring more than a one-sentence response
Advanced Fluency	Has a near-native level of speech	Decide if ...  Retell ...



Source: From *Using Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners* (2nd ed.) (p. 12) by J. D. Hill and K. B. Miller, 2013, Alexandria, VA: ASCD © 2013 by McREL. Adapted with permission.

When teachers and providers ask questions at the child’s stage of second language acquisition, they increase the child’s access to, and comprehension of, the content and provide ELs with opportunities to practice their new language. Asking questions from the next stage of acquisition is a transitional strategy that keeps children moving through the continuum of learning English. With the aid of tiered questions, children in the stages of Preproduction and Early Production can be included in all early care and classroom instruction.

Engage ELs at the Same Level of Thinking as Other Children

It is not necessary to simplify curriculum and instruction for ELs at early levels of English language acquisition. When applying tiered questions with children who are in the process of acquiring English, it is important to distinguish between low-level questions, which lead to low levels of thinking, and high-level questions, which promote higher-order thinking.

Teachers and providers should design learning tasks for ELs that require the same levels of critical thinking we expect of other children. Teachers and early care providers must teach higher-order thinking skills while using language that is appropriate to the ELs’ levels of English language acquisition. The newer a child is to English, the more clear input he or she will need.

Be Aware of Your Own Language Use.

In early learning environments, there will be many times when information related to content is transmitted. Remember that words alone do not convey meaning for ELs. To help ELs follow the presentation of information, slow the



rate of speech, use nouns to convey more meaning, speak in complete sentences, and use one or more of the following:

- Manipulatives and objects
- Visuals (photos, pictures, and drawings)
- Gestures and body movement
- Facial expressions



**Classroom Strategies and Frequently Asked Questions for Working with Young ELs**

Practices early childhood educators use in the classroom every day are conducive to learning English language skills. Being aware of children’s stages of second-language acquisition along with these useful strategies below should help the teacher or provider and the student feel more comfortable in their early learning environments.

Classroom Strategies for Working with Young ELs

- Use visual aids
- Model appropriate behavior and language for children
- Use gestures, body language, and facial expressions to develop understanding
- Perform demonstrations to ensure comprehension and in depth understanding
- Provide vocabulary previews of forthcoming lessons
- Ask children to make predictions when reading stories aloud
- Adapt material in books to make it more comprehensible
- Use cooperative learning groups
- Provide multicultural content in early learning environments
- Provide home language support for children
- Create a non-threatening environment where students feel comfortable taking risks with language
- Make connections between content being taught and children’s prior knowledge and experiences
- Provide more time for engagement and interaction between the child and the teacher or provider
- Allow time for children to practice and apply daily lessons
- Provide wait time for children’s responses


Frequently Asked Questions for Working with Young ELs

Here are some of the most often asked questions by providers and teachers who are new to working with ELs that will help your ELs to feel safe and comfortable in their classroom.

**Communicating with ELs**

*How can I communicate with a child who doesn’t speak English? Is there anything else I can do to help my ELs understand what I am saying?*

Use hand gestures, facial expressions, and visuals to communicate. You will be surprised at how much you can convey with these alone. Just like any other young child, ELs will also pick up on your body language, so be relaxed and confident, smile often, and let them know when things are going well. Speak clearly, enunciate your words, and avoid use of regional idioms and slang such as, “having a blast”, “goofing off”, or “bling”.



Try to provide visuals and props whenever possible to help ELs better understand a concept. For example, use pictures to communicate classroom rules. When singing a song, use a prop or puppet. For example, if singing the song Five Green and Speckled Frogs, model what happens in the song using five frog props (stuffed animal type or puppets) to help ELs. Every time a new unit of study is introduced, use a thematic word wall with pictures of each word and lots of hands-on learning with manipulatives whenever possible to strengthen understanding.

**The Silent Period**

*Help! My ELL children never talk; I don’t think they’re learning. What should I do?*

Don’t worry, most ELs will go through a “silent period” that can last anywhere from six weeks to three months or more. During this time the ELs are acquiring their new language and are often afraid of speaking and making a mistake. It is very important that the teachers and providers do not force ELs to speak during this time or punish them for not speaking. However, a lot of praise and encouragement often works wonders in helping ELs through the silent period. Try enticing ELs to speak through the use of props and music. What four year old doesn’t love speaking into a microphone and hearing his own voice or singing along to a song with a big alligator puppet? By making English less scary and more fun, ELs are often talking freely and with confidence by the end of the year.

**Native Language**

*I have several ELs who all speak the same language and they are always talking to each other in their home language. Is this bad? Should I put a stop to it? How can they learn if they don’t speak English in my program?*

Discouraging the use of the home language in an early learning environment or at home is counterproductive. Often, ELs will discuss concepts they are learning in their home language, which improves comprehension.

English shouldn’t replace the ELs’ home language; English should be learned as a second or other language. Banning ELs home language in the classroom will force ELs to lose their identity and have the feeling that neither their language nor their culture is valued. Sometimes parents mistakenly think they are helping their children by banning the use of their home language in the home, forcing them to speak English only. However, this only results in children who have no home language or cultural identity which can lead to problems later in life.



**Social Interaction**

*My ELs are extremely shy and never interact with any of their peers. What can I do?*

The buddy system is a great way to help ELs adjust to their new classroom or program environment; pair new ELs with English speaking peers. The native English speaker acts as a shadow and a helper so there is less worry about the new EL getting lost on the way to the bathroom or wandering away when the class transitions outside. Make sure the pair is a good “fit” for both children, and be sure to pair children up carefully based upon their personality traits.

**Communicating with Parents**

*How can I communicate with the parents of my ELs if they don’t speak English?*

It is as important to communicate with the parents of ELs as it is to communicate with other parents. To help communicate with families, a monthly or weekly newsletter might be very helpful. Use lots of clipart for visuals and break the text up into smaller chunks of information. Provide the information in a language that is understood by the parent to the best extent possible. Provide real visuals at parent orientation and conferences. For example, to explain that a backpack is required, hold up an actual backpack. For a “no flip-flop” policy, hold up a pair of real flip-flops and shake your head in the no motion.



Effective Practices

As this toolkit has demonstrated, family engagement is a partnership where schools and families work together in an intentional and reciprocal manner. Family Engagement ensures early childhood educators and providers are planning activities based on their families’ needs and goals. Parents provide their programs with information about their families through their initial intake, conferences, home visits, and informal conversations throughout the day. It is this information that providers can use to move from family involvement to family engagement, benefitting both programs and families. When this is done with commitment, programs will engage their families, improve outcomes and ensure the success of children.

This section includes examples of effective practices from various early childhood education and early care programs across Maryland. They have been effective in building relationships with families and staff and increasing family participation.

**Please note** - These practices range from very simple and easy to implement activities to more large and complex activities meant for larger programs. Not all effective practices listed are applicable to all programs and all practices can be modified to fit the needs of individual programs. Practices are coded to show important factors such as cost, level of effort, and which goals of the Family Engagement Framework are supported.

Hopefully using these different activities, all early childhood educators and providers can learn from one another, implement effective practices that are the most appropriate for their program, and continue to engage families and improve outcomes for all children and families.



**Title:** Truck Night

**Target Audience:** Young children 1-10 years old and their parents

**Duration:** 2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Large parking lot for big trucks, with additional parking for cars

**Description:**

Held in early June for the past five years, this program offers families with young children the opportunity to explore and pretend. Owners of big trucks, vans, farm equipment, buses, campers, and construction equipment are contacted and invited to display their vehicles. Big Truck Night addresses the Social Studies developmental domain. It is a time for community interaction and encourages parent involvement with their children.

The owners park their vehicles and share information and facts about how the vehicle, equipment and machinery operates. Many owners allow the children to climb up in the seats and “pretend” with their parents. During the first 45 minutes of the first hour, horn blowing is allowed. During the second hour, no horns are allowed. This allows children with delays or sensory issues to attend and not be over stimulated because of the noise.

Families that sign in at the event receive a book on vehicles for each child. Community partners collaborate to offer food for sale and demonstrate a variety of activities and games. In addition, an area for community resource information sharing is set up to encourage families to learn about their community.

Things to consider: We use a high school parking lot with lots of space. All owners “volunteer” their time and provide a copy of their liability insurance certificate. In return, each participating driver receives a free pizza. Books have been donated from local book stores and First Book., a non-profit program that provides new books and educational resources at reduced prices — and for free — to schools and programs serving children in need. – We also recognize all volunteer agencies and vehicles to promote them as well. In addition, some student organizations at the high school have become involved.

*Judy Center Partnership, Carroll County Schools*



**Title:** Family Swim Night

**Target Audience:** Families and children birth to five years of age

**Duration:** 1.5 hours (40 minutes in the pool and 40 minutes at the learning stations)

**Materials Needed:** Learning Stations (markers, paper, glue, building blocks, books, etc.), and booths for distributing information

**Description:**

Family Swim Nights are evenings when families are invited to the YMCA for swimming and activities. The structure includes two rotations: one group swims while the other engages in various learning stations/games and/or visiting with community agencies that have information about available resources and programs.

Learning Stations are centered around a specific theme such as Science. Packets and books are prepared and available for purchase so that families can take home information and activities.

**Things to consider:** It is important to allow time for transition and changing clothing. Ensure a safe monitoring system for families who do not want to leave the pool area. Engage volunteers from the high school or community to assist with information sharing, moving families from one activity to another and providing additional supervision during the activities.

*Judy Center Partnership, Cecil County*

**Goals:** 2, 3, and 6

**Level:** Moderate

**Cost:** \$

**Title:** All About Me “The Next Level”

**Target Audience:** Families and children of all ages

**Duration:** 30 minutes and can be classified as ongoing

**Materials Needed:** Family pictures, tape, and poster board

**Description:**

All About Me “The Next Level” focuses on bringing families, parents, and children together. The lesson focuses on learning/understanding the importance of families and allows children the opportunity to share part of who they are with their classmates.

Families are invited to come and introduce their family members, cultural customs (ex: food, clothing), and any other information they would like to share. During the presentation, children pass around pictures, clothing, etc.... for each of their classmates to explore. At the end, parents post all materials a poster board that will be displayed within the classroom.

**Things to consider:** It is important to understand and value the uniqueness of each family. Supporting families, parents and children throughout this process is critical so that everyone feels comfortable, respected, and appreciated.

*Anonymous*

**Goals:** 2, 3, and 6

**Level:** Moderate

**Cost:** \$



**Title:** International Festival  
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/culturally-responsive-instruction-holiday-and-religious-celebrations>

**Target Audience:** Families, parents, children, community, and schools

**Duration:** 2 hours (after school) or Weekends (if possible)

**Materials Needed:** Multi-cultural music, dancers, traditional clothing, and food

**Description:**

The International Festival is a multi-cultural tradition that takes place once a year (after school). Families, parents, children, community members, and staff come together outside (playground area) to exchange food, music, songs, dance, and projects with one another.

This festival has fostered friendships and cultural understanding through the arts and family engagement. One of the most essential components of the International Festival is its focus on school participation in the event.

**Things to consider:** This festival requires food as well as a lot of volunteer work to ensure safety and organization for the event to run smoothly and be a success. Having the event planned well in advance will help to ensure that everything aspect has been fully thought through. If they are able, parents are encouraged to bring a food dish representing their culture. Depending on the amount of funding the program has available, the event could be catered.

*Anne Arundel County Public Schools*

**Goals:** 2, 3, and 6

**Level:** Moderate

**Cost:** \$

**Title:** Unplugged “No Electronics”/ A Family Weekend

**Target Audience:** Families, parents, and children of all ages

**Duration:** 2 days (Saturday and Sunday)

**Materials Needed:** Going on a family trip or any fun activity that involves the family

**Description:**

Unplugged “No Electronics” goes into action during a family vacation. During the vacation, no electronic devices (ex: cell phones, I-pads) are permitted. The point of this activity is to have uninterrupted quality time so families can connect, talk, and listen to one another. At some point, each person must write down something new/different they learned about each of their family members.

**Things to consider:** Electronics can be used at any moment for EMERGENCIES.

*My Little Magic Garden Daycare, Anne Arundel County*

**Goals:** 2, 3, and 6

**Level:** Easy

**Cost:** \$



**Title:** Let’s Sing YOUR Song

**Target Audience:** Families, parents, and children birth to five

**Duration:** 1 month (full lesson is broken down into different songs each week)

**Materials Needed:** Print out of song lyrics and music

**Description:**

At parent meetings, *parents* teach their favorite nursery song to teachers, other parents, and children. Teachers then take those songs back to the class to practice with all students. A different song is taught each week. Parents are invited to help assist with teaching their favorite nursery song.

This activity allows parents to feel included and a part of not only their child’s life, but a part of the entire classroom community. These meetings allow parents the chance to get to know one another and become more comfortable within the school/classroom setting.

**Things to consider:** Meeting times play a major role with attendance. Offering several different time options for meetings could be beneficial to engaging all parents.

**Goals:** 2, 3, and 6  
**Level:** Easy  
**Cost:** \$

*Early Childcare Provider*

**Title:** End of School Year Celebration: *Relax, Reflect, and Communicate*

**Target Audience:** Families and teachers

**Duration:** 3 to 4 hours

**Materials Needed:** Outdoor games (ex: soccer equipment, baseball equipment, volleyball equipment, etc.), board games, food, and beverages

**Description:**

This celebration is held at the end of the school year at a local community park. We invite all families and children that attend our center. The goal of this event is to bring everyone together for an opportunity to relax, reflect, communicate, and celebrate all of the accomplishments that took place throughout the school year.

While enjoying the fun, families also have the opportunity to talk with center staff to exchange ideas for the coming school year. The goal is to come together as a community to socialize and share what works well to benefit families, parents, children, and staff.

**Things to consider:** Creating a diverse planning committee helps with having an overall all-inclusive End of School Year Celebration. There are a few things to keep in mind when planning an event such as this: weather, health conditions, allergies, safety, transportation, parking, event hours, first aid station, and other minor details easy to overlook. Planning and coordination is the key to a successful event.

**Goals:** 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7  
**Level:** Moderate  
**Cost:** \$

*Early Childcare Provider*



**Title:** Kindergarten Transition Resource Night

**Target Audience:** Parents

**Duration:** 30-60 minutes (after school/work hours)

**Materials Needed:** Packets filled with parent resources, agenda, and sign in sheet

**Description:**

Kindergarten Transition Resource Night is a time to share helpful resources with parents and families. These resources are designed to assist families/parents in preparing both them and their child/children for Kindergarten. Ideas for activities, helpful routines, community resources, and much more are discussed. These websites have great resources: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/transition> and <https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/transitioning-kindergarten>.

**Things to consider:** Make sure to plan for plenty of time for questions and discussion. Have enough handouts for every family/parent with important contact information so they can take the information home.

Goals: 3, 5, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$

*Early Childcare Provider*

**Title:** Career Exploration Workshop

**Target Audience:** Families with education career-related goals

**Duration:** 2 – 2 ½ hours

**Materials Needed:** Career Exploration inventory, folders, pens/pencils, note pads, food, sign-in sheets, and evaluations. In addition: laptop, LCD projector, flip chart/markers, extension cords, and speaker system/microphone/lapel microphone

**Description:**

A FREE workshop for parents interested in learning about resources toward education and/or employment related goals. Participants experience the following:

- \*Know Yourself: complete a 10-minute online inventory that offers personalized career suggestions
- \*Research Your Options: explore career fields, education requirements for specific industries/employers, work settings, and future outlook for career options
- \*Make Connections: hear from employers in tourism/hospitality, manufacturing, health care, and finance, speak individually with representatives present

After the opening and 10-minute inventory, participants form groups of common interest areas. This encourages participants to become familiar with each other to make new contacts, and share their aspirations and concerns. Ample time is allowed for participants to visit employers/education representatives on their own, with staff, or in a group.

Local employers (such as Health care providers, businesses, Banks, Restaurants, and Adult Care Providers) and partners attend in support of the event, and come prepared to accept applications and assist attendees through the beginning steps of their applicant and hiring process. Lunch, transportation, and on-site child care are provided. Collaboration partners include: Community Action-Career Advancement Team, Colleges, and Health Department-Early Care Programs. Staff from each program attends with family service staff assisting, especially for comfort level of participants.

This was the first event of its kind for the Garrett County Community Action-Career Advancement Team. There are plans for another event linked to the county-wide job fair. As the program develops, there is discussion to schedule similar events two times per year.

**Things to consider:** Keep in mind this event is to be FREE for participants. Remember to include food items for very young children (ages 1-4 years of age), avoid foods with common allergic results (peanuts, etc.) and potential choking hazards. Costs (partners provide the funding or support) include on-site child care, transportation, career exploration inventory (laptops with internet access and paper copies), food, and other supplies as needed.

*Judy Center Partnership, Garrett County*



**Title:** STEMtastic Fall Fun

**Target Audience:** Families – with Children in Kindergarten through First Grade

**Duration:** 45 minutes (after school activity)

**Materials Needed:** Wire hanger and masking tape, large spoon, newspaper, pumpkins, sharp knife to cut pumpkin (adult use only)

**Description:**

STEMtastic Fall Fun is a simple activity to engage children. To begin, you start with reading the book *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin*, by Margaret McNamara and G. Brian Karas. This is “a picture book for curious children, which explores skip counting and estimation in a fun pumpkin-themed classroom experiment.” <https://www.amazon.com/Many-Seeds-Pumpkin-Tiffins-Classroom/dp/0375840141>

Next, each child works with their parent or guardian to review details of the story. Once this is completed, pumpkin carving begins. After the pumpkin is open, the masking tape and wire hanger come into play. Both parent and child work together to create the spoon with which they will scoop out the inside of the pumpkin. Throughout this entire project, teachers walk around giving positive guidance.

**Things to consider:** This activity takes place after school hours, so it is important to secure teaching staff to assist. Make sure that there are enough materials available for all participants. Offer food/snacks to the families. You can even extend the activity by providing recipes for the pumpkin and pumpkin seeds.

*Greenwood Elementary School, Somerset County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Healthy Cooking

**Target Audience:** Families/Parents of children three years old and under

**Duration:** 1 hour and 30 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Eggs, spinach (and other vegetables as you like), olive oil, pan, spatula, and plates/utensils. Additionally you will need a stove or electric fry pan, and a Spinach Frittata recipe

<http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/Frittata.pdf>

**Description:**

A school nutritionist plays a major role in this activity. The nutritionist speaks to families/parents about cooking healthy lunches/snacks for their children and about ways to present food that will appeal to their child. This particular activity was to make Spinach Frittata which can either be served for lunch if served with fresh green salad or, if served alone - a snack. The nutritionist demonstrated the process of making the frittata and each parent had an opportunity to make their own to share with their children during the socialization time.

**Things to consider:** Safety First! Keep children away from the cooktop or fry pan. Have fun, meaningful activities for the children while the demonstration is taking place. Cost for this activity is about \$50.00 for a group of twelve parents and twelve children under 3 years of age.

*CentroNia, Takoma Park*

Goals: 1, 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Digital Portfolio

**Target Audience:** All families

**Duration:** Throughout the school year

**Materials Needed:** One flash drive (at least 4G for each child), a digital camera, and an approved assessment framework written for use by parents/families

**Description:**

New families are asked to provide a flash drive that can hold at least one hundred (100) pictures at a time. An orientation meeting, coupled with a home visit to each child, allows us to share information about the way we approach children’s learning, and how we will document children’s progress.

Throughout the year we observe children as they work and play and take pictures of moments that highlight their learning. We invite parents to be a part of those moments when we notice a kind gesture or joyous response by capturing those moments and putting them in folders each month. The folders are shared along with comments from teachers to help families notice the same things we do. The comment page has a place for parents to respond. They are also invited to arrange to meet with us at any time.

The flash drives are collected and returned to the parents about three times each half semester. Parents can remove folders to make room for new pictures. The portfolios are kept private, but the full files are always available through the school/program should a parent want them.

**Things to consider:** Costs are minimal, but try to have FREE flash drives ready and available to give to parents.

*Running Brook Children’s Nursery, Howard County*

Goals: 2 and 3

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Library Playtime

<http://www.slrc.info/>  
<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/library/index.html>  
<http://www.worcesterlibrary.org/>

**Target Audience:** Infants to five years of age and their parents

**Duration:** 1 hour

**Materials Needed:** Age appropriate educational toys that are durable and easily cleaned

**Description:**

Libraries are a great place to make new friends and learn new skills while having fun. Parents and their children explore educational materials together in an interactive, free play environment.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, pediatricians agree that playtime is a very important part of a child’s development. Hectic family schedules and other issues make finding time for play more challenging than ever. Children’s play is serious business. As parents and caregivers, we might assume that play is already a basic part of our children’s lives. Most parents are used to seeing the curious hands and questioning minds of their children as they explore and learn about the world around them. It seems that children are busy all day long, whether we give them something to do or not. It is up to adults to define what healthy play should be, and to schedule that time so that it’s safe, age-appropriate, and a big part of the lives of our children.

Writer Megan Treacy states, and we agree, that libraries are community centers, serving everyone in their area. Just visiting the library is a way to connect to the community you live in, but libraries offer more than that. They host book clubs, LEGO clubs, story times, puppet shows, writing camps, family movie nights and information sessions on technology and community issues (among so many other things). They serve us and they also bring us together and help us become involved in our community.

**Things to consider:** The program works best if staff interacts with families and children modeling appropriate language, encouraging parents to play/interact with their children, and guiding parents to interact with other parents. Check with your local library for various programs and times.

*Worcester County Public Library*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Easy

Cost: \$



**Title:** Learning Parties  
<http://www.readyatfive.org/programs/learning-parties.html>

**Target Audience:** Children 0-5 years of age and families

**Duration:** Sessions are two hours in length and are conducted on four consecutive weekdays within a month

**Materials Needed:** Instructors guide, magnets, mirrors, flashlights, magnifying glasses, blocks, cardboard, tape measure, rulers, cork, wood, shell, Styrofoam, paper bags, weather books, plastic bowls, ice, water and printed materials from the instructor’s guide

**Description:**

Each of the Learning Party sessions are 90 minutes in duration. Our sessions at the Charles County Judy Center are an additional 30 minutes because we provide and include time for dinner. During the 90 minute sessions, parents and children are placed into two separate groups for 45 minutes, while the parent is given background information and instructions on how to teach their child the concept covered for the evening (ex: magnetism). Following the background and practice session, parents are reunited with their children and the parent then teaches the child using their newly acquired skills. While parents are in the adult training session the children play games and complete activities related to the topic they will practice with their parent. Following the parent/child practice, a debriefing takes place and a homework assignment is assigned to be practiced for the next meeting. Those families completing all four sections receive a certificate of completion along with kudos.

Ready At Five states, Learning Parties are interactive, hands-on, parent/child “parties” that promote young children’s development of school readiness skills. Based on the belief that parents are their child’s first teacher, Learning Parties teach parents how to make everyday moments learning moments through playing, singing, talking, reading, and engaging in fun activities. Originally developed by Children’s Resources International and modified by Ready At Five, the Learning Party curricula support the seven domains of learning: Language & Literacy, Math, Science, Social Foundations, Physical Well-Being and Motor Development, Social Studies and The Arts. Each series consists of four 90-minute Learning Parties and contains the following components:

**\*Parent Skill Development.** A Lead Trainer demonstrates a variety of techniques and strategies for improving the skills and abilities of their children. Each session focuses on a specific concept.

**\*Child Play Session.** While parents are learning new skills, children attend a “fun learning room,” where a child care provider engages the children in directed child play, aligned with the specific concepts discussed at the parent portion of the Learning Party.

**\*Practice and Parent-Child Activities.** When the parents and children are reunited, parents practice the activities with their child, while trainers provide positive feedback and constructive suggestions.

**\*Parent Networking** enables parents to meet, talk with, and learn from other parents.

**\*Home Connection and Learning Library.** Parents are given a homework assignment, as well as a variety of books, developmentally appropriate materials, and educational toys to start an early learning library in their home.

**Things to consider:** Learning Parties require a lot of planning and coordination. Have staff available to work with the children during the parent “training” time and provide modeling when parents and children are practicing.

*Judy Center, Charles County*

Goals: 2, 3, 5, and 6  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Literacy Play and Enhancement Groups

**Target Audience:** Children birth to two and their caregivers

**Duration:** 90 minutes per session (generally 30 minutes of free play-including clean up; 30 minutes of circle time; 30 minutes for craft and healthy snack)

**Materials Needed:** Age appropriate toys and games for free-play, one story to read, at least four interactive songs for circle time, age appropriate craft that promotes tactile leaning, and healthy snacks

**Description:**

Families are encouraged to fully engage with their child/children during play and learn groups. Free play promotes connections to loved ones, as well as other children and families in the community. During circle time, parents either hold or sit behind their child/children. Interactive songs, such as “One Little Finger” and “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” are led by the instructor as parents and children follow along.

Children are also engaged in learning numbers (1-10), the alphabet, and story time. It is important to use as many puppets or interactive stories as possible to promote interest. The instructor is also modeling how to read stories at home. Finally, during craft time, parents and children are engaged in an activity promoting tactile learning/sense of touch. Crafts should be easy enough to complete in a short timeframe, as well as easy enough for families to replicate at home. A light, healthy snack is served toward the end of the session.

**Things to consider:**

\*Using a space large enough to accommodate parents and children (max groups at 25 children)

\*Striving for full parent participation

\*Schedule for various times during the day. Our program hosts three playgroups on Tuesdays/Thursdays from 10:00AM to 11:30AM; Wednesdays from 1:30PM to 3:00PM. This gives parents multiple options to participate.

\*Providing a light, healthy snack promotes proper nutrition.

\*Take-Home Libraries are also encouraged. Once a month, families receive a book and a review sheet to complete as a family. Families are encouraged to return the review sheets to the Judy Center, demonstrating their engagement in learning at home.

*Judy Center, Montgomery County*

Goals: 1, 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Children’s Multicultural Holiday Party

**Target Audience:** Parents and children age birth through five

**Duration:** 2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Arts and craft supplies/activities, several stations set up for each activity, camera, holiday decorations of all observed holidays, music, lunch, snacks, age appropriate toys, and door prizes

**Description:**

During the Children’s Multicultural Holiday Party, parents and children were able to travel from station to station participating in activities which represent a variety of different cultures (parents can facilitate stations as well). In addition, parents were able to engage in all activities with their child. Family photos were taken, lunch was served, and door prizes were distributed.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), holiday celebrations can be wonderful opportunities for children to learn about the traditions and values that are cherished parts of people’s lives. But many early childhood professionals wonder what holidays to celebrate in the program or classroom and how to respect the cultures represented by all children. Many parents, too, wonder why programs celebrate specific holidays or why they discourage any celebration at all.

NAEYC believes that decisions about what holidays to celebrate are best made together by teachers, parents, and children. Families and staff are more comfortable when both have expressed their views and understand how a decision has been reached. The important thing for all to remember is that when planning holiday activities, the rules of good practice continue to apply: Are the activities meaningful to the children? Are their needs and interests being met? Is the activity a valuable use of children’s time?

Teachers may survey families at the beginning of the year to determine what holidays they celebrate. They may even ask the children to create their own holiday to help them learn the concepts that underlie such valued traditions. In any case, holiday celebrations are just one way for programs and families to work together to create developmentally and culturally appropriate learning experiences.

**Things to consider:** All staff will be needed to manage activity stations. Also keep in mind to have enough toys/ manipulatives for every child. Ask families to participate and demonstrate or host an activity related to their holiday traditions.

*Our House Early Head Start, Baltimore City*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Book Sharing-Teaching Parents Effective Ways to Read with Their Children

**Target Audience:** Children age three to five

**Duration:** According to the child’s age

**Materials Needed:** Various books, flannel board, puppets, props, paper and crayons

**Description:**

To begin, both parent and child will read a book of choice. They will have the option of creating a flannel board story, drawing a picture of the story and/or acting out the story. The parent should be at the child’s level to make eye contact. The parent(s) are encouraged to practice open ended questions to create healthy discussion. Parents should also follow the child’s lead as well as cues.

**Things to consider:** Please make sure books are age appropriate and adjust lessons for children with special needs if necessary.

*Young Parent Family Support Center, Baltimore County (Essex, MD)*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Easy

Cost: \$



**Title:** Annapolis Day - Creating Leaders and Child Advocates

**Target Audience:** Program parents, children, and Early Head Start/Head Start Staff

**Duration:** 6 hours (approximately)

**Materials Needed:** Transportation

**Description:**

Early Head Start, Head Start, and parents visit the State legislative offices facilitated by the Maryland Head Start Association Public Policy Committee.

<http://www.md-hsa.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.pageDetails&id=67180&typeID=429>.

Staff helps notify parents and families through phone calls, flyers and letters sent home about Annapolis Day. Transportation for parents to Annapolis is provided. While in Annapolis, families have the opportunity to meet with their State Representatives to advocate for continuation of funding for Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Staff helps encourage and coach parents as needed as they advocate for their program and children.

**Things to consider:** Alternative transportation may be required due to family needs.

*Anne Arundel Early Head Start, Anne Arundel County*

Goals: 3, 6, and 7

Level: Easy

Cost: \$\$

**Title:** My Work, My Play!

**Target Audience:** Parents and children birth to five

**Duration:** Six interactive workshops

**Materials Needed:** Finger-paint, paper, blocks, sand/water, play items/manipulatives, books, and dramatic play props

**Description:**

My Work, My Play! is a six-week interactive hands-on program session designed to highlight what children learn during play. Class sessions include:

- \*Dramatic Play
- \*Music and Movement
- \*Storytelling
- \*Finger Painting
- \*Sand and Water Play
- \*Block Play

Each session begins with a basic introduction about why children do “the activity” and then we do it. For example, as we are finger painting we discuss what skills children may be learning including motor, social emotional, etc. Classes are typically 45 minutes in length and parents leave class with sample materials to use at home with their child. Certificates of completion are awarded at the end of each session.

**Things to consider:** An experienced facilitator who can model and coach the parent through what might be the uncomfortable stage of playing is recommended.

*Family Support Center, Washington County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Easy

Cost: \$



**Title:** Play and Learn with Playdough (also known as Play-doh)

**Target Audience:** Parents and children ages 18 months to 5

**Duration:** 30-45 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Flour, oil, food coloring, cream of tartar. For simple, no cook play dough recipes see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8tmn3r3YrY>

**Description:**

Adults and children make playdough from scratch and use simple utensils for cutting, shaping, and rolling playdough.

Making and manipulating playdough incorporates fine and large motor (cutting, rolling, kneading, pounding); mathematical thinking (measuring ingredients, shapes, length/width, thickness, etc.); social-emotional (expressions of sensory and emotional feelings-some actions are soothing and calming (kneading, rolling); others are more physical and can be more vigorous (kneading, pounding) and participants can discuss how he/she feels while manipulating the dough; the warmth of the dough feels so good; language (as described above as well as descriptive vocabulary; literacy and numeracy (making letters and numbers); cognitive-asking open ended questions; science-dry and wet ingredients (visual, olfactory, touch) separately and then combined; color, change of texture and consistency of materials used to make playdough; heat of cooked playdough; and, finally creativity!

Parents and children can sit across from one another to make eye contact and engage in conversation. The dough can be saved and used again and can be a regular family activity with materials found in the home!

**Things to consider:** Having sufficient materials on hand to make, store, and manipulate the playdough; if recipe calls for cooking, you will need to have a stove, hot plate or electric fry pan, and monitor young children at all times. Safety first!

*Family Partnership of Frederick County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$

**Title:** Health/Family Education

**Target Audience:** Adults (Families)

**Duration:** 45 minutes to 1 hour

**Materials Needed:** Appropriate guest speakers to discuss topics of expertise (Pediatrician, Health Department, Priority Partners, Salisbury University Staff, University of Maryland Representatives, etc.)

**Description:**

Health Education services provided to parents provide information about matters such as family planning, nutrition, substance abuse, screening services, prenatal care and other related health education. This can be done by providing guest speakers with knowledge about the topics and helpful resources for families.

**Things to consider:** Ensure that Health Education provided takes into consideration participant needs and how the information provided can improve the families' well-being. Also remember to encourage parent participation, and consider providing dinner and child care.

*Family Support Center, Wicomico County*

Goals: 1, 4, 6, and 7  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$\$



**Title:** Ready for School-Kindergarten Club

**Target Audience:** Parents of children in Head Start transitioning into Kindergarten

**Duration:** Six months, 1 hour per month

**Materials Needed:** Portfolio binders needed for children who are transitioning to kindergarten, tip sheets, calendars, letter to parents, and transitioning activities for children to complete.

**Description:**

Parents of enrolled four-year-old children, transitioning into Kindergarten, begin a series of transition workshops along with their child. Tip sheets are sent home on a monthly basis to help prepare the parent, as well as the child, to transition smoothly to Kindergarten with school readiness skills. Community activities are also scheduled to assist parents with the transitioning process. These website have great resources:

- Head Start -<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/transition>
- NAEYC -<https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/transitioning-kindergarten>

**Things to consider:** The cost of additional food is something to consider when planning this type of family engagement activity.

*Y of Central Maryland Head Start, Baltimore City*

Goals: 2, 3, 5, and 6  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Wow Bags - Theme Activity Kits to Borrow from the Library

<https://www.stmalib.org/library-services/wow-vanhomebound/>  
[http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/23/stmaryscohandout\\_dec2014.pdf](http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/23/stmaryscohandout_dec2014.pdf)

<https://www.stmalib.org/>

**Target Audience:** Children ages two – five

**Duration:** Dependent on child's developmental age

**Materials Needed:** Wow Bags theme activity kits

**Description:**

Wow Bags contain over eighty themes. Each backpack contains two to five books, several hands-on materials, activity sections, and CDs if appropriate.

Also, “The Wow! Van Service” visits child care providers and centers. Services include materials, deposit collections and programs.

Homebound Services - Home delivery service is available to homebound county residents or centers. Volunteers of service organizations deliver library materials to county residents and then pick up the materials to return to the library. This service is only provided if a volunteer can be located to service the individual or senior center. County residents and centers should contact the library.

**Things to consider:** Contact your local library to see if they offer Wow Bag, Van Service, and/or Homebound Services. Ask for information such as cost and other important details.

*St. Mary’s County Library*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: Library = \$\$;  
Provider = \$



**Title:** Bilingual Story Time

**Target Audience:** Preschool age children

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Felt pieces, flash cards, books, and felt boards

**Description:**

This program encourages celebrating others’ differences and learning a “new” language. Some children who attend the bilingual story time are English speakers whose parents want them to learn another language. Non-English speaking children often attend the bilingual story times to hear stories in their native language. The interaction of the children, both non-English and English speaking, allows for the fostering of community and the celebration of differences in others.

**Things to consider:** Children pick up new language easily; children are not embarrassed to point out others’ differences, which can be difficult to address in an appropriate way. Check with your local library for resources.

*Charles County Public Library*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Easy

Cost: \$

**Title:** Grandparents Day Celebration

**Target Audience:** Prekindergarten/Kindergarten children and their grandparents

**Duration:** 1 hour

**Materials Needed:** Book for each grandparent and breakfast

**Description:**

Grandparents are invited for breakfast near the date of National Grandparents’ Day. Grandparents arrive prior to the children and share breakfast with other grandparents. As breakfast ends and conversations lull, a brief talk with grandparents about the importance of both reading to their grandchildren and sharing oral stories is a great way to share information about the importance of families as the first and most important teachers of their children.

Children join their grandparent(s) after breakfast, each with a book and a child created card in hand. The two sided book “What Grandmas Do Best/ What Grandpas Do Best” by Laura Numeroff is a great book for this event. It motivates grandparents and grandchildren to converse about what they like to do together and can easily be purchased through Scholastic. Students then sit with their grandparents and read together and share the card that the child has made. Children can even sing a song or two. This is a great way for grandparents and grandchildren to be involved in the school setting.

**Things to consider:** Be sure there is ample seating and of course food (especially coffee). The books can be purchased for about \$2.00 a book and the breakfast costs can be kept low with donuts, fruit and coffee. Be aware that some grandparents may speak and read in a language other than English. Make sure to have books available in their language. Send home flyers that require grandparents to RSVP so that you know which children may not have a grandparent attending. Pair up children who do not have a grandparent present with a friend that does, or recruit grandparents from the community that do not have grandchildren locally.

*Judy Center, Kent County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$\$



**Title:** Book Swap

**Target Audience:** Parents of children in Prekindergarten through Elementary

**Duration:** On a monthly basis throughout the year (especially the summer months)

**Materials Needed:** Age appropriate books (new or used) and staffing

**Description:**

The school/program provides a book swap where children can return books and pick out new ones to encourage reading and to help negate the “summer slide”. These books are given to the children to own in their home library or to return and obtain new ones. There are no fees associated with kept books. Books are kept in “bins” by reading/grade level for ease of children identifying books. Generally, the swaps are conducted at the school/program entrance with the support of volunteering school/program staff.

**Things to consider:** Parents may have non-target age children (younger children that would also benefit from books); books in other languages might be needed if parents are assisting young readers; interpreting services; how to support parents of children with significant disabilities; community partnerships for books; convenience of hours for working parents, etc.

*Judy Center, Caroline County*

Goals: 2, 3, 5, and 6

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$

**Title:** Parent Cafés

<http://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/programs-services/strengthening-families-maryland/>  
<http://www.beststrongfamilies.net/>

**Target Audience:** Parents and children

**Duration:** Single session, may be conducted multiple times

**Materials Needed:** Café cards, table hosts, items for a pleasant environment, table/chairs, and refreshments

**Description:**

Parent Cafés are a method of facilitating conversations among parents about the things that keep their families strong, build protective factors, and promote self-reflection and peer- to-peer learning.

Parent Cafés include the use of a portable, easy to use card set that helps individuals or community agencies get started offering Parent Cafés. The colorful deck of cards asks questions ranging from, “What do you do when you don’t understand what’s going on with your child?” to “How do you stretch a dollar to make it last?” There are hundreds of questions, and they all fit into the five protective factors that help strengthen families. Every time you have a conversation, it is different. Each time, you learn, grow, and get to the heart of the matter with conversations that mean something for you and your family.

According to Maryland Family Network (MFN), a community partner, one of the ways they help parents and other caregivers learn about the protective factors is through Parent Cafés. These are two-hour, structured get-togethers that engage parents and other adults in meaningful conversations about what matters most to families with young children and how to build protective factors at home and in early childhood settings. At Parent Cafés, those who care for young children share information and ideas that can help them to take care of themselves, develop strong relationships with children, and strengthen families. Facilitators and table hosts must be trained. For more information about Parent Cafés and Parent Café Facilitator training, please contact [info@marylandfamilynetwork.org](mailto:info@marylandfamilynetwork.org).

**Things to consider:** Parents may have concerns that would prevent them from attending. Consider providing services for them such as transportation, interpretation, support to parents of children with significant disabilities, and child care.

*Judy Center, Caroline County*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals

Level: Advanced

Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Every Child Ready to Read at the Local Library  
<http://www.everychildreadytoread.org/>

**Target Audience:** Parents of children birth to six

**Duration:** Five, 45 minute sessions

**Materials Needed:** Trained staff in Curriculum, meeting area, book giveaways, and handouts

**Description:**

Every Child Ready to Read is a national library early literacy initiative for parents and caregivers that provides them with effective tools and strategies. The Curriculum consists of five workshops focusing on singing, talking, reading, writing and playing. This program also provides linkages to library and community supports. For more information on the Every Child Ready to Read curriculum, please visit <http://www.everychildreadytoread.org/>.

**Things to consider:** Parents may have non-target age children that would prevent them from attending if you do not also provide services such as: transportation, interpretation, capacity to support children with challenging behaviors, and support to parents of children with significant disabilities.

*Judy Center, Caroline County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6

Level: Easy

Cost: \$

**Title:** The Chicago Parent Program  
<http://www.chicagoparentprogram.org/>

**Target Audience:** Parents and primary caregivers of three and four year olds

**Duration:** Six to12 week parent program

**Materials Needed:** Facilitators of the Program bring the materials; the Judy Center provides support

**Description:**

This Chicago Parent Program is a partnership with Johns Hopkins University, The Fund for Educational Excellence, Pre-Kindergarten Head Start parents, and the Judy Center at Liberty Elementary School. The program is implemented through 12 weekly sessions and designed for improving parenting skills, young children’s behavior and the parent-child relationship. This then improves kindergarten readiness, attendance, academic performance, and school engagement. These are key factors associated with student academic success and emotional wellbeing. Parents have received tremendous benefit from the parenting conversations, guidance, and fellowship that the program provides.

**Things to consider:** Keep in mind this is **grant-funded**, but we are working with the Chicago Parent Program to train additional facilitators who can offer this program again. Also, always have a caregiver for infants parents bring with them, give out additional books to parents from the Judy Center, and, if possible, launch an extensive recruiting program.

*Liberty Judy Center Partnership, Baltimore City Public Schools*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals

Level: Advanced

Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Parent Symposium “*Growing Strong Families*”

**Target Audience:** Parents with children, birth to five

**Duration:** Saturday event held at local elementary school

**Materials Needed:** Staff: presenters for breakout sessions, child care staff, and staff to facilitate the schedule.  
Materials: A registration packet, books for children, door prizes, session handouts, and lunch was provided.

**Description:**

Market event to entire community and promote through the early childhood programs, Parents and Teacher (PAT) educators, etc. Utilize representatives from the Early Childhood Consortium and partner agencies to facilitate the day and assist with logistics. Sessions should include such topics as: brain development; social emotional development; relationships; importance of play; early literacy; sensory integration, etc. Use incentives to attract families, such as: 1) transportation assistance; 2) lunch; 3) child care; 4) door prizes; and 5) encouragement to learn how to help children be successful and ready to learn.

**Things to consider:** Location is important; select a location easily accessible and welcoming to all. Address the needs of families (food, transportation, and child care) and also try to approach community businesses for donations (lunch, prizes, resources, etc.).

*Carroll Family Support Center, Carroll County*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals

Level: Advanced

Cost: \$\$\$

**Title:** Mental Health/Self Esteem Classes  
<http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/early-childhood-mental-health>

**Target Audience:** Parents

**Duration:** Ongoing

**Materials Needed:** Mental Health Therapist/Professional

**Description:**

Participants meet regularly with a Mental Health Therapist to discuss issues such as parenting styles, discipline, healthy relationships, domestic violence, setting goals and planning for the future, etc.

**Things to consider:** Cost, stipend for Therapist is \$75.00-\$100.00 per hour

*Family & Children Services EHS, Baltimore City*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals

Level: Advanced

Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Peer Support Group  
<http://www.onetoughjob.org/>  
<https://www.nct.org.uk/about-us> National Childbirth Trust

**Target Audience:** New Parents

**Duration:** 1-2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Prompting questions along with fun engaging activity

**Description:**

During our Peer Support Group meeting, we prompt participants with questions to which they all may be able to relate. We share experiences and allow parents to do some creative problem solving as well as brainstorming based on Early Childhood Curriculum learning.

Editor Julie Clayton states that peer support has been shown to help in increasing rates of breastfeeding. Peer support can also help in the transition to parenthood, offering friendship and alleviating isolation, stress and low mood.

