

GOAL 1

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING

Maryland's vision for family engagement is a two-generation strategy. Families are the key to a child's early development and learning. A goal of family engagement initiatives must support family well-being. Maryland's family engagement initiatives and the family engagement practices of early care and education providers should promote the safety, health, and financial security of families so they may successfully parent their young children.



TWO GENERATIONAL APPROACH

A focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of children and their parents together. For more information on the two generational approach, see the Resource section.

It is necessary to be aware of family concerns, priorities, and resources because this helps us better support them. For example, you may have attempted to reach out to a parent regarding the child's behavior, only to leave the conversation with several unresolved issues. Perhaps the parent was even dismissive about your concerns. When you met with the parent, you discovered that the family was going through a difficult move or was struggling financially. Maybe the parents were not dismissive of your concerns for the child but, at the time, had other priorities. To effectively work together, we have to be aware of each other's concerns and priorities. When this happens, not only do parents feel validated but we are establishing a give-and-take relationship with families that will lead to improved outcomes for all.



CPR - Concerns Priorities Resources

To effectively partner and build relationships with families, we must be aware of and validate their concerns, priorities and resources.

These sound like some pretty lofty goals, right? However, sometimes it is the simple things that we can embed into our programs and our interactions with families that really give families the support they need.



FAMILY VOICE

"Being homeless a few short years ago I got into the routine of bringing my children into the library each day. One day before we got to the library, Miss Sue (from the check-out desk) was walking down the street on her lunch break. She greeted us saying, "Hello, how are you? Will we see you in the library later today?" "She talked to us as if we were any other family that goes to the library. That conversation was a turning point in my life. I began to think of myself in a more optimistic and confident way. In time, I was able to get out of a troubled marriage and move into an apartment with my children."

- Parent, Library Cafe, Carroll County Public Library

FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

As stated before, family wellbeing is critical to children's success. However, recognizing when families need assistance and knowing how to approach a family can be difficult. Programs need to have systems and supports in place that focus on high-quality professional development, continuous improvement, program environment and community partnerships to ensure they are supporting a family's well-being and providing them with appropriate resources. What does all that mean? Programs that are invested in improving a family's well-being will have specific policies and procedures in place to provide professional development opportunities in this area. Also, policies regarding community partnerships will be necessary to support the program as they help families meet their individual goals.

For example, programs that are accredited by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) collaborate with the community and use community resources to strengthen programs, promote family and child learning, and address the needs of families. A unique aspect of Maryland's early care and education system is the presence of Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Family Education Centers (Judy Centers). Maryland's Judy Centers are another great model for community partnerships. It is through these partnerships that Judy Centers are able to offer services or parent trainings that are designed to meet the specific needs of parents they are serving.

For more information on MSDE Accreditation and the Judy Centers, please see the Resources section.

EDUCATOR VOICE

The Charles County Judy Center has numerous useful and reliable community partners; however, the University of Maryland Extension partnership has strengthened our Judy Center in five of the 12 component areas the Judy Centers must meet. The Maryland Extension teaches nutrition lessons to Judy Center children but also provides professional development to our teaching staff as well as parent trainings. Parent trainings are always at times that are convenient to our working Judy Center parents. The Maryland Extension can always be counted on to offer an

activity for our family nights throughout the year as well. Families always enjoy the activities and the food samples. When we discuss and plan take home projects, the Maryland Extension provides free materials that can be incorporated into a developmentally appropriate parent and child home activity. This partnership as well as many others helps to provide an array of services to our families.

- Charles County Judy Center

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE'S JUDY CENTERS

Judy Centers are located at or near Title I schools, and provide access to high quality early childhood education programs, as well as comprehensive family support services. Judy Centers serve families with children birth through five years of age that live in designated Title I school zones. The goal of these Centers is to support school readiness. Judy Centers are unique because they promote school readiness through collaboration with community - based agencies, organizations, and businesses. This integrated approach promotes program and service delivery that is conveniently located under one roof at or near the schools, ensuring that young children who may begin school at a **deficit** are given opportunities to start their formal education on a level playing field with their peers. The focus on family wellbeing (Goal 1) and an Adult Education Component (Goal 4) are key aspects of the Judy Center model. Judy Centers must meet 12 Component Standards that are deemed essential to children's school readiness. Component V is Family Involvement. The Judy Center's role in family involvement is centered on the family's ability to participate in and support their child's early learning. Supporting positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2), families as lifelong educators (Goal 3), and family engagement in transitions (Goal 5) is accomplished through a host of different activities that may include Parent Cafés, programs for dads and other significant men in the lives of children, playgroups, puppet and children's theaters, story time, and family field trips. Activities and events are focused on the seven **domains of learning** used to assess school readiness when children enter kindergarten. Family activities provide social networking opportunities that connect parents and caregivers to their peers and community (Goal 6) and support family empowerment and child advocacy (Goal 7) through event planning, volunteer opportunities, and membership on Judy Center Partnership Steering Committees. The family engagement services provided at a Judy Center depend on the collaboration of all the partners and the specific needs of the children and families. Judy Center staff communicates on an ongoing basis with parents through face-to-face contact, home visiting, regularly published newsletters that include calendars of events, flyers and brochures that include information about their programs and services, and many have websites. There are currently 51 Judy Centers located throughout Maryland.



Make an Immediate Impact on a Child's Life

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:

Bedtime Conversations:

- Tell me more about bedtime.
- How does your child know that it is time for him to go to bed?
- What happens first?
- So when you tell him it is time for bed, what is the first thing that she does?
- What is everyone else in the house doing at this time?
- Who usually helps your child get ready for bed?
- If you have stairs to go up, how does your child get up the stairs?
- How does tooth brushing go?
- How does dressing/undressing go?
- Does your child have any favorite books or songs that you read/sing prior to bed?
- Does your child sleep in a crib or a bed?
- Does your child sleep in his own room, or does he share with someone else?
- Does your child have a favorite toy, blanket or pacifier that she uses to help her fall asleep?
- Once your child is in bed, does she stay in bed?
- If not, tell me more about what it looks like when he is getting out of bed?
- Does he leave his room?
- Once your child is asleep, does he wake up again during the night?

Once you have exhausted all of your questions, identify those things that the parent has sounded concerned about, or things that sound to you like it is a concern. Make a list of these things, and ask the parent if they agree. Also ask the parent, if they had to choose one thing they would like to focus on, what would it be? After this is identified, then together with the family, number in order of priority the other items. This will help to identify if it is sleep related issues, routine related issues, or behavioral issues. That should then point you in a direction for where to go next.

Contributed by Mary Hendricks, M.S. Certified RBI Trainer.

Special Educators, who are certified in the use the **Routines Based Interview** (RBI) approach, help families with identifying what works well and what challenges they have within their daily routine. This method helps to determine the routines in which to embed interventions and learning opportunities. For more information on RBIs, see the Resource Section.

Some programs use home visits or parent conferences to discuss family concerns and needs and then identify appropriate resources. Many times, families are not aware of the supports and resources that are available within their family, their neighborhood, and the larger community. The **Eco-Map**, developed by Robin McWilliam, is a tool that can be used to help identify these resources for the family. Providers can use this tool to gain additional information about the family and identify the family's formal and informal supports.

WHAT IS AN ECO-MAP?

An Eco-map is a graphical representation that shows all of the systems at play in an individual's life. Ann Hartman developed these ecological maps, or eco maps, in 1975 as a means of depicting the ecological system that encompasses a family or individual (Hartman, 1995). (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eco-map).

Robin McWilliam, Ph.D., began using eco-maps as a component of his Routines Based Intervention approach. In his article *Understanding the Family Ecology* (2001), Dr. McWilliam calls the eco-map the "most important activity of the intake visit". It provides the team with the family's "perceived informal, formal and immediate supports."

The team member explains to the parent that they want to get an idea of all of the people involved in the family's life in order to know where they might need additional information. The team members begin by asking about all of the people living in the house with the child. Questions are asked so as not to make any assumptions. The question may be posed as, "Who else besides you and your child live in the house?" The names of the people living in the house are recorded in a box or a circle in the center of the paper.

Once the members of the home are recorded, the team member asks about other people involved in the child and family's life. It is important to be sure that you are clear that this is about the entire family. Specific questions about relatives and friends are phrased in a sensitive manner, such as "Do you and your child's father have family that live close by?" Once family is established ask, "How often do you see them/talk to them?" Other areas explored are the parent's friends, places of work, and regular weekend activities. You might ask if there are special people in their lives from any of those activities. Questions are asked about the child's service providers, health care providers, support groups and community activities. You might ask about the relationship with these professionals by saying "Can you talk easily with them?" or "Do you like them?"

As the parent is talking, you are determining based on the amount of time they see or talk to, as well as how they are describing the relationships, whether these are sources of stressors or support. This is indicated on the eco-map by thick lines, thin lines and broken lines.

An eco-map should not take any longer than 10 minutes. It is a way for the team working with the child to get a good picture of the support that the family has, as well as supports that the team may need to help the family to access.

The eco-map ends with the provider asking the question, "If you have news to share, whether it is good news or bad news, who is the first person you call?" The team member then thanks the family and once again explains that the information will be helpful as they assist the child and the family during the intervention.

For more information on Eco-maps, see the Resource section.

Contributed by Mary Hendricks, M.S. Certified RBI Trainer.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

Many programs develop contracts or agreements with other community agencies to enhance or expand their services and meet families' needs. When early learning programs and other community organizations share parents' concerns and interests, partnerships will develop that can enhance opportunities, including training, for families.

An example of this would be the Local Child Care Resource Centers. They collaborate with various programs and agencies to ensure that educators, providers and families are getting needed training and information. For more information on your Local Child Care Resource Center, see the Resource Section.

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)**

A MOU is a formal agreement between two or more parties. Companies and organizations can use MOUs to establish official partnerships. MOUs are not legally binding but they carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect. An MOU will outline the responsibilities of each agency for their roles in how they will each serve children, families and staff.

**EDUCATOR VOICE**

In Early Head Start, the family engagement practices that support family wellbeing are provided by the Family Services Coordinator and by teacher led classroom experiences. Parents share ideas that can help families raise strong, happy children by attending Parent Cafés. The March of Dimes Mama and Baby Bus comes monthly to educate parents about health services for their families and provide screenings. Parents have daily opportunities to volunteer in their child's classroom. During this time, parents are involved and learn how to understand and address the children. They also gain understanding about how caregivers provide growth in physical, behavioral, social, and cognitive areas.

- Pre-K teacher, Centro Nia, Takoma Park

MARYLAND CHILD CARE RESOURCE NETWORK

The Maryland Child Care Resource Network is administered by Maryland Family Network and began over 25 years ago with three pilot programs. Today, this Network continues to provide professional development and technical assistance services to child care providers, as well as resource and referral services to families. Consisting of 12 regionally located Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs), the Network serves all licensed and registered child care providers within the State of Maryland. Through a comprehensive and systematic approach, the Network works to ensure that child care programs have access to the resources and supports needed to improve the quality of care for children birth to 5 years. With professional development, child care providers are offered a series of high-quality training workshops, conferences, and other opportunities to increase their knowledge base and build new skills and strategies. These opportunities are aligned with local initiatives and national standards and are based on adult learning principles to ensure providers are able to implement the knowledge and strategies learned. Research has shown that training is not enough to change behaviors so the CCRCs also provide comprehensive technical assistance services. These coaching and mentoring opportunities assist providers in implementing developmentally appropriate and research-based practices which work to ensure that all children have access to high-quality care and the opportunities necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. Technical assistance is provided in one-on-one and group settings at the CCRC, the child care program, and virtually (by phone, email, and webinar) based on the identified and expressed needs of the child care providers and program. Additionally, the Maryland Child Care Resource Network provides a free resource and referral service to families called LOCATE: Child Care. Families may call the community line and speak to a referral specialist who will assist the family in understanding high-quality child care (what it is and how to identify it), connect families to resources, and assist in identifying child care programs that meet the expressed needs of the family. The referral specialists search an extensive database of all licensed/registered child care programs to help families find the care that meets their needs, such as location, hours, and cost. LOCATE: Child Care Assist is a website which families may utilize to search for child care with criteria determined by the family and accessing the same extensive database. For families seeking care for children with special needs, the referral specialists provide additional support in finding child care such as contacting child care programs to determine if there are openings.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

The family's wellbeing has a direct impact on the child and how their behavior may influence the classroom. Because of this, teachers and providers may be the first to recognize when a family may be dealing with challenges. Teachers may not know what the family is experiencing all the time but they often notice changes in the child or even the family's routine that may indicate that there is a concern. For instance, teachers may notice changes in:

- Attendance
- Health
- Mood
- Schedule
- Interests
- Eating habits
- Family situation

When teachers and providers notice these changes, they should take the time to talk with the family and identify the problem. They may be able to help the family problem solve or give them the resources they may need.

