MOVING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INTO ACTION:

Promising Practices to Support Implementation in Early Learning Settings

JUNE 11, 2017

TODAY'S PRESENTERS

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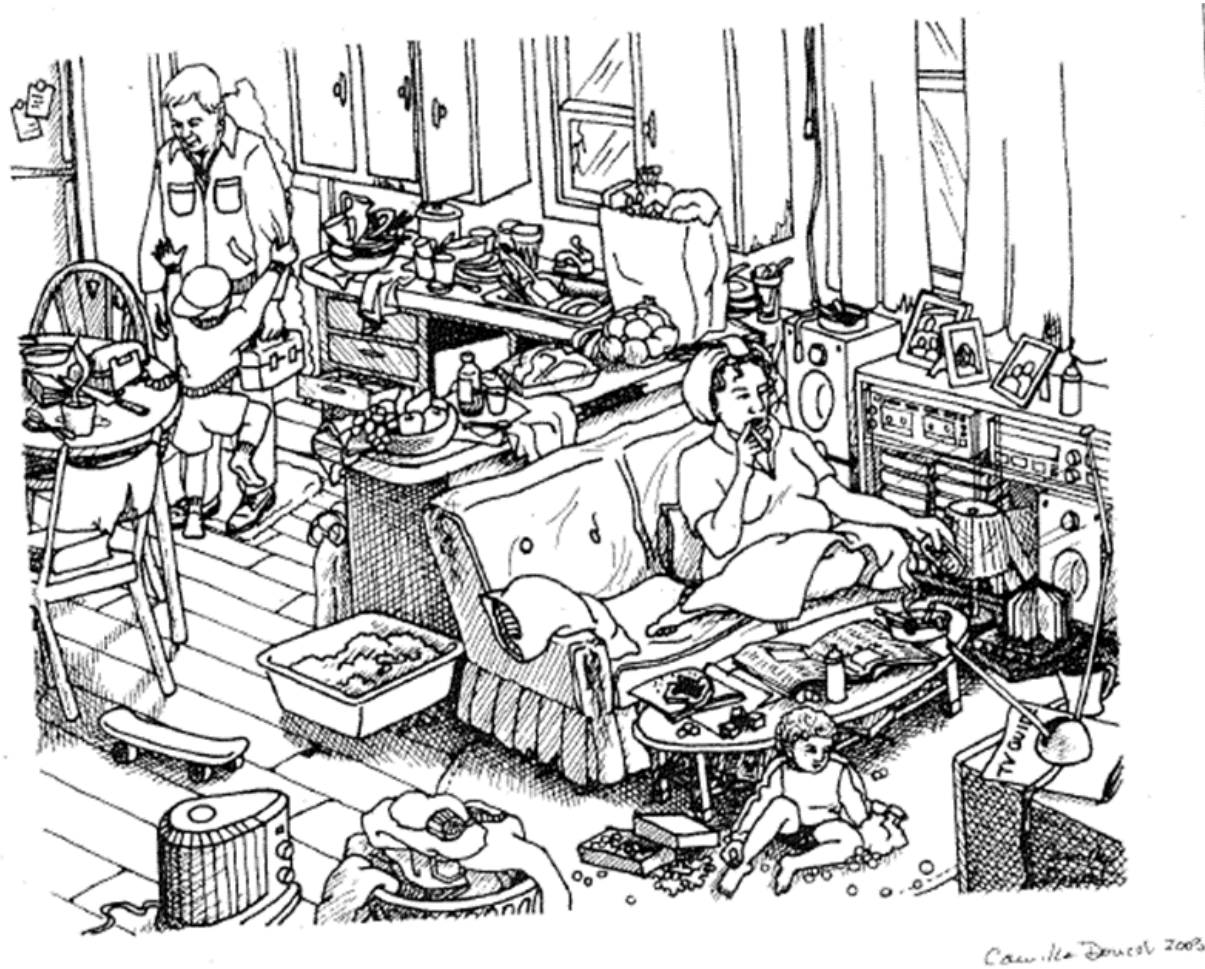Technical Assistance
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TODAY'S AGENDA