**Things to consider:** Ages may vary and providing food helps as an incentive.

*Prince George’s County Department of Family Services, Prince George’s County*

Goals: 1-7 All Goals  
Level: Moderate  
Cost: \$

**Title:** Pathway Planning

**Target Audience:** Parents and their children receiving services from Garrett County Community Action Judy Center, Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care, Home Visiting Programs, and After-school Programs

**Duration:** Ongoing as needed

**Materials Needed:** Crisis to Thriving Scale <http://socialimpactarchitects.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Boulder-Discussion-Guide.pdf>, planning forms, knowledge of resources available to families in your community

**Description:**

The Crisis to Thriving Scale creates a starting point for meaningful conversation about the strengths, weakness, and aspirations of a family. Building on that conversation, the family is offered an invitation to participate in deeper discussion about a pathway to *self-sufficiency*. When the family agrees to participate in pathway planning, the coordinator then assists the participant with identifying goals based on their strengths and needs. Next step includes developing an “Action Plan” to achieve these goals and creating a budget with the family.

Once goals are developed, the action plan is created, and a budget is formulated; the Pathway Planning Participant may require or request further meetings and assistance with their coordinator in meeting these goals or “putting the pathway plan into action”. The number and frequency of pathway meetings between the family and the coordinator are determined by the family and the goals established. Recurring pathway meetings allow for further collaboration between the coordinator and family. As families achieve goals and/or access resources they are encouraged to review the Crisis to Thriving Scale to demonstrate to the families their success in moving up the scale.

**Things to consider:** The Pathway Plan is designed to provide ongoing support, resources/services as needed to promote family wellbeing. Pathway Planning is free to families who volunteer to participate.

*Garrett County Community Action Council, Garrett County*

Goals: 1 and 7  
Level: Advanced  
Cost: \$\$\$



**Title:** Family Literacy Night

**Target Audience:** Families within Title I School Districts and Housing Projects

**Duration:** 1 hour - broken down into 20 minutes for reading and singing, 20 minutes for family crafts, and 20 minutes for snack and choosing free books

**Materials Needed:** Appropriate books to read, books to give away, craft materials, and snacks

**Description:**

One Family Literacy Night is conducted at each site once a month with a theme. Families are welcomed, and then the children move to a story time area where a reader shares stories and sings. The parents often meet with community resource representatives from the Library, YMCA, Social Services, and others.

**Tips for Organizing your own Literature Day**

Literature Day can take a great deal of planning -- and shopping!

\*Organize age appropriate activities that appeal to children/students.

\*Activity sessions can run from 45-60 minutes.

\*Sessions should be limited to 15 children and 15 parents.

\*Have teachers fill out activity planning sheets that include the grade level for the activity; the book to be used (title, author, illustrator, publisher, and copyright); a list of needed supplies; and a brief description of the plan.

\*Sample literature activities are: cooking, music/movement, arts and crafts, drama, game playing, and writing.

\*Offer signup for evening activities to take place before the literature night begins.

**Things to consider:** It helps to have reading specialists, media specialists, and teacher’s select appropriate literature materials.

*Catholic Charities Head Start, Baltimore City*

Goals: 2 and 3

Level: Easy

Cost: \$

**Title:** Home School Connections “Back Packs”

**Target Audience:** Parents and children

**Duration:** 15-minute home activity

**Materials Needed:** Back packs, journals, materials (reusable), instructor(s), and feedback forms

**Description:**

The teacher prepares back packs with short reusable activity ideas and materials. Children take back packs home. Parents conduct the activities included in the back packs with their child and write in the journal to provide feedback regarding their experience. Back packs are returned to the program and the children get to take home the next book bag in rotation.

**Things to consider:** Keep in mind cost of materials, making sure items are in the parents’/children’s native language, and having reusable bags. Materials may need to be refreshed when back packs are returned. Be sure to check the bags before sending out with the next child to see if any materials, consumables or contents need refreshing or replacing.

*Ready At Five, Baltimore County*

Goals: 2 and 3

Level: Easy

Cost: \$



**Title:** Story Time at the Local Library with Infants and Toddlers  
<http://health.frederickcountymd.gov/269/Infants-Toddlers-Program>  
<http://www.fcpl.org/programs/childrens-programs>

**Target Audience:** Parents of young children with and without disabilities

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Storybook with associated materials

**Description:**

Our local library has collaborated with the Infants and Toddlers Program to engage parents of children with disabilities in story time together with typical same-age peers. Infants/Toddlers and library staff jointly prepare and share a selected story with modifications to allow all children/families to participate in the story time.

**Things to consider:** Check with your local library for story time hours and locations.

*Infants and Toddlers/ Early Intervention, Frederick County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$

**Title:** Student Writing Night at the Public Library

**Target Audience:** Children and families- pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade

**Duration:** 1-2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Student writing projects

**Description:**

Each grade level brings student writing projects to display at the public library for an evening. Families come to see their child’s project displayed and participate in other activities together as well as sign up for library cards, read aloud/storytelling, puppet shows, etc. Other literacy organizations can set up information resource tables for parents, families, and the community.

**Things to consider:** There is no cost associated with this activity. Be sure to plan ahead, collecting student work and allowing time to take and set up displays at the library.

*Anonymous*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$



**Title:** Children’s Discovery Fair

**Target Audience:** Parents and children ages three-five

**Duration:** Once a year at a local library or other community location

**Materials Needed:** 25 different activities. Each community program pays for the materials for the activity.

**Description:**

A team gets together to create 25 activities that families can choose from. Topics included science, social studies, language/literacy, and social/emotional. The Discovery Fair planning committee is a subcommittee of Howard County Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Community-Resources-and-Services/Office-Of-Children-and-Families/Launch-Into-Learning>.

**Things to consider:** We suggest securing community partners to assist with the Discovery Fair.

*Local Early Childhood Advisory Council/Howard County*

Goals: 2, 3, 5, and 6  
Level: Advanced  
Cost: \$

**Title:** Pru’s Back Pack “Thrive by Five”  
<https://thrivewa.org/>

**Target Audience:** Parents of low-income

**Duration:** Ongoing

**Materials Needed:** Books: Pat the Bunny, Baby Faces, etc. and Manipulatives

**Description:**

The Harford County Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) <https://www.hcps.org/parents/default.aspx> participated in a workshop facilitated by a former low-income mother, who said that young parents need a way to engage children that is easy and mobile. Pru’s Back Pack was developed for parents in need of support that they can take with them to engage their children during “down time”.

**Things to consider:** A low cost is associated with this activity. Work with partners and businesses to supply books, manipulatives and backpacks.

*Local Early Childhood Advisory Council/Harford County*

Goals: 2 and 3  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$



**Title:** Pastries for Parents “The Next Level”  
<https://www.psea.org/uploadedfiles/teachingandlearning/dadsanddonutsormomsandmuffins.pdf>

**Target Audience:** Parents of school age children

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Curriculum materials and refreshments (if needed)

**Description:**

Parents are served breakfast items and listen to a short presentation on a variety of curriculum topics such as math concepts, reading with your child, importance of homework, transitions, etc. Families have the opportunity to ask questions and talk to other parents.

*Parent: “Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads is an opportunity to honor moms and dads and to say thank you for all the hard work we do every day. Children love sharing this time with us and having a special morning to share with their parents at school is such a treat”.*

**Things to consider:** A low cost is associated with this activity. Allow for staff preparation time to prepare presentations in an interesting and engaging manner. Plan ahead for refreshments and have them set up prior to families’ arrival.

*Dorchester County Public Schools/Dorchester County*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$

**Title:** Gingerbread House Story Night

**Target Audience:** Families and children birth to age five

**Duration:** Once a year

**Materials Needed:** Gingerbread House kits, books for story time, hot cocoa and books to take home per family (encourage parents/families to read every night)

**Description:**

Each family is given a Gingerbread House Kit. Together they create their home design. Every year the structures are very creative and allow parents and their children to work together.

First parents sign in with their children (all children are invited to come in their pajamas). They are invited to have hot cocoa and other treats. Once everyone has arrived, the children gather together for story time. Parents are able see how the book is read and how to engage the children. Each family then creates their Gingerbread House. When the activity is completed they are gifted books to take home and read together.

**Things to consider:** This could be a sensitive activity for some children who may not have parents, mother, father, grandparents, etc. who can attend. Try to have additional parent volunteers, child friendly community partners (ex: local librarian) or familiar staff person to work with a child if needed. Have families sign up ahead of time to make certain you have enough supplies (houses and books) for everyone attending. Have supplies for decorating the houses available at each table or set up ‘buffet-style’ for families to access.

*Gaithersburg Judy Center/ Gaithersburg, MD*

Goals: 2, 3, and 6  
Level: Easy  
Cost: \$



**Title:** Dia de los Muertos “Day of the Dead”  
<http://www.art-is-fun.com/>

**Target Audience:** Families and children birth to five

**Duration:** Once a year/One day celebration

**Materials Needed:** Dia de los Muertos art, art supplies, costumes, recipe for bread, and books for children about Dia de los Muertos

**Description:**

This daylong celebration honors the Mexican tradition of honoring our ancestors through storytelling, a homage through an altar, book making, and cooking.

**Things to consider:** There are moderate costs are associated with this activity. Be sure to plan well in advance for any volunteers, materials, cooking supplies, etc. Staff should become familiar with Dia de los Muertos history and activities prior to this activity.

*Latino Family Providers/ Montgomery County*

Goals: 2 and 6

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$\$

**Title:** Chinese New Year!  
<http://www.china-family-adventure.com/chinese-new-year.html>

**Target Audience:** Families and Children

**Duration:** Ongoing

**Materials Needed:** Information from families shared in a PowerPoint presentation or photo e-mails

**Description:**

One of our parents conducted a full, in-depth lesson on Chinese New Year. The presentation was conducted via PowerPoint on a large screen to be sure all children/parents were able to see information/images. Within the presentation we discussed the 12 Chinese Zodiac Signs, the Great Wall of China, the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, Fifty-Six Ethnic Groups in China, and a Fashion Timeline of Chinese Women’s Clothing. At the end of lesson, families discussed how they would extend their learning at home.

**Things to consider:** Being sensitive to cultural responses and differences is critical for these presentations. Consider other families who could share their cultural heritage through events and activities throughout the year.

*Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Care Dev. Center/ Baltimore City*

Goals: 6

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$



**Title:** Family Routines  
<http://www.shineearly.com/family/>  
<http://www.shineearly.com/>

**Target Audience:** All parents

**Duration:** 2-3 hours

**Materials Needed:** Large space for families, LCD projector, laptop, speakers, microphone, and refreshments

**Description:**

In collaboration with Shine Insight and Acelero Learning, Family Service staff train parents on Family Routines. The workshop is very interactive, allowing parents to learn from one another.

**Shine Insight Family Services Approach Description:**

The idea of our family engagement model is simple: well-informed, well-supported parents and families are essential partners in our work to close the achievement gap. Savvy Head Start leaders understand that without the help and active partnership of the families that they serve, they cannot ensure that each child who completes their program will be well-prepared to succeed in school and life.

At our partner, Acelero Learning programs, <http://www.acelero.net/>, we focus on: informing families about the Achievement Gap and empowering them with practical knowledge on what they can do about it; understanding each family’s strengths and needs for support with a well-structured and detailed Family Strengths Assessment; partnering with families by setting goals around Family Life Practices that will be key to tipping the odds in their child’s favor; and coaching and evaluating by our Family Advocates and other family service team members over the course of the year with detailed Family Advocate Success Rubrics.

Our robust set of Family Services-focused tools includes:

- \*Achievement Gap Brochure & Workshop Package
- \*Family Strengths Assessment survey
- \*Family Goal-Setting templates (60+ goal sheets in English and Spanish, plus blank templates)
- \*Family Handbooks (HS and EHS)
- \*Family and Community Partnerships Training Workshop materials, #1-5
- \*Parent-Child Activity calendars
- \*ERSEA tools and resources
- \*Health, nutrition, other comprehensive services resources, and much more.

**Things to consider:** Additional staff is needed to assist with the event. The location has to be spacious enough to accommodate all children and families. Initially plan for parents, considering their interests and needs, as well as being mindful of their unique schedules.

*Y of Central Maryland Early Head Start and Head Start/ Baltimore County*

Goals: 1 and 2

Level: Moderate

Cost: \$\$









## THE EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK: MARYLAND'S VISION FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

### GETTING STARTED

Effective family engagement does not happen in isolation or without considering the specific strengths and needs of the family. Programs using family engagement strategies in an effective manner to support all areas of the child's and the family's life will ultimately promote children's success in school and throughout life.

This self-assessment, modeled after Head Start's Markers of Progress<sup>1</sup>, is a working document to help you examine your program's current practices related to family engagement. The guide can be used as part of your program's current Self-Assessment Process to help you focus on family engagement. It can also contribute toward your program's continuous learning and program improvement. As you go through the assessment process, use it to affirm what you are already doing well and to enrich and improve areas of your program that need more focus. Use the data you gather through this process in the decision-making for your entire program.

Remember you are not alone in this endeavor. Your community can be an important source of social networks and service agencies. Invite community administrators to join with you to identify new opportunities for families, the community, and your program as you strengthen your relationships with them. As program administration, staff, families, and community partners come together to enhance family engagement, children and families will benefit, and your work will become even more effective and satisfying.

The guide offers concrete strategies to follow as you go beyond involving parents, families, and community partners to engaging with them as an intentional strategy to promote the long term wellbeing of children and their families. As you get started, we suggest you review the Key Definitions and Principles to provide the foundation for your work in a shared understanding of family engagement.

### 3 STEPS TO ASSESS AND ENHANCE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

#### 1. Build a Self-Assessment Team

Include partners representing diverse roles, cultures, and abilities – from within the program and community - and encourage all staff and partners to contribute their perspectives, information and insights to the self-assessment process.

#### 2. Use the Assessment Tool

Gather and analyze information to assess your program's current family engagement practices.

#### 3. Create an Action Plan

Use the data you collect to set priorities, determine goals, and develop a strategic set of actions to improve your program's family engagement practices.



OVERVIEW OF THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

This tool is divided into six areas – each a key strategy for bringing the Maryland’s Family Engagement Framework to your program.

PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS: THESE COMPONENTS INFLUENCE EVERY AREA OF THE PROGRAM

**Program Leadership:** The provider, director, governing boards, policy councils, parent committees and management teams determine the ways that programs engage parents, families, and the community.

**Professional Development:** Family Engagement training is important for all staff. Professional development focuses on how each staff member can contribute to program-wide family engagement efforts and how these roles fit together.

PROGRAM IMPACT AREAS: THESE ELEMENTS MUST BE INCLUDED AS PART OF SUCCESSFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

**Program Environment:** Families feel welcomed, valued, and respected by program staff and experience themselves as essential partners in understanding and meeting the needs of children.

**Teaching and Learning:** Families are engaged as equal partners in their children’s learning and development.

**Family Partnerships:** Families work with staff to identify and achieve their goals and aspirations. To make a positive impact in the area of family partnerships, staff and families build ongoing, respectful and goal-oriented relationships.

**Community Partnerships:** Communities support families’ interests and needs and foster parent and family engagement in children’s learning. Programs and families can also strengthen communities.

For each of the six sections of the Self-Assessment, you will also find:

- Indicators for Program Foundation Components and Impact Area Elements
- Assessment Grid to focus your self-assessment on a specific area of your program’s family engagement practices
- Markers describing outcomes programs are achieving, or goals they are setting for themselves for successful family engagement

Markers are broken into three levels:

Starting Point:

- Standard best practices that define features of a quality program in concrete terms. These practices encourage family engagement in all aspects of the program. You will also find practices that reflect a commitment to build partnerships within the community to ensure children and families receive individualized services.

Progressing:

- These practices go a step beyond to reflect a deepened focus on goal-oriented relationships between programs, parents and families. They describe how staff build on the trusting partnerships they have established with parents and other family members. They work together to promote the ongoing learning, development, and well-being of children and families alike.

Innovating:

- At this level, effective parent, family, and community engagement practices are part of every aspect of the program. Practices in this column build collaborative relationships among the program, parents, families, and community. Parents are empowered as Leaders and work side-by-side with staff to make decisions and develop program activities and policies. The community is embraced as the program sees itself as an active member of the community and the early childhood field. Data is collected and used to make decisions that result in improved family and child outcomes. Family engagement approaches at this level are systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.

Use these markers to develop a rating of your program’s present level of quality on each indicator you choose to assess. Use these ratings to create a composite picture of your family engagement efforts for the strategies you have assessed and inform discussions and decisions about next steps to enhance your program’s family engagement practices.



ASSESSMENT KEY

COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING ( INDICATOR)			
(Levels) →  (Markers) ↓	STARTING POINT:  Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING:  Demonstrating Practices that Bolster family engagement	INNOVATING:  Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Program management/Providers engage families in collaborative decision- making.	Program management/Providers create opportunities for families to participate in collaborative decision-making. They ensure there are effective operating structures in place (e.g., Program Committees, and Governing Board) that give parents the opportunity to contribute to decision-making within programs.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Across program areas, staff engages parents in collaborative decision-making on a wide range of topics (e.g., curriculum planning and community assessment).  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program.	Program management/Providers empower families and community partners to collaborate in decision-making in community- based programs, including public education.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program.
Program management /Providers support parents as they develop skills as advocates and Leaders.	Program management/Providers provide interested parents with training on how to be effective advocates and program leaders on behalf of their children.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers invite community partners to provide parents with in-house training to enhance their leadership and advocacy skills. They provide ongoing coaching and mentoring as parents practice new skills in the program (e.g., serve as role models for other parents, participate in focus groups, and work with providers and teachers to enhance curriculum).  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program.	Program management//Providers encourage parents to attend advocacy and leadership training in the community. As parents practice and develop new skills (represent early childhood program at a community meeting, participate in the PTO of an older child's school, etc.) they educate and encourage other parents to become leaders and advocates.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program.



USING THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Family Engagement Assessment Tool is designed to help you gather and analyze information to assess the level of your program’s current family engagement practices.

THE ASSESSMENT IS FLEXIBLE  
ONLY INCLUDE THE INDICATORS THAT ARE APPLICABLE TO YOUR PROGRAM.

Collect Data

Choose a strategy. Go through the indicators and markers to clearly define your focus. Determine what sources of information will help you document your current level of performance or quality. Feel free to create your own markers to add to the ones offered here. (Be sure to share the markers you create with us so that we can share them with other programs.) Review and analyze documentation from your program reporting systems, any community needs-assessments, files on children and families, and other management systems that relate to the indicators and markers you want to examine.

Ask Partners for Input

To assure an accurate, well-rounded picture, ask for input from administrators, staff, current families, parents who were engaged with your program in the past, and community partners. This can be done in a number of ways, for example, through focus groups, open forums, short surveys, or individual interviews.

Analyze the Data

Engage your Family Engagement Self-Assessment Team in reviewing the data you have collected. Use it to guide discussion of your program’s current status on the indicators you wish to focus. Encourage team members to examine whether a quality practice is widely and consistently observed in all parts of your program or implemented only in some instances or settings. This will help you see how far along you are in integrating high quality Family Engagement practices across your program. Document the main findings of your Family Engagement Self-Assessment Team. You will use this data to create your Family Engagement Program Action Plan.

Assess

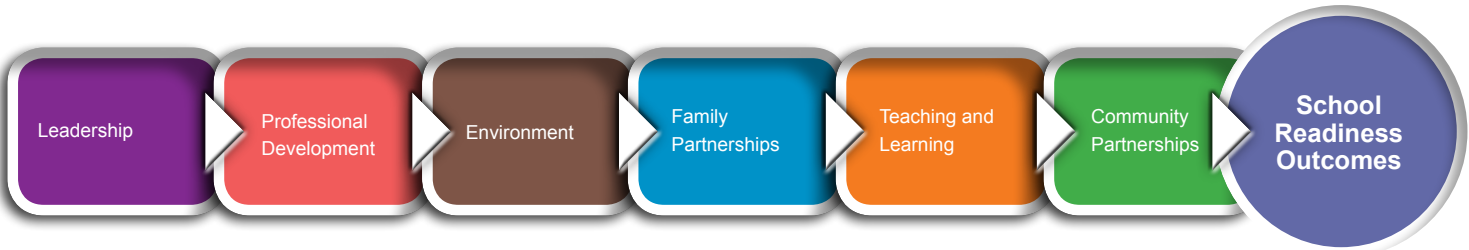
Determine the marker level that best describes your program’s status for each indicator you are examining.

Engage the Family Engagement Self-Assessment Team in reviewing patterns of strengths and areas for improvement. Encourage team members to also consider possible links between the different indicators and elements. You may discover patterns of strength or areas needing improvement across several indicators that shed light on your overall program self-assessment.

Communicate

Develop a strategy and materials to share the Family Engagement Self-Assessment results and your subsequent Action Plan with staff, families, and community partners. These materials can also be used as part of your strategy to recruit others to join efforts to enhance your family engagement practices. For example, your Family Engagement Self-Assessment Team members might present findings at meetings of the governing boards, management teams, staff, parents and community partners. Handouts and/or newsletter articles might include examples of what is working well and offer practical, hands-on suggestions of how people can contribute to enhance the program’s family engagement efforts and the well-being of children and families.



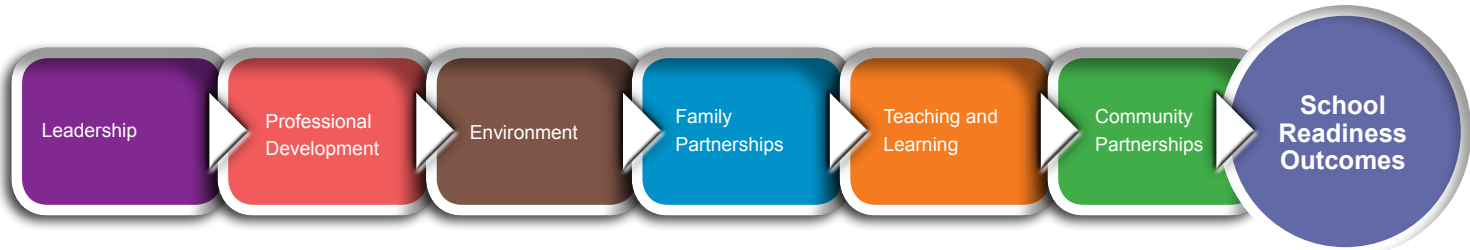


**PROGRAM LEADERSHIP**

The provider, director, the Governing Board, parent committees, and management teams determine the way programs engage parents, families, and the community. To begin, program administration sets a clear vision and ambitious goals for family engagement. Program administration ensures program systems (such as communication and human resources) integrate practices that help parent and family engagement to flourish. Administration outlines strategic plans that bring systems, people, and activities together in a way that values staff and enhances parent and family engagement in the program.

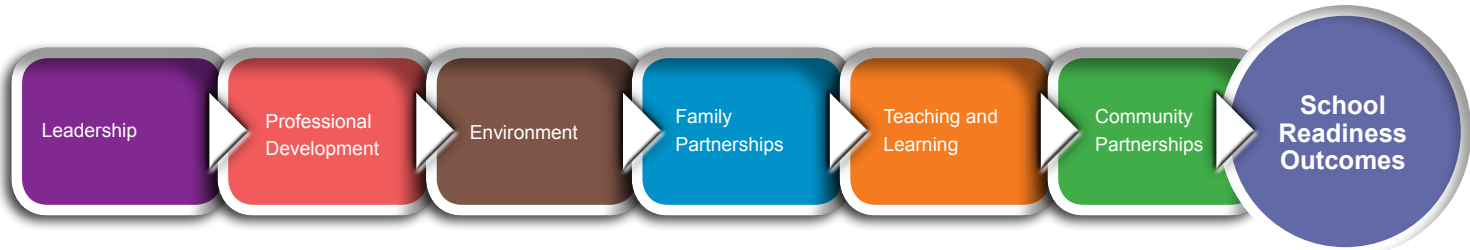
AMBITIOUS GOALS			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Ambitious goals promote family engagement success in engaging families and community	Program management/Providers inspire staff and parents to reach for ambitious goals as they create capacity to engage families and community partners.	Together with staff, program management/providers use the Family Engagement Framework to identify and implement strategies to promote family engagement.	Together with staff, program management/providers regularly revisit and revise family engagement practices across program areas to promote family engagement. Together they examine accomplishments and set progressively higher goals for staff to enrich their practices with families.
	Management communicates on a frequent basis the importance of family engagement practices and supports staff's understanding of how they promote family and child wellbeing.	Then, program management/providers support staff to incorporate family's needs and goals into their daily planned activities and into their communications with families, other staff members and supervisors.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program





COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Families are part of collaborative decision making	<p>Program management/Providers create opportunities for families to participate in collaborative decision-making. They ensure there are effective operating structures</p> <p>in place (e.g., Program Committees, Parent Meetings and Governing Board) that give parents the opportunity to contribute to decision-making within programs.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Across program areas, staff engages parents in collaborative decision-making on a wide range of topics (e.g., curriculum planning and community assessment).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Program management/Providers empower families and community partners to collaborate in decision-making in community-based programs, including public education.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>
Program management/Providers support parents as they develop skills as advocates and leaders.	<p>Program management/Providers provide interested parents with training on how to be effective advocates and program leaders on behalf of their children.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Program management/Providers invite community partners to provide parents with in-house training to enhance their leadership and advocacy skills. They provide ongoing coaching and mentoring as parents practice new skills in the program (e.g., serve as role models for other parents, participate in focus groups, and work with providers and teachers to enhance curriculum).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Program management/Providers encourage parents to attend advocacy and leadership training in the community. As parents practice and develop new skills, (represent early childhood programs at a community meeting, participate in the PTO of an older child's school, etc.) they educate and encourage other parents to become leaders and advocates.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>





FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS A SHARED PRIORITY FOR ALL STAFF			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Program management/Providers help all staff understand their unique contributions to family and community engagement.	Program management/Providers use written materials and ongoing interactions with managers and staff (e.g., job descriptions, initial orientation, ongoing training, supervision and evaluation) to communicate expectations for supporting family and community engagement.	Program management/Providers strengthen shared commitment to family engagement by personal example as they interact and communicate with staff, families, and community partners.	Program management/Providers build a program-wide, deepening commitment to family engagement by helping managers and staff realize they can make a positive difference. Program management/Providers help staff see how what they say and do each day can lead to positive, trusting relationships with families and community partners. They point out specific examples of how these relationships promote individual family's progress and how children and families progress toward School Readiness.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Program management/Providers make resources and staffing decisions that promote family and community engagement.	Program management/Providers ensure that staff has enough time to plan and work one-on-one with families regularly – in both center and home-based programs.	Program management /Providers adjust assignments and caseloads to allow for additional interactions based on family needs, strengths and relationships with individual staff (e.g., Family Service Workers, Home Visitors and teachers) and managers.	Program management/Providers reallocate resources and time of all staff members to provide individual families with support needed to reach their goals. These decisions are based upon data* about families' progress on meeting family and child goals (e.g., community assessment data, self-assessment data and data on staff-parent interactions).
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program

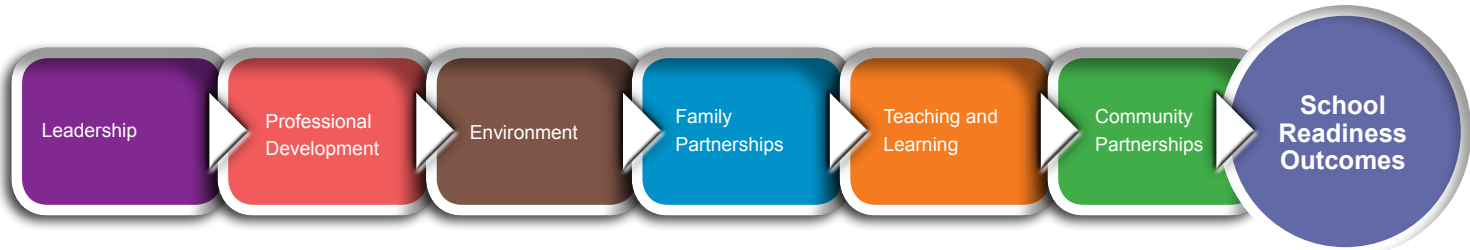
\*Data can also mean information gathered through informal conversations, observations and meetings.



To build a solid foundation in family engagement, professional development plans should be comprehensive and include training, supervision, recognition, and information about career options. Regular opportunities to come together as a community of learners helps providers, directors, and staff find mutual support and ideas for turning training and information into action. These opportunities are also important for cross-service area teams, such as teaching, family services, and home visiting professionals.

