

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Taken from the, *Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades (May 5, 2016)*,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services U.S. Department of Education

The first step in systemically embedding effective family engagement in early childhood systems and programs is to establish a culture in which families are seen as essential partners in the systems and programs that serve their children. The Departments consider the following practice principles foundational to establishing a culture that values family engagement. The practice principles are drawn from our respective frameworks, and they are embedded in the recommendations that follow. Adopting these practice principles across systems and programs in a strategic and coordinated manner will result in more benefits to children and families.

1. Create continuity and consistency for children and families. Promote a vision for family engagement that is consistent across systems and programs, and that can set the stage for families' involvement in their children's development and education at all ages.

2. Value respectful and trusting relationships between families and professionals. Promote shared responsibility for children's healthy development, learning and wellness by valuing families' experiences and strengths, and providing opportunities for shared learning. Encourage two-way communication by welcoming information from families on all aspects of the child's life and development, including their culture, traditions, and home language.

3. Develop goal-oriented relationships with families that are linked to children's development and learning. Develop ongoing relationships centered on children's well-being and success. Jointly work with families to identify specific strategies that support children's development and learning at home and in the classroom and community.

4. Engage families around children's health, mental health, and social and emotional well-being. Engage families around children's development, learning, and wellness, including physical health, mental health, and social and emotional needs. Ensure that programs and families know about child development related to these areas and have access to the tools they need, including concrete strategies to promote child well-being at home and in the classroom. Ensure that families and staff are connected with relevant community partners, such as early childhood mental health consultants and children's medical homes, as needed.

5. Ensure that all family engagement opportunities are culturally and linguistically responsive. Ensure to the maximum extent possible, that the environment, children's curricula and learning, and all family engagement opportunities respect, reflect, and embrace families' cultures, are devoid of bias, and are linguistically accessible.

6. Build staff capacity to implement family engagement practice principles. Prioritize professional development opportunities that support staff to view parents as capable, competent partners. Strengthen staff's ability to form positive, goal-oriented relationships with all families. Develop professional capacity in working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including immigrant communities, and in partnering with families who have children with disabilities, special health care needs, or other unique needs.

7. Support families' connections and capabilities. Provide opportunities for families to build upon their knowledge and skills to foster children's development, learning and wellness; advocate for their child and family; share experiences and expertise with other families; and take on leadership and advocacy roles in early childhood systems and programs. Connect families to family organizations that support families of children with and without disabilities, special health care and mental health needs; parent to parent programs; child care resource and referral agencies; parent teacher associations; parent advisory councils; and community-based organizations that serve diverse families, including families of dual language learners.

8. Systemically embed effective family engagement strategies within early childhood systems and programs. Align, integrate and coordinate family engagement strategies in all aspects of programming, including but not limited to: involving families in governance; establishing positions that focus exclusively on family engagement; identifying specific family engagement responsibilities and professional development opportunities for all roles across systems and programs; providing families with multiple and diverse opportunities for engagement; and creating physical environments that are welcoming and culturally and linguistically responsive.

9. Develop strong relationships with community partners that support families. Establish formal partnerships with community partners, such as after-school programs, social service agencies, adult education programs, one stop career centers, medical homes, public housing authorities, and libraries, to promote family wellness and adult learning, and enhance children's learning and family stability. Invite the community to celebrations and other events in the school and programs.

10. Continuously learn and improve. Improve integrated and systemic family engagement practices by regularly collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of the practices, in order to guide decision-making and policy change and to inform technical assistance and professional development.

Implementing effective family engagement practices to promote positive child outcomes will require bold leadership and dedication from all institutions where children learn. The practice principles identified above are the foundation of the following recommendations at the State and local level. The recommendations are not an exhaustive list; rather, they are a selection of actions that can be taken to promote effective family engagement.



Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC)

907 Barra Row, Suites 102/103, Davidson, NC 28036

704-892-1321 • 800-962-6817 (*parent info line*) • www.ecac-parentcenter.org