



RESEARCH

Research has shown families engaged in their children's education increases the child's success rate. Increased involvement among families will lead to:

- Better grades and test scores
- Improved school readiness
- Better social skills and behavior
- Higher graduation rates
- Increases likelihood of pursuing higher education

—(Harvard Family Research Project, 2009)

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 serving young children. Family engagement means building relationships with families that support children's well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and the ongoing development of parents and children. Sustainable family engagement requires intentional practice being implemented in early care and learning settings and adequate resources, to ensure the use of meaningful and effective strategies that have the power to impact student learning and achievement.

—(Maryland Family Engagement Coalition, 2014)

Past family engagement research has focused primarily on parent-initiated behavior and on measuring tasks that parents perform either at the program setting or with their children in the home. These tasks are often referred to as "Parent Involvement" and can include (1) regular contact with teachers, (2) volunteering in the classroom, (3) planning or attending school activities or events, (4) chaperoning field trips, and (5) participating in fundraising activities. Although these activities can be positive, research suggests that the responsibility for parent involvement is placed on the parent and is insensitive to parent's time, financial or educational limitations. (NAEYC, *Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature*. 2009.) To be useful and meaningful, engagement should include strong program-family partnerships that are co-constructed by the programs and the families they serve, and are characterized by trust, shared values, ongoing communication, mutual respect, and attention to the family's needs. Meaningful family engagement emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships between families and childcare providers.

Family engagement is an important part of quality early care and education. Effective family engagement can support strong social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children. In particular low income families significantly benefit from family engagement practices when early education providers support them in times of need, link them to needed resources, help build their peer networks, increase their knowledge of child development, as well as providing avenues to enhance parenting practices. Family engagement occurs when there is an on-going two-way relationship between the parent and the childcare provider.

According to the **Head Start Family and Community Engagement Framework** they have identified best practices and comprehensive goals for meaningful and effective family engagement that serve as the foundation for this proposal. The tool kit includes a tab for each goal with suggested practices for each. These include:

- **Family Well-Being** – Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.
- **Positive Parent-Child Relationships** – Parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.

- ***Families as life-long Educators for their Child** – Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school and in their communities.*
- ***Families as Learners** – Parents and families advance their own interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goal.*
- ***Family Engagement in Transitions** – Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning as they transition to new learning environments – including other early learning environments, to Kindergarten and beyond.*
- ***Family Connections to Peers & Community** – Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational.*
- ***Families as advocates and leaders** - Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision making, program policy development, or in the community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.*

Correlating with the Head Start Family and Community Engagement framework is the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) **Code of Ethical Conduct** which includes ideals and principles for our interactions with and our work with families. It states that families are of primary importance in children's development, because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being. We need to acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development. Some of the key principles of the Code of Ethics include:

- Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child
- Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication
- Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal
- Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community
- Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts
- Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement