



the
**Down East Partnership
for Children**

Building Blocks

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Partnership for Children
Program Newsletter

CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL, FAMILY RESOURCES, COORDINATED SUBSIDY

Building Family Engagement to Support Children

When asked, families often say they wish they knew more about what happens when their children are in child care or school and may wish they were more involved. School and child care teachers, directors and administrators often say they wish families were more involved in their children's learning and education. Everyone seems to want something more from each other. But what does "being involved" mean? And does it matter?

Being Involved is Family Engagement

Family engagement is described as meaningful communication between a child care or school and the families of the children attending the child care or school. Successful family engagement includes a commitment from both families and the school or child care. The family commits or promises to support their child's learning. The child care or school commits or promises to involve the family in their child's learning experiences.

In the past, family engagement focused on the parents or guardians. Today, most people believe that many different family members help children grow and learn. So successful family engagement includes not only parents but also other people in the family—sisters and brothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Also, in the past, family engagement was clear and simple. Involved families made sure their children went to school and got there on time. They helped with homework, attended parent-teacher conferences and volunteered for special

activities such as planning a party, going on field trips or raising money. While all of these are important things, most people now believe that effective family engagement is more complicated.

Today, family engagement means families, child care and schools working together in trusting and respectful relationships in order to help children be successful learners.

This issue of Building Blocks offers tips to help families and educators build successful family engagement.

Includes information adapted from Harvard Family Research Project, <http://www.hfrp.org/> and The Office of Child Care's National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/>

Why is family engagement important?

According to research—

Families who are engaged in their child's learning experiences in child care are more likely to be engaged in their child's learning when they go to school. School children whose families are engaged in their learning experiences in a positive way show improved performance through all grades. This is regardless of the age of the child or the family's ethnicity, income or education level.

Children with families who are actively engaged in their learning—

- Adjust to school easier
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills
- Show improved attitudes and behavior at school and at home
- Have advanced language and math skills
- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Graduate from high school and go on to higher education

Adapted from A New Wave of Evidence The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections of Student Achievement (2002) <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

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Helping families overcome barriers to becoming engaged

Family engagement is good for everyone: children, families, teachers and the child care or school. However, many families face difficulties or barriers that prevent them from becoming engaged in their child's early education experiences. Teachers and administrators also admit that getting families involved is difficult.

If all families are to be successfully engaged, teachers, schools and child care must help them overcome barriers that may keep them away.

Barriers that may keep families from being engaged...	To help overcome barrier...
Language or culture differences	Learn about and develop a friendly attitude toward other cultures. Demonstrate respect. Ask families to share their culture or language.
Printed materials not targeted to family's language, culture or understanding	Provide a variety of materials for families who don't speak English, do not read well or have a disability.
Feeling they're unwelcome	Create a welcoming setting and practice welcoming behavior. Make home visits to get to know the family. Be accepting of different family backgrounds, talents and needs. Provide activities and information for all families not just the ones who easily engage.
Feeling talked down to, talked at or blamed	Demonstrate respect. Focus on positive communication especially about the children. Make sure all information is clear, usable and linked to children's success.
Negative family attitude based on experience	Build trusting relationship by getting to know the family. Provide a welcoming, friendly and positive atmosphere. Encourage participation in little ways and praise any level of engagement.
Feeling overwhelmed, inadequate or unclear how to help child with learning	Work together to set learning goals for the child. Give families specific activities they can do. Ask follow-up questions and clear up any misunderstanding.
Belief that they don't have anything to offer	Get to know the family to determine strengths and ask for help based on strengths. Offer times and activities that work for them. Provide training if needed. Recognize all efforts.
Belief that they have no decision-making power	Create ways all families can be represented on decision-making committees. Include leaders from all income levels and ethnic groups on parent teams or committees. Offer training to help them represent all families.
Don't see teacher or school as a person or place to go to ask for help if needed	Create list of community resources (contact people and phone numbers) and make list easily available. Be willing to listen and make referrals. Practice confidentiality.
Little or no access to transportation	Be flexible and creative to meet family needs. Ask family for ideas that might work. Offer to visit the home or to send information home with a follow-up phone call. Pair with another parent who is willing to help.

Includes information adapted from School, Family, and Community Partnerships Your Handbook for Action (2002) by Joyce Epstein, Mavis Sanders, Beth Simon, Karen Salinas, Natalie Jansorn, Frances Van Voorhis

How Families Can Engage

So you want to be more engaged in your child's school or child care?

First please remember that you are your child's most important teacher. You know more about your child's likes, dislikes, needs and concerns than anyone. You are an equal partner in your child's education.

Second, ask your child's teacher how you can be more involved. If the teacher is unsure or needs fresh ideas, make some suggestions from the list below.

Third, demonstrate respect. Your goal is to develop a meaningful relationship so you and the teacher can work together to make sure your child has a positive learning experience.

