MOVING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INTO ACTION:
Promising Practices to Support Implementation in Early Learning Settings

JUNE 11, 2017
TODAY’S PRESENTERS

Melissa Dahlin, Research Associate
Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO)

Education Development Center (EDC)

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Preschool Development Grants, AEM Corporation
TODAY’S AGENDA

- Welcome!
- Small Group: Identifying Family Strengths
- States’ Family Engagement: Responsive Strategies
- Engagement that Works!
- Maryland’s Family Engagement Toolkit
- A Deeper Dive into Successful Engagement
- Reflections and Questions
FINDING FAMILY STRENGTHS
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT is...

- An approach, not a supplement or add-on
- A shared responsibility; everyone has a role
- Embedded program-wide
- Relationship-dependent
- Respectful of the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and activities of all families
- Mindful of diversity
- Responsive to student and family needs
- Continuous from birth into school age years
- Across home, early childhood settings, school, and community
- Reliant on adequate resources
Family Engagement Strategies:
A State Review
Where have we been headed?

Federally funded programs include family engagement

- Head Start (traditionally part of their standards)
- Preschool Development Grants: one of required quality standards
- Early Learning Challenge: a key section of grant
- Child Care Development Block Grant: expands the families’ access to consumer education and ways families access services
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Title 1
- IDEA: families have always been a vital component
Federal guidance supports states’ family engagement policies

- Federal Policy Statement
- National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement
- Family Engagement Frameworks
  - Dual Capacity Building Framework
  - Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework
  - Strengthening Families
Where have we been headed?

State and local response

- State-developed frameworks
- State designated departments and staffing
- Program standards that specify family engagement
  - QRIS
  - State-funded programs
  - Early learning standards and guidelines
- Family members included on advisory councils and committees
STATES HAVE MET THE CHALLENGE!
One state-approved agency within a community assures:

- Coordinated information campaign
- Coordinated eligibility determination
- Coordinated application for enrollment
- Matching enrollment based on preferences
Family Engagement Framework Principles:

- Develop systems that support family engagement
- Build welcoming and supportive environments
- Enhance communication with parents
- Include parents in decision making
# Washington: QRIS Standards

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Complete modified Strengthening Families Self-assessment (Director/Owner)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
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<td>Develop a Plan of Action based on Strengthening Families Self-assessment</td>
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<td>Provide evidence of continuous feedback and improvement (Plan of Action)</td>
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<td>Have a parenting support and education program in place (e.g. Incredible Years, Triple P Parenting, CSEFEL Parenting Modules, Parents as Teachers etc.)</td>
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<td>Provide information about community based programs available for parents in languages represented in the facility (e.g. community mental health, child nutrition, physical fitness, food banks, Child Find, medical/dental resources etc.)</td>
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<td>Evidence of transition plans/policies in place for changes in settings and providers</td>
<td>3 points</td>
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<td>Partner with parents to determine perception of child strengths and needs</td>
<td>2 points</td>
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1. Multiple opportunities for regular involvement with the program and its staff including placement, planning for individualization and evaluation related specifically to their child.

2. Families have multiple opportunities to participate in the child’s classroom program as they prefer and are able to do so.

3. Families are provided a range of opportunities outside of the classroom for participation, education, and enrichment as part of their child’s program as they prefer and are able to do so.

4. The program’s policies and practices promote support and respect for the home language, culture, and family composition of each child in ways that support the child’s health, learning, and social-emotional well-being.

5. Family members and members selected from the community participate in the program’s advisory council; the council has responsibility for recommending direction in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of the program.

6. All families are provided with opportunities to assist in evaluation of the program.
NEW JERSEY: STATE GUIDANCE

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles of administrators, teachers and teacher assistants and social services staff

Collaboration

• Keys to effective communication
• Role of the school in collaboration
• Home visits

Transition

• Activities to facilitate smooth transitions
• Roles of administrator, teacher and transition team

Evaluation

Annual surveys to determine successful strategies
Recommendations and Essential Practices:

- Policy
- Staffing
- Funding
- Educator Competency
- Research and Evaluation
- Tools and Products
- Community Connections and Relationships
IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS
Local level Strategies

- School and District: posters, websites, K registration, blogs, bus drivers, PTA
- Corporate and external partnerships
- Community partnerships: places of worship, Rotary, colleges, senior centers, food banks, pediatricians, community boards and councils,
- Single point of entry

State level strategies

- Webinars
- Recruitment plans
- Family surveys
- Monitoring
CONNECTICUT: COMMUNITY TEAMS

Local community teams develop and implement individualized outreach and recruitment plans.

- Systematic and community-coordinated approach to finding and enrolling families
- Ideas are shared across the community teams, developing a compendium of successful strategies
- Family leaders to reach other families
- Underlying principle: “go to families, don’t wait for families to come to us”
THINK—PAIR--SHARE

Pick one of these areas of family engagement:

• Family well-being
• Promote positive parent-child relationships
• Support families as life-long educators
• Support educational aspirations of the family
• Support families in transition
• Connect family to peers and community
• Create advocates and leaders

Talk about a strategy you’ve used that has been successful for engaging families.
Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Toolkit
The Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework puts forth a set of common goals for family engagement to be used across the Maryland early childhood system and within individual early care and education programs. These goals are realized by implementing family engagement strategies that focus on foundational areas like leadership and professional development as well as strategies that focus on the "points of impact" in early care and education settings. The successful implementation of the strategies promotes positive school readiness outcomes.
## Parent Involvement Becomes Family Engagement

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<tr>
<th>PARENT INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>FAMILY ENGAGEMENT</th>
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<td>Program/school leadership develops a statement on home-school partnership.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Parents participate in program/school events and activities offered by the program/school.</td>
<td>Families — in partnership with early childhood educators and program leadership — co-create opportunities for families to support their children’s learning.</td>
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<td>Parents attend parent-teacher conferences where they receive reports about their child’s progress.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>A designated staff person is assigned as the parent-liaison and is responsible for outreach to parents.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programs and schools are primary consumers of data on children.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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Family Engagement Toolkit

- Sections
  - Introduction and Involvement to Engagement
  - Seven Goals
  - Special topics impacting early childhood educators
  - Effective Practices
  - Self-Assessment
SECTION 2: GOAL 1

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Since we are talking about professional development, we should talk about what kind of training is most helpful for staff regarding family well-being. 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 Resources 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 Cafes.
- 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 must 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. 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 and validating their concerns. This often leads to more in-depth conversations where providers can continue to encourage family growth and development.

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 talking the parents that 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:
SECTION 2: GOAL 5

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. Social Stories help:

- 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

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.

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 accerate or adjust to new staff, a new environment, and other children.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
When we are working with families we may find that they are struggling with specific transitions. They might feel 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.

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.

Example of an meeting worksheet?

- 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
Section 2: Goal 5

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 local school system.

Educator Voice

At the George Washington Carver Judy Center, we provide two different transition events for families. The first transition event involves Preschool, 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 transitioning between daycares or different schools, we can see more consistent 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 child’s transition 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 transition 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 parent 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 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 sustain 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 of 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.

-Jacqueline Sparrow, Early Learning Specialist, St. Mary's County

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!
Self - Assessment

- Based on the Head Start Markers of Progress
  - Starting point - Implementing practices related to Framework goals and strategies
  - Progressing - Demonstrating practices that enhance Framework goals and strategies
  - Innovating - Implementing practices that are systemic, integrated and comprehensive
# Self – Assessment/Action Plan

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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Time Frame(s)</th>
<th>Measure(s) of Success</th>
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Resources

- [https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/](https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/) (English Family Engagement website)
- [https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/es/](https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/es/) (Spanish Family Engagement website)
- [https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=38](https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=38) (English training modules)
- [https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=39](https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=39) (Spanish training modules)
- [http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-toolkit](http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-toolkit) (Toolkit)
LET’S LOOK DEEPER

Use Maryland’s self-assessment’s program foundation and program impact areas to consider your state or program’s family engagement efforts towards your table’s goal. Share your results! Are you:

- At a starting point?
  - Progressing
  - Innovating?

Next, think about the strategies you identified for your specified goal before the Maryland presentation. Using the information from Maryland’s toolkit and self-assessment, what are ways to enhance or modify your approach?
Assessing your program

Strong Program Foundations  High Quality Impact Areas
Leadership
Professional Development
Environment
Family Partnerships
Teaching and Learning
Community Partnerships

Improved School Readiness Outcomes!
JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE!

WEBINARS

Strengthening Families™ through Early Childhood Education, Part 2: Cafe Conversations: Engaging Parents and Building Protective Factors
April 2017

In this webinar, Anna Lovejoy and Callin O’Connor from the Center for the Study of Social Policy return to provide an overview of the café approach and discuss the core components of effective cafés. They describe three café models that are related to Strengthening Families: Parent Café, Community Café and Caring Conversations. A recording of the webinar and presentation slides are available here.

Strengthening Families™ through Early Childhood Education, Part 1
February 2017

In this webinar, Callin O’Connor and Anna Lovejoy from the Center for the Study of Social Policy give an overview of Strengthening Families™, a program designed for any early childhood professional who develops family engagement programming or works directly with families. Learn about the Big Ideas behind the Strengthening

https://pdg.grads360.org/#/communities/family-engagement
FINAL REFLECTIONS

- Family engagement is hard work!
- It’s a community affair.
- It’s all about relationships.
- Successful plans require broad-stroke processes.
- Identify strategies to overcome barriers.
- Go to families, don’t expect them to come to you.
QUESTIONS?
CONTACT INFORMATION

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