- 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
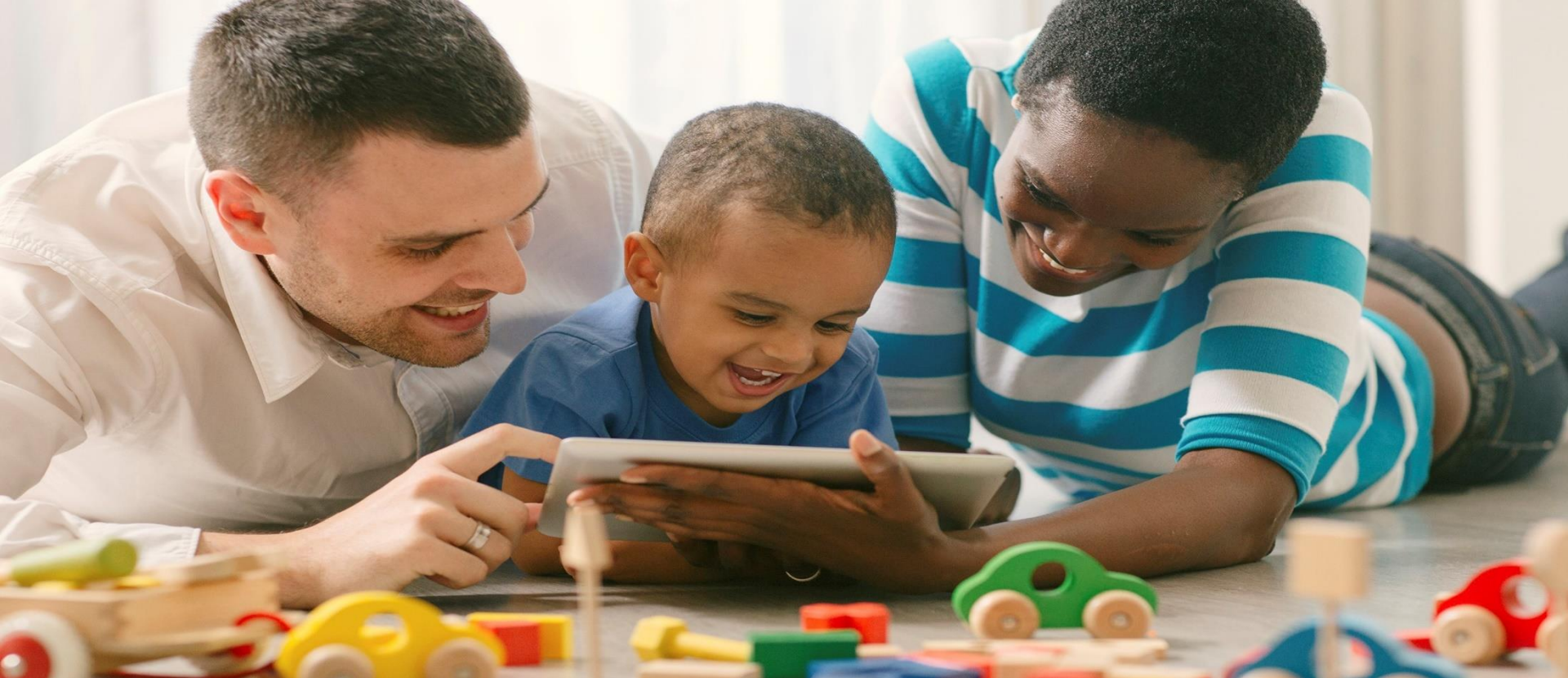
Family Engagement Strategies: A State Review

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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

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Where have we been headed?

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

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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!

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

LOUISIANA: COMMUNITY COORDINATION

One state-approved agency within a community assures:

- Coordinated information campaign

- Coordinated eligibility determination

- Coordinated application for enrollment

- Matching enrollment based on preferences

ILLINOIS: SYSTEMIC AND INTEGRATED

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

Component	Total Points
Complete modified Strengthening Families Self-assessment (Director/Owner)	1 point
Develop a Plan of Action based on Strengthening Families Self-assessment	1 point
Provide evidence of continuous feedback and improvement (Plan of Action)	1 point
Have a parenting support and education program in place (e.g. Incredible Years, Triple P Parenting, CSEFEL Parenting Modules, Parents as Teachers etc.)	1 point
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.)	1 point
Evidence of transition plans/policies in place for changes in settings and providers	3 points
Partner with parents to determine perception of child strengths and needs	2 points

MICHIGAN: EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

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

OHIO: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Recommendations and Essential Practices:

- Policy

- Staffing

- Funding

- Educator Competency

- Research and Evaluation

- Tools and Products

- Community Connections and Relationships

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS

VIRGINIA: RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

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"