- Visit the classroom to see how your child spends the day and interacts with other children.
- Make every effort to attend parent conferences and meetings. Reschedule conferences you can't attend and ask for feedback from missed meetings.
- Help plan and participate in open houses and workshops. Offer to contact other parents to encourage them to attend.
- Share information that will help the teacher plan for your child (examples: what your child's interests are, what is going on at home that might make learning hard, etc.)
- Communicate with the teacher regularly. Don't wait until there is a problem.
- Offer to share your culture or language with the children and staff. Teach them to greet your family and others in your language.

- Volunteer for tasks that can be done at home (examples: cut out activity materials, clean or repair books, toys or dress-up clothes, etc.)
- Volunteer to help in the classroom. You can read stories, play games, share a hobby, practice skills with flashcards, etc.
- Encourage the child care or school to create a family space where teachers and families can drop off or pick up materials, post information, highlight learning activities and meet other families.
- Ask for information or materials you can use at home to help your child develop and learn.
- Ask to participate on decision-making boards or committees. Encourage them to include families from diverse backgrounds.
- For families with school-age children, ask to be part of the school improvement committee to plan strategies to solve problems and improve academic performance
- Attend meetings about policies and budgets.
- Share information about resources in the community with other families.

Includes information adapted from:

PTA's National Standard for Family-School Partnership—What Parents Can Do, http://www.pta.org/topic_getting_involved.asp

California Parent Center Department of Child and Family Development College of Education, San Diego State University, <http://parent.sdsu.edu/aboutpi.htm#epstein>

Lolita's PIC's

Check out more information about family engagement in the DEPC Parent Information Center (PIC). Materials are available for both families and professionals.

FOR FAMILIES

Helping Kids Succeed in School talks about what families can do at home and in partnership with schools to improve children's academic performance and behavior. (DVD)

Preparing Your Child to Succeed helps families support children's learning styles and to motivate them to do their best. Also focuses on positive ways to support teachers. (DVD)

School Success Takes Teamwork shows families how to help children succeed at school. Covers issues such as communication, parent/teacher conferences, conflicts and complaints. (DVD)

National PTA Magazine has articles on family engagement and its importance to student success.

FOR PROFESSIONALS

Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs provides parent messages that can be used in newsletters, handouts, etc.

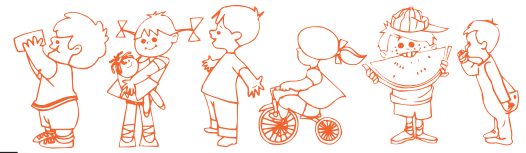
Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Education discusses family involvement programs in early education. Offers solutions to typical problems.

Tool Kit for School-Family-Community Partnerships is a collection of sample practices and resources that schools can use to create school-family-community partnerships.

Quick Notes: Inclusion Resources for Early Childhood Professionals discusses family engagement in child care with a special emphasis on children with special needs.

Books, DVDS and videos may be checked out free of charge. Brochures and pamphlets are available as supplies last. Parent Information Center hours: Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm. For more information, contact the PIC Specialist at 985-4300, ext 246

What Child Care Can Do To Encourage Family Engagement



Getting families engaged in their child's learning experiences helps build the foundation for school success. The following tips may help your families feel more welcome and will go a long way toward building good relationships and long-term family engagement.

Create a Welcoming Atmosphere

Make your families feel welcome when they come into the building. Hang friendly signs, display children's art, create a bright reception area and greet families with smiles and positive conversations.

Create Positive Home-School Communication

Make personal contact with families including friendly greetings and conversations. Send home positive, daily notes to help families feel involved in the child's day. Make a personal contact for negative or serious conversations. Use newsletters, email updates and handbooks to keep families informed and in touch.

Include Families in Learning Goals

Inform families about the overall learning goals and day-to-day activities and how they tie into learning and development. Provide activities and books to help connect learning at home and in child care.

Hold Open Houses

Open houses help families understand how their children spend their day and gives them a chance to meet their children's friends and families. Hold open houses at different times (lunch, end of the day, evening, on Saturday, etc.) to make it easier for working families to attend.

Offer Family Workshops

Offer workshops that focus on how families can help children learn and develop. Also offer life skills workshops such as GED or craft classes. Invite local experts to present the information and ask families to organize a potluck supper. Be sure to have staff on hand to provide child care if needed.

Celebrate All Families

For families who speak a language other than English, translate all written materials and have an interpreter available during meetings and workshops. Ask family members to share their culture or language with the children, other families and staff.

Hold Family Story Times

Each week, invite a family member (parent, aunt, grandpa, etc.) to read one of their child's favorite books. Be flexible

Family Engagement Brochures

Get Ready for the Parent-Teacher Conference

How to Work with Your Child's Teacher Is Your Home a Learning Place?

Parents Are Teachers, Too!

Ten Steps for Good Communication with Your Child's School

What to Do If Your Child is Having a Problem in School (focuses on working together)

with the schedule so families can choose a time that works for them.

Highlight a Child

Plan a time to highlight each child. Ask family members to share pictures of their child at different ages. Have a day for a special visit from family members.