HIGH QUALITY TRAINING FOR ALL PROVIDERS, DIRECTORS AND STAFF			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Building relationships with families requires specific skills and strategies.	Providers, directors and staff participate in training and mentoring to develop strong, positive and effective relationships with families, including vulnerable families and families dealing with adversity.	Providers, directors and staff build skills to produce supportive engagement that is reflective of individual families' cultures, strengths, and needs. Providers, directors and staff rely on ongoing mentoring and supervision to develop strategies to support families who may have challenging circumstances.	Providers, directors and staff initiate and sustain a "community of practice" as they exchange information and insights with staff from other agencies that provide family support. They meet regularly as "peer experts" to share questions and expertise to enhance family engagement practices and relationships with individual families.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Family engagement strategies are taught and incorporated into everyday practices.	All providers, directors and staff participate in training about what they as individuals can do and say in their daily interactions to promote family engagement. Training helps us all understand that "family engagement is everyone's business".	Providers, directors and staff participate in training on specific family engagement strategies to promote progress with individual family goals and needs. Providers, directors and staff are familiar with, discuss, and use research on family and community engagement to enhance daily practice.	Program-wide professional development supports providers, directors and staff to work together across program areas to promote family engagement. It also promotes the use of data to inform decisions about program services and interactions with individual families over time.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Ongoing support promotes family engagement related skills.	Program supervisors provide feedback and coaching on family engagement related practices at each staff member's annual evaluation.	Providers, directors and staff who work most closely with families participate in ongoing individualized mentoring and support on effective goal-oriented family engagement practices.	All providers, directors and staff participate in family engagement related training, mentoring and support. Community partners are invited to take part whenever possible.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program





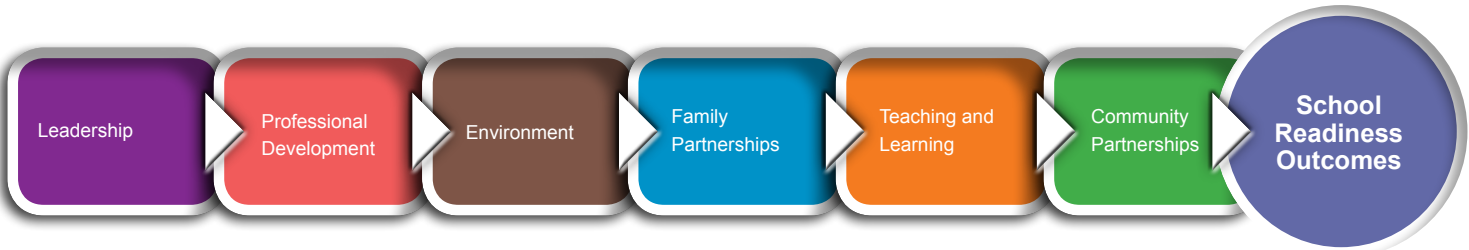
CAREER PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Career development	Program management/Providers provide opportunities for staff to gain skills and experience that can help lead to career advancement in the area of family engagement.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Effective staff members are groomed for, and promoted into, other positions as they become available. They receive ongoing support as they transition into their new roles.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers works with higher education and other community partners to identify career opportunities for staff. Together they create processes for staff to gain career-advancement credentials in child and family fields. (e.g. social work, education and health)  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Parent volunteers' growing commitment and contributions can lead to expanded career development options.	Provider/Administration and staff invite all family members to visit and observe. They are also invited to volunteer to support learning in classrooms as well as to try follow-up activities with their children at home.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff document family interests and talents. Together with families, they co-create opportunities for parents to contribute to curriculum planning, learning opportunities and ongoing child assessment on-site and at home.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff encourage increased levels of responsibility for parents to work with groups of children along with staff. Programs go beyond documenting volunteers as non-federal share resources to tracking their contributions to other families' progress with family engagement. Management and staff encourage interested parents to apply to work in the program and/or community to support children and families.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Effective efforts to promote family engagement are honored.	Program management/Providers recognize staff and parent volunteers for their job performance in the area of family engagement.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers recognize the accomplishments of staff in enhancing family engagement across program areas.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Together with community partners, Program management/Providers recognize collaborations between all staff and parents to promote children's and families' well-being in the program and throughout the community.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



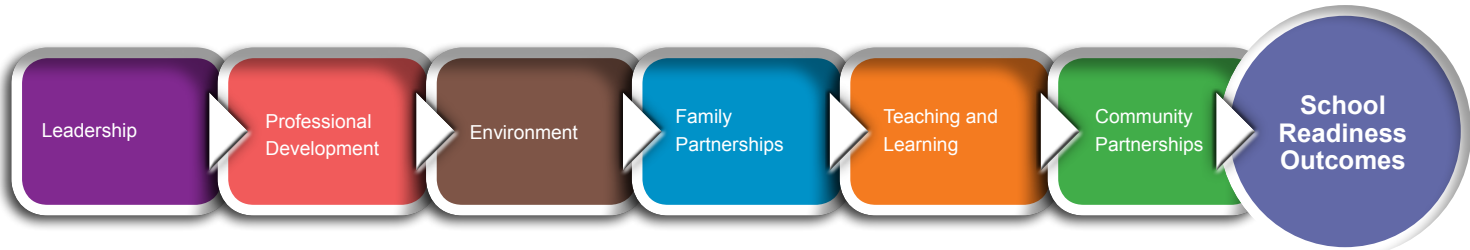
In an effective program environment, families feel welcomed, valued, and respected by the program staff. Program administration supports all staff to build strong relationships with each other and with families and communities. Providers, staff and families work together to set expectations and support family goals and children’s learning and development in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. Two-way communication and relationship-building with families is adapted to meet changing family and community circumstances. In addition, opportunities are provided for family support and development through the family partnership process and through intentional parent/family peer groups within the program and community.

WELCOMING AND INVITING SETTINGS			
	STARTING POINT:  Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING:  Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING:  Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
The space supports interactions and relationships.	Physical space is calm, clean, safe and accessible. It reflects respect for the language and culture of children and their families (e.g., documentation of projects, artwork, and family photos). Culturally and linguistically appropriate information is available.	In a dedicated, welcoming, and comfortable space for adults, parents can drop-in and connect with providers, staff and peers.	Providers, directors, staff and families use feedback as they work together to make areas more welcoming and conducive to social interactions. When appropriate, the program shares space with the community to enhance connections between community agencies and families.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



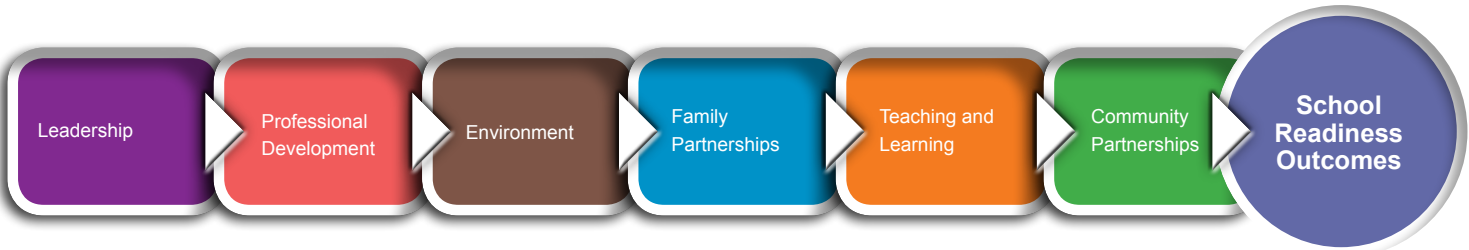


CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RESPONSIVENESS			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Understanding of families' cultures deepens, builds trust and promotes engagement.	Program management/Providers and staff talk with and learn from families about their home cultures (e.g., family structure, preferred child-rearing practices). This information is used to affirm families' culture and history in program policies, resources, activities and in staff professional development.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers and staff use new information and insights gained about families' cultures, and their own, as conversations continue and trust grows. Program management/Providers and staff continually tailor services and systems to be more culturally and linguistically responsive.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers, staff, and community agencies discuss conflicting assumptions, complex feelings and challenging issues. Together with families, they design, implement and evaluate activities that remove cultural and linguistic barriers to family engagement and strengthen relationships with families of different cultures and backgrounds.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Materials and resources increasingly reflect families' cultures and languages.	Providers, directors and staff support families as lifelong educators by offering learning materials (books, games and other learning media) for children and parents that reflect families' cultures.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff regularly invite families to provide feedback about culturally appropriate books and other learning materials and suggest additional ones for children and parents.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Families, providers and staff create culturally appropriate and relevant learning materials together. These extend beyond foods and holidays to include a broad range of activities. This process, and the materials that result, strengthen family engagement with the program, and parent engagement with children. They also expand parent and child learning.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



SYSTEM OF REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Communication becomes increasingly family-centered and responsive.	Program management/Providers and staff create clear communication channels to promote regular dialog with families about child progress and program matters in ways that deepen trust and relationships. Families each have a designated contact person. The use of technology is tailored to different families and ages of family members. Interpreters are available as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers and staff are proactive in communicating with families. They regularly ask families for feedback and suggestions about additional information they need. <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors, staff and parents talk together regularly about how to improve communication. <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Professional ethics guide interactions with and about families.	Program management/Providers model professional ethics when interacting with staff and families. Providers, directors and staff do not share confidential information about a child or family with other families or with other providers or staff who do not also work with that child/family. <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers provide ongoing training to staff and support in the area of professional ethics (e.g., confidentiality, boundaries). <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Providers model professional ethics when working with community partners. They take an active stance against negativity and unprofessionalism when talking about families. This remains true even when challenging issues are addressed and emotions run high. Codes of ethics from NAEYC and other organizations supporting families and young children are shared. <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program

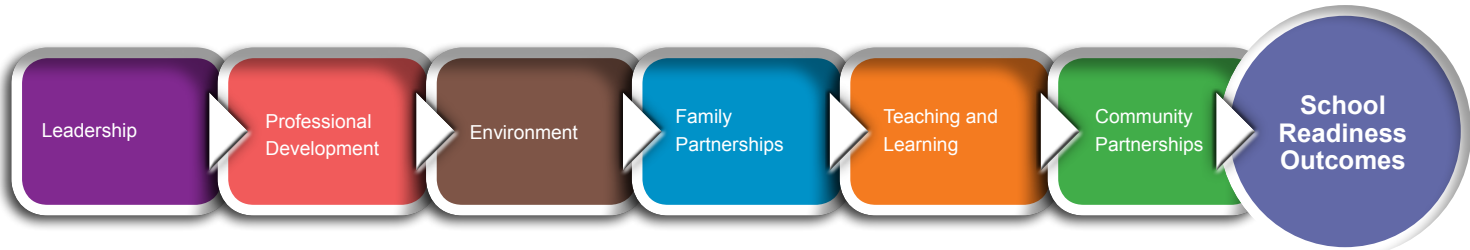




FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

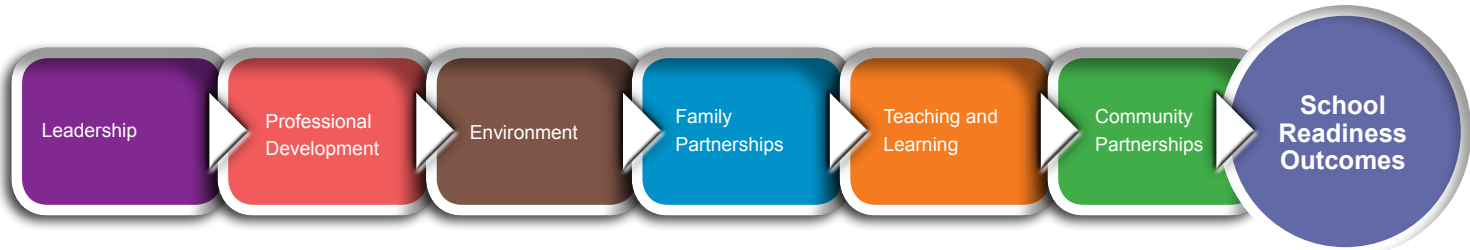
To build high-quality family partnerships, families work with providers, directors and staff to identify, achieve and act on their goals and aspirations. To strengthen family partnerships, staff and families build ongoing, respectful, and goal-oriented relationships. To promote progress, providers, directors, staff and families use program and community supports and resources.

RESPECTFUL, TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND PARENTS			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Program management/Provider supports relationships between staff and families through professional development, technology, and their own relationships with staff.	Program management/Provider develop trusting relationships with staff that are models for the relationships staff builds with families. Respect, caring, commitment, and flexibility characterize these relationships.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Provider expand staff development to tailor training, coaching, and reflective supervision to help build trusting relationships with all types of families, from all cultures and backgrounds, including those who are vulnerable and severely stressed.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program Administration/Provider create an easy-to-use system that documents the quality of relationships between staff and parents. It includes feedback from families, documentation of reflective supervision efforts, and perspectives from community partners that are skilled in providing family support and mental health. Provider, director and staff use this information to enhance their relationships with individual parents.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Peer support and learning opportunities are enhanced.	Program management/Provider and staff provide informal opportunities for parents to form connections with peers.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Program management/Provider and staff provide opportunities for peer networking, support and learning opportunities among parents.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Parents work with each other and with provider to design and enhance opportunities for peer-to-peer networking and support.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program

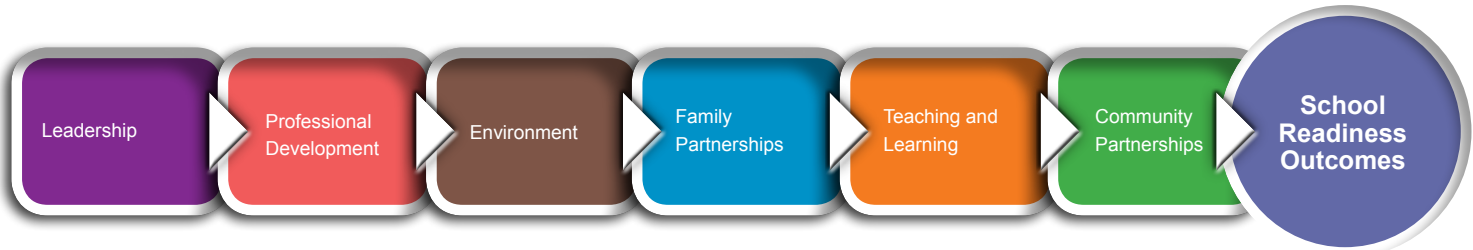


FAMILIES ARE PARTNERS IN DEVELOPING AND ACHIEVING THEIR GOALS			
	STARTING POINT:  Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING:  Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING:  Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Providers, directors and staff partnerships with families grow and deepen.	Provider, director and staff find opportunities to learn about the family's strengths, needs, and goals as an entry to this relationship.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Provider, director, staff and families meet regularly to discuss their children and to strengthen relationships with family members.  These meetings reflect their joint efforts, new circumstances and opportunities.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Together, provider, director, staff and families decide on the data and information they will use to monitor trends in family strengths, needs and goals. They use this data/information to track their joint efforts and progress in reaching child and family goals. Learning to use data/information contributes to families' success in supporting children's development and learning. Using data and information together also strengthens parent-staff relationships.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Providers, directors and staff help family members recognize their own contributions to their progress.	Providers, directors and staff provide ongoing information and support to families in using program services and community resources (education, career development, health) to achieve family goals and promote the wellbeing of children.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff help individual families see how their use of services leads to progress. They help families overcome challenges in achieving their goals.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Families, providers and staff affirm the vital roles that families play in nurturing their children's learning and development. Together, they acknowledge and celebrate family members' growing knowledge and skills, and build upon these in their work together to support children.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program





FAMILIES ARE PARTNERS IN DEVELOPING AND ACHIEVING THEIR GOALS (CONTINUED)			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Family partnerships open the door to families' use of resources and services.	<p>Providers, directors and staff develop trusting relationships with families that make for responsive family referrals and effective information-sharing about program and community services and resources.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Providers, directors and staff use knowledge of families to tailor referrals to services based on the strengths, needs, and styles of individual family members.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Provider/director/staff-family partnerships empower families to independently seek and use community services that are tailored to their strengths, needs and cultures.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>
Parents receive training and support for transitions.	<p>Programs provide families with information, training and connections to future early care and educational settings to help facilitate the transition process for parents and children.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Programs ensure families have the skills to communicate with other early childhood programs and schools about their child's accomplishments, interests and needs and can refer to child assessment data to support their observations.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>	<p>Programs provide opportunities for parents to create relationships with other families and to participate in parent groups in schools to which children will transition.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program</p>

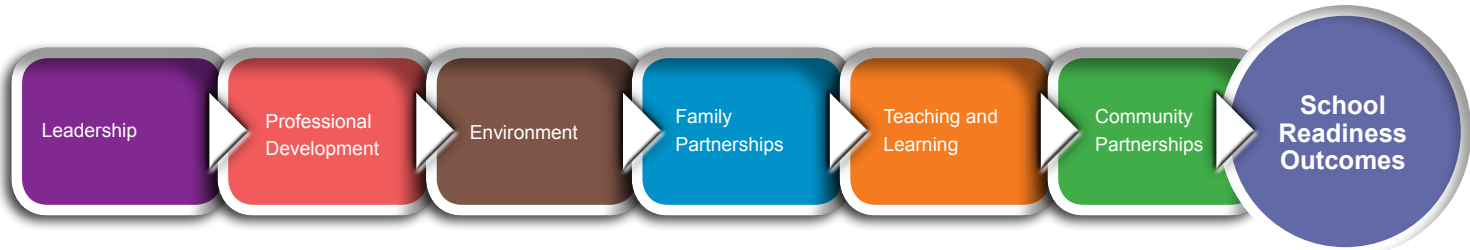


TEACHING AND LEARNING

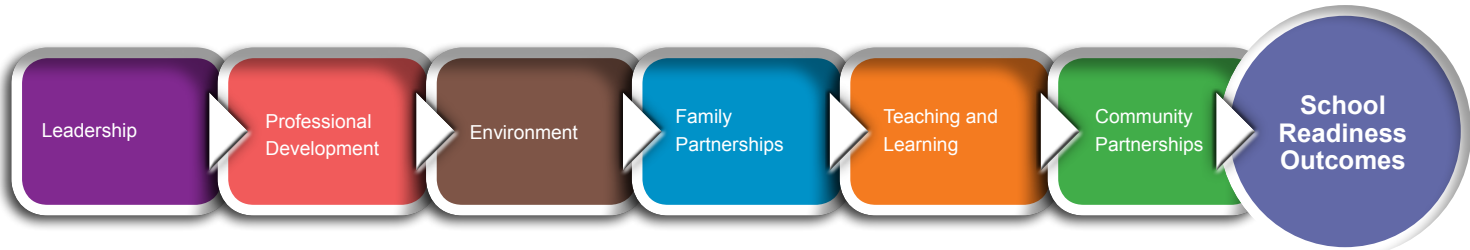
Families should be engaged as equal partners in their children’s learning and development. Providers, directors, staff and families work together as equals to build strong relationships that support information-sharing with each other about children’s learning and developmental progress. Programs ensure that families have access to information about their child and that the information is understandable and meaningful. Parents share their knowledge about their child’s progress at home. Together, staff and families use this information to set and work toward goals for the child in the program, home and community.

FAMILIES GROW INTO THEIR ROLE AS EDUCATORS AT HOME			
	STARTING POINT:  Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING:  Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING:  Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Supporting Families as Lifelong Edu- cators for their children.	Providers, directors and staff work to develop relationships with families that allow them to effectively address children’s learning needs and support families in the vital role they play in their children’s learning and develop- ment.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff model specific learning strategies for fami- lies to help them promote children’s learning during daily routines and play time. Providers, directors and staff sustain families’ interest in learning new strategies by reflecting with them on children’s progress over time.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Together, families and providers/direc- tors/staff identify new opportunities for families to support children’s healthy development and learning. Families recognize that they are children’s “for- ever” teachers.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Providers, directors, staff and families promote children’s development and learning in increasingly collaborative ways.	Providers, directors and staff welcome families to participate in program activi- ties. Providers, directors and staff pro- vide basic information about children’s learning and development during home visits, daily conversations, on bulletin boards and in e-mails.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff invite families to partner in planning activities in the program or at home to promote children’s development and learning.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	Providers, directors and staff and fam- ilies engage each other as partners in planning classroom or home activities that promote children’s development and learning.  Both have a clear understanding of what each contributes and what each can expect in their exchange of information. They use what they learn from each other to plan and implement learning activities for children at home or in the program.  <input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



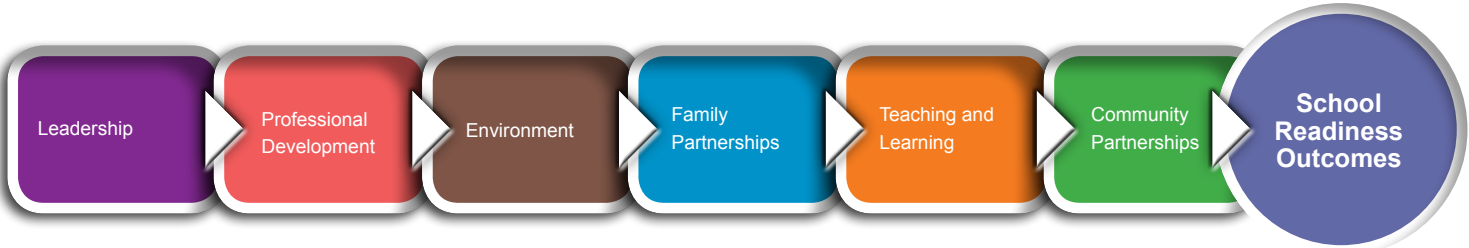


FAMILIES' USE OF CHILD ASSESSMENT INFORMATION PROMOTES CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Parents are informed about the purpose of assessment. Providers/ Staff has scheduled meetings/parent-teacher conferences to share assessment data/information with families.	Providers, directors and staff seek input from families in developing goals for children and assessing children's progress. This includes families with young children with disabilities as they participate in IFSP and IEP planning and progress monitoring.	Providers, directors, staff and families regularly share information and observations about curriculum activities.  Providers, directors and staff invite parents to be part of the assessment process and explain that their input leads to a more complete, accurate picture of their child. Providers, directors and staff share child assessment data with families and request their impressions regularly. Child assessments are used to engage parents in determining how they can contribute to fostering their children's progress. Providers, directors and staff support and monitor those efforts and work with families to adjust and tailor goals for their children during the year.	Together with families, providers/directors/staff regularly discuss formal assessments and share child-related questions, concerns and successes to create a picture of the child as a whole. Both home and program observations and assessments are used. Providers, directors, staff, families and community partners regularly use this data/information to decide how best to support children's learning and development in the program and in the community.  Providers, directors, and staff work with families to develop long-term goals for all of their children and family members, chart clear pathways toward those goals and prepare parents to continue to advocate for collaborative decision-making as they transition into other early learning environments and Kindergarten.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



SUPPORTING POSITIVE PARENT- CHILD RELATIONSHIPS			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Shared observations of family strengths and child behavior open the door to positive change in child outcomes.	<p>Providers, directors and staff focus on family and child strengths as an entry into relationships and conversations about children.</p>	<p>In the home and program, parents see that providers, directors and staff interact with each child as an individual, and with respect and authentic caring. As a result, trust deepens and communication about each child’s strengths and needs becomes more open.</p>	<p>Providers, directors, staff and parents observe and learn from each other’s interactions with the child. Providers, directors, staff and parents use their observations about the child’s behavior as data. This guides the decisions they make together about their roles as the child’s educators.</p>
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Providers, directors and staff strengthen their partnership with families to address challenging child behaviors in positive ways.	<p>Providers, directors and staff try to understand what children might be thinking/feeling when they behave in challenging ways. They use this information to decide how to discourage such behavior while promoting children’s self-control. Providers, directors and staff take steps to prevent challenging behavior whenever possible.</p>	<p>Providers, directors and staff discuss challenging behaviors with families in ways that demonstrate and strengthen the trust and respect between them. In their discussions, providers, directors and staff support families to help keep the child’s best interest in the forefront even when strong feelings arise.</p>	<p>Providers, directors, staff and parents work together to prevent challenging behaviors and address them in positive ways when they occur. This supports the child’s healthy development and social competence and the families’ engagement with the child and program.</p>
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program





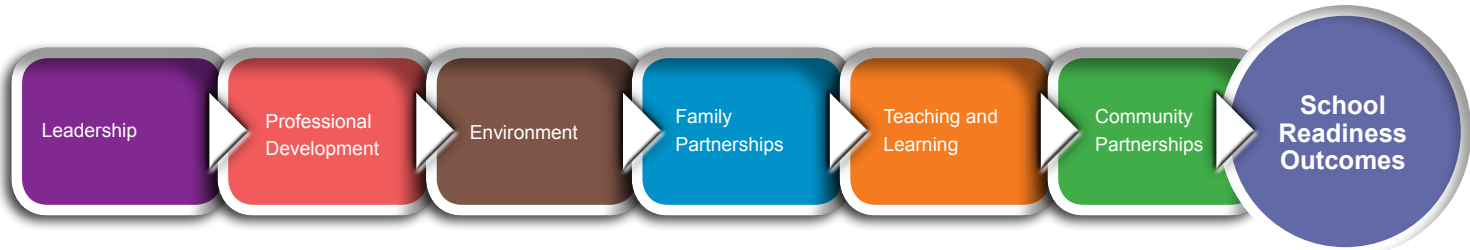
SUPPORTING POSITIVE PARENT- CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (CONTINUED)			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Child assessment data informs work with community partners.	Programs develop school readiness goals that are in line with those of their community. Programs participate in or provide training on transitions. This strengthens the relationships with other early care and educational settings and promotes the use of child assessment data during transitions from birth through age eight (8).	Programs share school-readiness goals and related data with community partners. Their relationships and collaborations continue to develop.	Programs extend relationships with community partners beyond sharing assessment data. Data is used to drive decisions intended to improve transitions. Together they work to implement their shared commitment to ambitious school-readiness goals.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



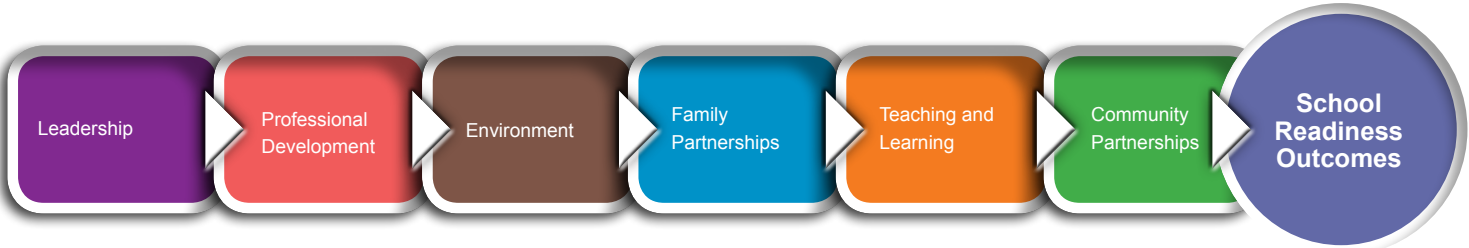
Successful community partnerships support families’ interests and needs and encourage parent and family engagement in children’s learning. Providers, directors, staff and families collaborate with community, health, mental health, social service, and school partners to build peer networks, to link families and children to needed services, and to support successful transitions for children and families.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS WITHIN PROGRAM AND WITH LARGER COMMUNITY			
	STARTING POINT:	PROGRESSING:	INNOVATING:
	Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Growing support for families as educators in communities.	Providers, directors and staff provide information about community resources (e.g., family literacy programs, and parenting workshops) to families. Representatives of trusted community organizations meet and present their offerings to families (e.g., at a parent meeting, and a community resource fair).	Together with families, Providers, directors and staff provide feedback to community partners about services that are most easily accessed and effectively used, as well as about barriers and service gaps.	Families, providers, directors, staff and community partners use information from families’ experiences to decide how best  to get the word out about existing community services, and to determine how to enhance them, remove barriers, and fill in service gaps.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program
Family engagement moves into the community.	Providers, directors and staff link families to program/ community opportunities for peer networking, volunteer activities, internships and other experiences that expand their personal and professional interests.	Parents form relationships with parent-to-parent organizations or K-12 parent groups to facilitate their child’s transition to community programs.	Parents serve as mentors for one another and connect each other with alumni parents/families, elders and professionals in the community to promote advocacy,  administration development and family engagement in the community.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program





COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS TO SUPPORT FAMILY WELL BEING			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bol-ster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Inte-grated and Comprehensive
Staff and families participate in service development.	Program management/Provider, staff and families collaborate to enhance program services to families. They address obstacles to families' awareness and use of services to meet their needs and goals.	Program management/Provider, staff and families collaborate with community partners. The Maryland Family Engagement Framework guides their work together to help families receive the services they need to reach their goals.	Program management/Provider, staff and families represent the program in inter-agency coalitions with community partners who serve the same families. Together they address obstacles to services and help ensure families receive needed services to reach family outcomes.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



SUPPORT FOR TRANSITIONS			
	STARTING POINT: Implementing Practices Related To Best Practice	PROGRESSING: Demonstrating Practices that Bolster Family Engagement	INNOVATING: Implementing Family Engagement Practices that are Systemic, Integrated and Comprehensive
Program management/Provider provides support for transitions.	Program management/Providers establish and maintain procedures and supports for successful transitions of all enrolled children and families.	Program management/Providers build relationships among community partners so that transition efforts are mutual, (Early care programs, Head Start programs, public schools and all school staff and managers are equally engaged in classroom observations, home visits, outreach to families and ongoing communication.	Program management/Providers model effective family and child centered transitions for community programs. They share insights and lessons learned from the program's transition efforts with community partners.
	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program	<input type="checkbox"/> This best describes our program



CREATING A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

A written Family Engagement Action Plan informs your long and short range goals in addition to helping you identify the family engagement challenges to be addressed. This plan focuses your program’s efforts to enhance family engagement.

Creating an Action Plan provides an opportunity to:

- create a realistic roadmap for change by organizing your ideas into concrete steps;
- track your progress;
- identify goals and then evaluate if and when they are met;
- adapt plans and goals in light of unexpected opportunities or obstacles;
- affirm existing family engagement skills encouraging administration and staff to build on strengths as they develop new skills;
- continue positive change over time; and
- promote commitment to improvement in family engagement by bringing parents and community partners together with staff and management.

Challenges and Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Creating a Family Engagement Action Plan can be helpful, but can also pose its own challenges. For example, it may be a challenge to:

- find time for busy team members to meet;
- come to consensus on areas to prioritize;
- decide on realistic goals;
- identify steps;
- agree on a realistic time frame; and
- acknowledge signs of progress.

To overcome challenges, it can be helpful to:

- create a shared vision of the benefits of engagement for children, families, the community, and program staff and management;
- build trust and promote a sense of collaboration among family members, community partners, and program staff and management;
- keep communication flowing so that decisions are recorded and partners who may miss a meeting can stay informed; and
- return to the vision and its benefits to keep challenges in perspective.

Components of a Family Engagement Action Plan

The components of a Family Engagement Action Plan will vary from program to program based on a unique set of resources, demands, participants, partners, and needs. We have developed a template you can use to personalize your plan and a sample showing how it might be used (see next page). This Family Engagement Action Plan format can be used to enhance your current program planning efforts and long and short term goals.

This form provides a place for you to identify:

- Desired family engagement outcomes
- Your objectives and goal(s)
- Strategies from the Family Engagement Framework
- The indicators on which you are currently focused
- Action step(s)
- Resources available
- Person(s) responsible
- Time frame(s)
- Measure(s) of success

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Desired Family Engagement Outcome(s) (from the goals of the Framework):

Objective(s):

Strategy	Indicator	Action Step	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Time Frame(s)	Measure(s) of Success



GETTING STARTED ON YOUR ACTION PLAN

Begin with the end in mind. What do you want to accomplish? What are the desired outcomes for Family Engagement that you want to enhance? (In the sample Family Engagement Action Plan below, the Desired Family Engagement goal is Family Well-Being.)

**Identify an outcome or goal(s) to strengthen family engagement and improve outcomes for children and families. To choose, you may want to ask:**

- Is there a goal within reach that will give you an early success on which you can build toward more challenging ones? (This may sound similar to your work with families – start with an early success and build from there.)
- Is there a goal that with focused effort could be moved from Starting Point to Innovating to build interest and excitement about additional change?

(In the sample, you might have chosen a different objective to enhance Family Well-being. For example, if your focus was on safety, your objective might be: Offer opportunities for every parent to be trained on first aid or CPR.)

**Identify the strategies (Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas) that you will focus on to meet the goal.**

- Most goals will require work in more than one of the strategy areas (in the sample below, professional development and family partnerships are both involved) and coordination of your work across the foundations and impact areas.
- Identify the indicator(s) that you will focus on to meet the goal.
- Many goals will involve more than one indicator. Consider how they link together. Efforts on one indicator can reinforce efforts on another.

**Define the specific, concrete action steps you will use to make progress in each strategy area.**

- Identify the people and any other resources you want to engage to support change or enhancement in this priority area.

Select a point person(s) from the team who will be responsible for seeing that the next steps toward implementing these action steps are taken and for reporting setbacks if they arise.

**Set a time frame for accomplishing tasks. Your time frame should include check-in times.**

- Check in on progress being made on specific tasks and the Family Engagement Action Plan itself. Keep in mind that your Family Engagement Action Plan is a road map, a way of tracking progress that you can adapt as needed.

**Identify a measure of success that will indicate your goal has been met.**

- If a goal is to be of any value, there must be a way to accurately define and measure it. For example, see the sample Family Engagement Action Plan. Success is measured in a variety of ways which include: a) staff and families are able to describe asset-building practices and related benefits; b) ongoing monitoring documentation that confirms all staff members are assisting families with asset-building strategies; c) a specific percentage of families incorporating asset- building strategies into their family partnership agreement; and d) resources in the community are observed to be established, available, and used to support families in obtaining their asset-building goals.

SAMPLE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

**Desired Family Engagement Outcome(s) (from the goals of the Framework):** Family Well-being: Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased family security.

**Objective(s):** Offer increased opportunities for families to learn about and enhance asset-building strategies.

Strategy	Indicator	Action Step	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Time Frame(s)	Measure(s) of Success
Program Leadership	Ambitious Goals	Expand program policies, procedures, goals and opportunities to encompass asset-building strategies for staff and families.	ECLKC (Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center), National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations (NCPMFO) material, Community Resources and Partners	Management Team, Board, Parent Committees	Begin during summer planning phase and implement in the fall.	Provider, staff and families are knowledgeable about asset-building strategies and can describe the associated benefits.
Professional Development	High Quality Training for All Staff	Insert asset-building strategies as a standing agenda topic during monthly staff meetings to familiarize all staff with the concept, strategies, and opportunities for families.	ECLKC, materials, Community Resources and Partners	Management Team	Begin with pre-service training sessions and continue monthly	Ongoing monitoring indicates all staff members are able to assist families with asset-building strategies as part of their routine practice.
Family Partnerships	Families are partners in developing and achieving their goals for their children and families.	Staff and families collaborate to identify and share information related to asset building opportunities in the community.	Financial education Savings and Individual Development Accounts, Managing credit and debt,  Tax credits and tax filing assistance	Management Team and Parent Committee	Begin in early fall with the intention of sharing with all families by the first weeks of October.	Of the families who choose to set goals with staff, 10% will explore and/or adopt goals around asset-building strategies.
Community Partnerships	Collaborative relationships for comprehensive services	Provider, staff, families, and communities participate in collaborations that respond to family goals and needs around asset-building strategies.	Board Members Local banks  Local tax entities (EITC)  Local housing authorities(savings programs and information sessions)	Management Team, Board, and Parent Committee	Begin in late fall after assessing family asset- building strategies and implement any new opportunities by January.	Resources relating to parent’s goals are established, available, and used.

In this Family Engagement Action Plan, program foundations and program impact area strategies are connected. Each contributes to **Family Well-Being** through asset- building strategies. **Program Leadership**, that includes parents, creates a foundation of policies and procedures that are incorporated into **Professional Development** opportunities for all staff. This, in turn, provides staff with information they need to strengthen **Family Partnerships** as they work with families to individualize opportunities for asset-building strategies in the community. As families and staff move forward in exploring asset- building strategies, together they strengthen **Community Partnerships** as they work with community partners to identify and use relevant community resources.



YOUR PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

As you conduct your self-assessments and plan your next steps, it will be helpful to keep in focus the shared vision that your program has developed for the children, families, and community you all serve. What is your vision of the future as parents and families become more engaged in their children’s development and learning? (Briefly describe how the lives of children and families, and your program, will be changed as you enhance family engagement practices.)

Your Vision for Family Engagement in Your Program

Desired Family Engagement Outcome(s) (from the goals of the Framework):

Objective(s):

Strategy	Indicator	Action Step	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Time Frame(s)	Measure(s) of Success

FINAL REFLECTION



This guide was created to help you take a step back to learn about your program, and then decide how to collaborate and move forward in the best interests of the children and families you serve. Be open to your successes as well as areas that need improvement and take advantage of this opportunity to enhance family engagement and the lives of the children and families you serve.





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# GLOSSARY

**Articulation** - 1. The sharing of information between programs or organizations. 2. To express your thoughts clearly.

**Attachment** - The emotional bond between the child and the parent or caregiver.<sup>1</sup>

**Behavioral Support Plans** - Action plans outlining the specific steps to be used to promote a child's success and participation in daily activities and routines.<sup>2</sup>

**Cognitively** -The act or process of knowing, perceiving, etc.<sup>3</sup>

**Competent** - Having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc., for some purpose; properly qualified<sup>4</sup>

**Comprehension** - Capacity of the mind to perceive and understand; power to grasp ideas; ability to know.<sup>5</sup>

**Cultural Capital** - The knowledge and skills needed to understand and participate in educational or other systems in a particular culture, or more simply, institutional or formal knowledge and support.

**Culture** - The characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts.

**Culturally competent** - The ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Competency comprises the awareness of one's own culture, attitudes toward cultural differences, knowledge of cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills.

**Curriculum** - An organized framework that outlines the content that children are to learn, the process through which children achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to achieve these goals, and the contexts in which teaching and learning occur.

**Deficit** - An amount that is less than the amount needed; a problem that causes a decrease in some ability.<sup>6</sup>

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)** - Teaching young children in ways that meet children where they are, as individuals and as a group, and support each child in attaining challenging and achievable goals that contribute to ongoing development and learning. Three fundamental considerations guide information gathering and decision making - . age appropriateness, individual appropriateness and culturally appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

**Developmental Milestones** - An indicator of growth that is achieved by most children by a certain age in physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language skills.

**Domains of Learning or Development** - Social foundations, physical development and health, English/language arts, math, science, social studies, and the arts. Early learning programs intentionally work with children to support acquisition of new skills in each of these domains of development.

**Eco-Map** - Developed by Robin McWilliam, the Eco-map is a tool that can be used to help identify resources for the family. Providers can use this tool to gain additional information about the family and identify the family's formal and informal supports.

**Emotional Regulation** - The process by which individuals influence the occurrence, timing, experience, and expression of emotion.<sup>8</sup>

**Empower** - Make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights.

**Engagement** - Meaningful involvement in an activity that requires dialogue and collaboration.

**Evolve** - To develop gradually.<sup>9</sup>

**Experiential Learning** - Providing children with opportunities to learn by doing, observing, and experimenting.<sup>10</sup>

**Family** - A group of persons related by blood or circumstance, as parents, guardians, children, uncles, aunts, and cousins. In this document family specifically refers to the adults in a child's life who provide the primary care for the child day in and day out. Family may be parents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, guardians or kin.

**Fluency** - Spoken or written with ease.

**Language Acquisition** - The process of achieving mastery of a language or a linguistic rule or element.<sup>11</sup>

**Learning Communities** - Groups of people who come together to learn with and from each other and then seek to act on what they learn. Their reason for being is ongoing inquiry and to improve behaviors or practice.<sup>12</sup>

**Migrant (immigrant)** - A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another.<sup>13</sup>

**Memorandum of Agreement (MOU)** - a formal agreement between two or more parties. Companies and organizations use MOUs to establish official partnerships. MOUs are not legally binding but carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect. A MOU outlines the responsibilities of each agency for their roles in how they will each serve children, families and staff.

**Navigate** - To move or progress through in a logical sequence.<sup>14</sup>

**Nurturing** - To support and encourage, as during the period of training or development.<sup>15</sup>

**Receptive** - To be open to new ideas or change; willing or inclined to receive *suggestions, offers, etc.*

**Reciprocal** - A relationship where there is give and take among all those involved. Thus, one person is not receiving all the benefits, or having more say in the direction of decisions.<sup>16</sup>

**Resilience** - The ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.<sup>17</sup>

**Respectful** - Behavior, interactions, and speech that is courteous, considerate and well-mannered. Developing and maintaining *respectful relationships* requires an early childhood provider to understand the values of each family to be courteous and considerate in relationships with children and their families, and to understand that the values of families may differ from the values of the early childhood provider.<sup>18</sup>

**Responsive** - Reacting in a desired or positive way; quick to react or respond. Early childhood providers must engage *responsively* with both children and their families to build relationships, requiring conversations, discussions, prompt and positive reactions and interactions.<sup>19</sup>

**Routines Based Interview** - A method used to gather information from families to understand their needs and priorities and provide quality early intervention.<sup>20</sup>

**Scaffolding** - When the teacher provides support, while also challenging the child to try something a little more difficult.

**School Readiness** - Skills believed to be predictive of school success, in the areas of physical wellbeing and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development (including early literacy); and cognition and general knowledge.

**Secondary prevention** - Targeted supports for children who are at risk of challenging behaviors.

**Self-Reflection** - Process by which teachers discover their own strengths and areas of challenge while helping them improve their practice.<sup>21</sup>

**Social Capital** - The relationships that help provide resources or information, more simply, relationships and support networks.

**Social Stories** - Scripted stories that help children understand a social situation by describing the situation, what the child needs to do, and how others feel when the child exhibits the inappropriate behavior or desired behavior.<sup>22</sup>

**Sustainable** - Something that has the infrastructure and support to last a long time.<sup>23</sup>

**Structured environment** - A learning environment or setting where the teacher influences the play by structuring it in such a way that guides students to learn specific content.<sup>24</sup>

**Teachable moment** - A moment that occurs when an unplanned opportunity arises when a teacher, parent or provider has an ideal chance to offer insight to a child. A teachable moment is not something that you can plan for; rather, it is a fleeting opportunity that must be sensed and seized by the provider or parent.<sup>25</sup>

**Tertiary intervention** - Includes individualized and intensive interventions to a very small number of children with persistent challenges.

**Transitions** - Changes from one activity or place to another. Transitions can happen during a day, within a program from one class or grade to another, or across programs.

**Two Generational Approach** - A strategy or plan that includes and has an impact on both the parent (and grandparents) and the child.

**Universal promotion** - Practices that ensure the promotion of social development of all children.

**Visual Aids (cues)** - Pictures or physical prompts that can be used to communicate clear expectations.<sup>26</sup>



ENDNOTES

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

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GOAL 3

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SECTION 5: SELF ASSESSMENT

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## RESOURCES

**For direct links to resources and documents see:**  
<http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-toolkit>

Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Development  
<http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/>

Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning  
<https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/sefel/>

Maryland Family Network  
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Maryland Learning Links  
<https://marylandlearninglinks.org/>

Robin McWilliams (Routines Based Interview)  
<http://robinmcwilliam3.wixsite.com/ram-group>

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<http://www.centerforresilientchildren.org/>

Remind  
<https://www.remind.com/>

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<https://library.carr.org/>

State Library Resource Center  
<http://www.slrc.info/>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act  
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10 Tips for Teaching English-Language Learners  
<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-english-language-learners-ayanna-cooper>

15 Tips and Strategies for Working with English Language Learners  
<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/>

Utah Education Network  
<http://www.uen.org/k12educator/ell/>

Everything ESL  
<http://www.everythingsl.net/in-service/>

WIDA  
<https://www.wida.us/standards/EarlyYears.aspx>

Head Start Markers of Progress  
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/dmop/en-us/>

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors  
<http://ap-od.org/>

Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders Self-Assessment Toolkit from Annie E. Casey Foundation  
<http://www.aecf.org/resources/engaging-parents-developing-leaders/>

NAEYC Family Engagement Self-Assessment Resources  
<https://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement/resources/self-assessment-checklist>

Johns Hopkins CTE Pinterest  
<https://www.pinterest.com/cteju/>