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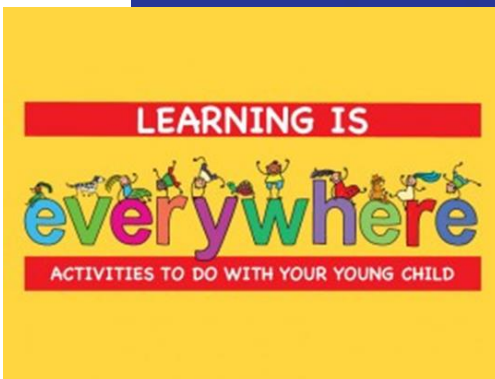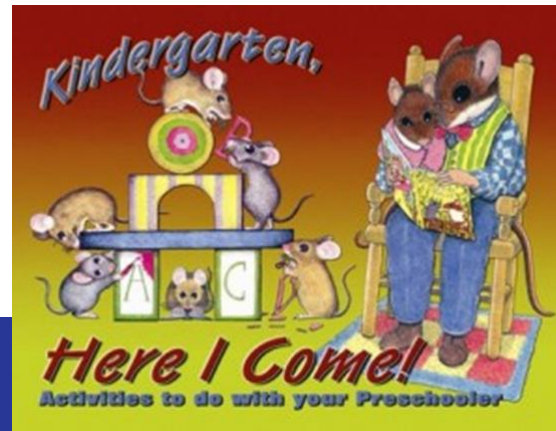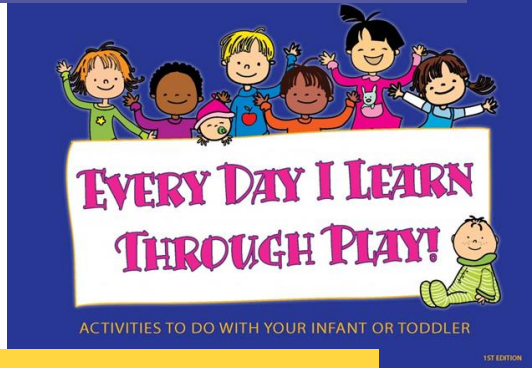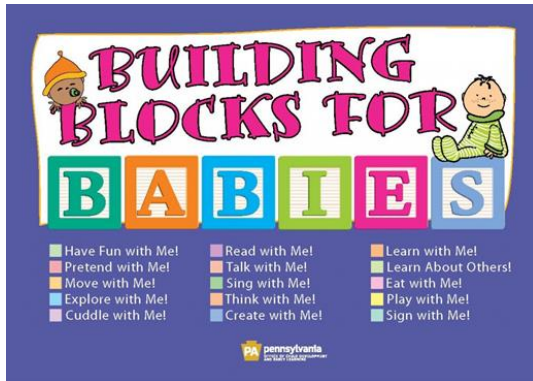
THINK—PAIR--SHARE

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.

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Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Toolkit

THE MARYLAND EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT GOALS

Family Well-Being

Promote Positive Parent-Child Relationships

Support Parents as Life-Long Educators

Support Educational Aspirations of the Family

Support Engagement in Transition

Connect Family to Peers and Community

Create Advocates and Leader

STRATEGIES

PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

Leadership

Professional Development

PROGRAM IMPACT AREAS

Environment
Family Partnerships
Teaching and Learning
Community Partnerships

SCHOOL READINESS OUTCOMES

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.

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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.

Family Engagement Toolkit

- Sections
  - Introduction and Involvement to Engagement
  - Seven Goals
  - Special topics impacting early childhood educators
  - Effective Practices
  - Self - Assessment

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.[1] 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:

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.[1] Social Stories help to:[2]

- 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.

Example of at the meeting worksheet[3]

- 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

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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.[4]

Learning Progress Form

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!

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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

Strategy	Indicator	Action Step	Resources	Person(s) Responsible	Time Frame(s)	Measure(s) of Success

Resources

- https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/ (English Family Engagement website)

- https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/family-engagement/es/ (Spanish Family Engagement website)

- https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=38 (English training modules)

- https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/onlineTraining/programCategory.cfm?ottype_id=39 (Spanish training modules)

- http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-toolkit (Toolkit)

- http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/4/final_md_technology_plan.pdf (Communication and Technology Plan)

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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?

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Assessing your program

Strong Program Foundations ➡ High Quality Impact Areas
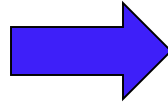
Leadership

Professional Development

Environment

Family Partnerships

Teaching and Learning

Community Partnerships
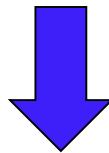
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FINAL REFLECTIONS

- 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.

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QUESTIONS?

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