Let Families Make Activity Suggestions

Provide a suggestion box so families can share ideas about classroom activities. When you use the suggestions, thank the person and highlight it as a "parent suggested activity!"

Help Families Find Help

Create a list of names and contact information for agencies and organizations that can help families in times of need. Be open to sharing the information and encouraging families to seek help if needed.



Discovery Park's Produce & Play Days

Wednesdays from 3:00 to 6:00 PM at The Down East Partnership for Children's Discovery Park.

Local farmers will be selling fruits and vegetables and there will be free family activities every week. More information is available on the DEPC Facebook page and website or call Melissa Lowry, Healthy Kids Coordinator at 985-4300.

Everyone is welcome!

What Schools Can Do To Encourage Family Engagement

Children whose families are engaged in their education are more likely to be successful. To encourage family engagement, teachers and schools can work to—

Understand families and help them with parenting skills and how to support learning at home.

- Hold parent meeting or workshops.
- Provide information about parenting, child development and learning
- Together, create goals for the child for the year. Focus on strengths and talents.
- Visit families at home or go to community activities where they might be present.

Build effective two-way communication.

- Offer communication skills training for staff, especially how to build relationships with people from different ethnic, cultural and income backgrounds.
- Make sure all written materials are clear and easily understood and translated for non-English speaking families.
- Highlight learning activities, daily school life, children's achievements and family involvement in newsletters and websites.
- Send home notes to keep families informed. Focus on the positive. Make a personal contact to discuss issues or concerns.
- Contact families in the way they prefer (phone, email, in person, etc.) and let them know when and how you can be reached.

Encourage and organize volunteers.

- Create a welcoming atmosphere and greet families in a friendly, positive way.
- Survey families about strengths and volunteer interests. Create task list matched with talent and work schedules. Include tasks for all families regardless of culture, language, income or educational level.
- Create a family space in the school or classroom where families can “check-in”, share information or drop off work. Include a space for handouts, books and learning materials.
- Celebrate volunteers. Send thank you notes, recognize them in public or in newsletter or website.

Create ways to INVOLVE families in their children's learning and activities.

- Give clear, practical information and the tools families need to support children's learning at home.
- Provide at-home learning activities that engage the family and make learning more meaningful. Include calendars of activities that the family can do at home or in the community.
- Provide opportunities for families to visit the school, observe classes, and provide feedback.

Include families in school decisions and develop parent leaders.

- Develop a plan to promote family-teacher partnerships.
- Ask families to participate on advisory boards, school improvement teams or planning committees.
- Host a “school walk-through” with staff and families to see the school the way families see it. Ask families for “how are we doing” feedback.

Collaborate with community organizations to provide resources for staff, families and children.

- Create a resource list of community organizations that families can go to for help if needed.
- Provide information about other learning activities such as scouts, summer camps, etc.
- Build partnerships with local industry, business, organizations and the faith community to develop resources that can enhance student learning and family engagement.

Includes information adapted from School, Family, and Community Partnerships Your Handbook for Action (2002) by Joyce Epstein, Mavis Sanders, Beth Simon, Karen Salinas, Natalie Jansorn, Frances Van Voorhis

NC Board Of Education Policy

The North Carolina State Board of Education understands that effective family engagement is necessary if all students are to graduate from high school ready for the future. In 2005 the Board adopted a Parent/Family Involvement Policy that identified eight family engagement areas that schools should promote. The following is a summary of those areas.

- Communication—Promote two-way meaningful communication between home and school.
- Parenting—Promote and support responsible parenting.
- Student Learning—Inform and involve parents in children's learning activities.
- Volunteering—Ensure that families are welcome in the school and seek their support and assistance.
- Advocacy and Decision-Making—Include parents as partners in decisions that affect children and families.
- Training—Assess parents' information needs and provide training based on those needs.
- Community Collaboration—Collaborate with the community to provide resources to strengthen school programs, families and student learning.
- Student Health—Promote health awareness, which is linked to student learning.

For more information, go to <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/parents/toolkit/guide.pdf>

facebook

Visit us on the web! • www.DEPC.org

We have updated our site to provide more resources and information for families!

YOU'LL FIND:

- A map of safe places to play in Nash & Edcombe counties
- New resources for parents of young children.
- Calendar of events – find out what's going on for parents and young children.
- Ways to get involved.
- Resources to know how to prepare your child for success in school.
- Opportunities to make a safe contribution online!



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<http://facebook.com/downeastpartnershipforchildren>

Teachers... *Do you want to help families find the community resources they need?*

Families... *Do you need to find local organizations or agencies that can help you?*

Family First can help with questions or concerns families may have about their children or family.

Contact Down East Partnership Family First at 985-4300.

Building Blocks is published by the Down East Partnership for Children. Please send your comments, suggestions or corrections to Wendy Price at wprice@depc.org or call 985-4300 ext. 202. DEPC provides all services in an unbiased manner with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, handicap and national origin.

Down East Partnership for Children

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