SCENARIO

Charles is a three-year-old boy who has been attending your program for just over a year. Lately, Charles has not been coming to your program as regularly as he did in the beginning, and when he does arrive, it is in the middle of the morning circle time. Sometimes, your assistant teacher has to give him breakfast when he arrives, so he misses a lot of the activities and interactions during that time. You barely even have a chance to wave to Charles' dad when he drops him off. You also notice that Charles has been losing his temper more often and he does not seem to want to participate in quiet activities anymore, preferring to build towers in the block area and then knock them down. You have tried to spend some individual time reading and talking to Charles, but he seems anxious and does not want to participate.

You have noticed many changes in Charles recently and you realize something must be going on. You arrange to have your assistant handle circle time so you can walk out with Charles's dad after drop off to have a chance to talk with him. You tell him that Charles seems to be on a new schedule, and ask if there is a reason that the schedule has changed. He tells you that Charles's mom lost her job, so now she is taking training classes that require her to travel much further away from home. Charles' dad now has to get all three of the children to school before he gets to his own job and many times the children do not have time to eat breakfast before they have to rush out the door.

Charles is dealing with changes or challenges to family wellbeing in several areas:

- **Financial Security** – Charles's mom lost her job so they are bringing in less income while she takes training classes.

- **Mental Health** – Charles is dealing with changes to his schedule and to the absence of his primary caregiver. Charles is acting out in response to the stressful situation.
- **Food security** – While Charles's family may be able to provide meals and food, they have not yet worked out an adequate morning schedule to allow Charles time to eat. Charles is hungry by the time he gets to your program.

By taking all of these factors into consideration, you will be better able to support Charles and his family through this stressful time. You might suggest to Charles' dad that if he can get him to your program 30 minutes earlier, Charles can have breakfast with his friends. This strategy can help alleviate stress at home and also provide a more consistent meal time for Charles.

Charles's parents now see you as a source of support instead of feeling guilty for being late. By helping to reduce the burden or stress related to security, health and safety, you help them focus on positive parenting strategies.

EDUCATOR VOICE

"During our Professional Development, we are always told that we need to understand our parents' priorities. We don't know what they are experiencing and our priorities may be different. As a teacher, this has helped me to be more aware as I'm working with my children and families. I look and listen for clues that something may be different. For example, when a parent picked up her child, I noticed that her car was packed full of clothes and furniture. I spoke to the Family Service Worker, who had a relationship with the family. We were able to help the family with housing and food and not only did I know the family was safe, but I knew the child would be able to come to school rested, fed and ready to learn."

-Teacher, Howard County Head Start

FAMILY VOICE

"When my child has been sick, the staff have checked on her and also provided helpful information to help her feel better. It leaves a good feeling to know the staff cares about our well-being."

-Parent, Greenbelt Children's Center, Prince George's County

REFLECTION



Many early childhood educators and providers have no idea of the extent of the impact they have on families and that it all starts with relationships. Taking the time to simply check in with a family and make them feel welcome is the start of a relationship that can make a significant difference in that family's life.



GOAL 2

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENT - CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Research clearly documents the link between competent parenting, strong parent-child bonds, and positive school readiness outcomes. Supporting this begins by developing warm, nurturing relationships among adults, including between staff members, and between staff and parents and other adult family members.

Promoting positive parent child relationships seems like an overwhelming task. What does that mean and how as providers and teachers can we help a family? What we often don't realize is that by working with children and families, providers are doing this already.

Remember CPR from the first goal? When we recognize parents' **C**oncerns, **P**riorities and **R**esources, we are supporting them in their relationships with their children. For providers, it is important to remember that this relationship starts early, even before birth, and is often when parents need even more support. It is this support that gives families the tools to better engage their children emotionally and **cognitively** by being caring, nurturing, and responsive through actions and words. This in turn gives children the confidence, the motivation and the support they need to be successful in school.

Children entering kindergarten without the social and behavioral skills needed to be successful may face long term effects. By the 4th grade, these children are¹:

- Up to 80% more likely to be retained in their grade.
- Up to 80% more likely to receive services and supports through an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or a 504 Plan.
- Up to 7 times more likely to be suspended or expelled at least once.

By promoting nurturing relationships between family members and caregivers and children, children are provided with a strong foundation to help them enter school fully prepared with the critical skills necessary to be successful.

When children have a secure **attachment** to their families or parents, they are more likely to get along with adults and peers, have increased academic performance, and have higher self-esteem. This is also what contributes to a child's **resiliency**. When someone is resilient, they are able to identify problems, find ways to address challenges and recover quickly and move on. A resilient person will have many protective factors – characteristics, people and supports that help a person get through tough times².

PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Protective factors are circumstances or characteristics that can help reduce or eliminate risks families face to the health and wellbeing of their children and family. Protective factors help parents find and use resources, supports, or strategies to help them effectively cope, even in stressful times.³

As educators, we want children to develop protective factors and characteristics. When we effectively support our families, we are building their protective factors. The Center for the Study of Social Policy developed the Protective Factors Framework as part of their Strengthening Families Approach⁴. The protective factors include:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PARENT CAFÉS

Child care is a diverse system, mostly offered by private individuals, programs and organizations and paid for directly by families. Because the system must be so responsive to the needs of working parents and adults in school who have young children—some of the busiest people—child care providers report that supporting children's primary caregivers by offering parent engagement activities can be challenging. One promising approach being implemented through Maryland's Child Care Resource and Referral Centers (CCRCs) is the Strengthening Families Parent Cafés. These are guided conversations designed to share the collective knowledge of families and build a network of community support among them. These events promote family wellbeing (Goal 1) and connect families to their peers and to the community (Goal 6) by fostering social connections and parental resilience. Parent Cafés can support the development of families as leaders and child advocates (Goal 7) by engaging parents, child care professionals, and other community members in conversations about the needs of families, how to meet those needs, and the role each neighbor can play in strengthening families and communities. In Maryland, staff members from the CCRC network have been trained as Facilitators to conduct Parent Cafés for parents and providers of children from birth to age five, based on the five protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. During a Parent Café, a group of 20-30 parents and other community members take seats, five at a table, set café-style. A unique question is discussed at each table for approximately 20 minutes. Then participants move to another table, where the Table Host presents the question, brings the group up-to-date on what

the last group discussed, and facilitates the conversation about the question available at that table. Participants visit at least three different tables. The process concludes with a list of themes identified by the participants and of next steps for future Cafés. The group may come up with some resources that meet identified needs, ideas or approaches that respond to common concerns, decide on a specific topic for the next discussion, or identify a speaker to invite to their next Café to address something they would like to know more about. In this way, Parent Café conversations harness community knowledge and address specific needs. Child care providers who facilitate Cafés report that the experience helps them understand what parents are facing and get useful ideas about how their programs can support families whose children are in their care. For more information about Parent Cafés, see the Resource section.



FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Promoting parent-child relationships is essential to any early childhood program and family serving agency. Encouraging positive relationships in early child care programs start with program leadership that understands and emphasizes the importance of strong nurturing relationships among children, families and staff.

Programs that are accredited by the Maryland State Department of Education follow specific criteria to promote and model positive interactions with adults and children. By addressing supportive relationships in policies and procedures, its significance is highlighted; ensuring staff make it a priority and intentionally model appropriate working relationships as well as professional relationships with parents. This is the first step to promoting positive parent-child relationships. For more information on MSDE Accreditation, see the Resource section.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To support parent-child relationships, it is crucial to understand that families' experiences and cultural differences impact parent and child relationships. Additionally, staff need to be aware of their own backgrounds, knowledge, and biases and how that impacts working with children and families. The following training topics address these concerns and help to prepare staff to work with all families:

- Relationship building that is grounded in cross-cultural responsiveness and strengths-based perspectives.
- Reflecting on daily practices and personal experiences to increase self-awareness and effective relationship-building with families.
- Professional ethics in the areas of confidentiality, boundaries, and self-determination.
- Engaging fathers; how mental health and wellness affects families; trauma and its effect on relationships; communication styles; and relationship building.

The Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) program follows the pyramid model which has four levels – nurturing relationships, supportive environments, social emotional practices, and targeted intervention techniques. The base of the pyramid addresses an effective workforce and positive relationships as being the foundation for social and emotional development for children. This helps providers understand both the importance of relationships with others and how our own experiences impact our work with children and families. This is essential to understanding how to promote positive relationships with families. For more information on SEFEL, see the Resource section.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING (SEFEL)

SEFEL is a nationally recognized framework of evidence-based practices that support the social and emotional development and school readiness of children birth through age five. In 2012, twenty-two of twenty-four school systems in Maryland used the SEFEL framework. The SEFEL Pyramid Model is organized around universal promotion, secondary prevention, and tertiary intervention practices that can be incorporated into everyday routines and relationships.

- **Universal promotion** includes practices that ensure the promotion of social development of all children.
- **Secondary prevention** includes targeted supports for children who are at risk of challenging behaviors.
- **Tertiary intervention** includes individualized and intensive interventions to the very small number of children with persistent challenges.
- A competent, confident workforce of early childhood educators is the foundation of the SEFEL Teaching Pyramid.

FAMILY VOICE

Our early care program promotes positive parent-child relationships and offers positive parenting classes and Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) parent modules. Every week we were encouraged to do the activities from the book. This changed my view on my child's education. Knowing how he learned opened my eyes and helped me to understand when he was having trouble learning something new.

- Parent, Union Baptist Head Start, Baltimore City



IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

To support positive parent-child relationships, staff must first establish a relationship with the family. Once the relationship is established, families will be more engaged in their child's program and their education. Programs can focus on relationship building by modeling open communication between staff, families and children and by sharing information with families about the benefits of strong relationships and the importance of early bonding. The program environment can reflect that sense of partnership. Maintaining and promoting the open-door policy, encouraging families to actively participate in the program, and providing resources that make families feel welcome and valued as partners in their child's education will go a long way in building these positive relationships.

Remember that your relationships will look different with every family. Differences in needs, schedules, personalities and responsibilities will impact how families and providers interact with one another. You may have families that are very engaged with the program and volunteer on a regular basis, but this may not be the case for every parent or family. It is important not to judge that family and assume they are not interested in their child's education. They may have supports from family and friends or feel comfortable with their child's progress. As providers, keeping the lines of communication open and checking in with families is a supportive family engagement practice that lets parents know we are here to support them when they need us. Consider whether your program is providing opportunities for partnership to meet the scheduling needs of all of your families.

FAMILY VOICE

As a single mom, I was never able to fully participate in the activities that were offered at the school. I had to work during the day and had other things that I had to do when I got home at night. I always talked to my son about the importance of education and staying on top of him about his schoolwork – I may have even been a little hard on him – but I wanted him to know how important it was. Just because I couldn't be there all the time didn't mean I wasn't as interested. I felt like the moms who could participate in all of the events or volunteer at the school or go to all the PTA meetings were favored sometimes. The teachers that I remember most were the ones who took the time to send an occasional email or call me to tell me how my son was doing or just to see if there was anything I needed. When he was younger, I would ask for things that I could do with him at home since he didn't have a lot of homework then. This made me feel like we were working together as a team.

- Parent, St. Mary's County

TECH TIP

Strong family engagement begins with communication, and today's families often use technology as their preferred mode for staying in touch. In the United States, 92% of all people aged 18-34, the age-group most likely to have children in care, own a smartphone⁵. Among families below the federal poverty-level, 91% have access to internet, with nearly a third of those only accessing information through mobile technology⁶. With so many of the families we are serving using web-based technologies, in particular mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, family-focused child care providers must have familiarity with these tools.

Luckily, there are many low or no-cost tools available to make communication between families and child care providers easy, organized, efficient, and secure. For example, WhatsApp allows you to send text messages and make phone calls using the internet – called Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP) – for free without using your text, or phone minutes on your mobile device (WhatsApp messages may impact plan data use). WhatsApp is available for iPhones, iPod Touch, and iPads; all Android devices; and over an internet connected computer.

WhatsApp is a great way to communicate with families. Here's what you need to do:

- Install WhatsApp on your device and ensure it is installed on the family's device, too. We suggest downloading the installation directions from the WhatsApp website to distribute to families along with your WhatsApp username.
- When families add you, or you add them, via searching for their username, you will be able to send text messages, files, and make phone calls wherever you have internet access. If you are on Wifi, this doesn't cost you any data minutes either!

The other advantage is you can do group chats – being able to talk with a number of families, family members, or colleagues all at once. Think about it – you could have a family outreach session where everyone is sharing tips on best practices right from your phone!

The other great feature about this tool is WhatsApp allows you to set your privacy settings, so the families with whom you are communicating do not see your actual phone number, and the messages they send you are kept separate from your personal communications. This helps you keep boundaries, protect your privacy, and be in control of the access the parent has to you.

Chris Swanson, Ed.D., Senior Director for Quality Care and Education & Associate Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Center for Technology in Education

FAMILY VOICE

Our child care provider promotes my relationship with my child and my family. They have provided me with a private room to nurse my daughter at lunch time, every day. If I am not nursing, I have enough room to play with my daughter and spend time with her and her providers. This has been critical to my success in returning back to work. We also receive texts, videos, and pictures on a weekly basis and the communication lines are always open, which makes me feel comfortable that I am a part of my child's first moments even though I am at work.

- Wonder Friends Learning Center, Baltimore County



FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When programs fully understand the importance of the parent-child relationship and promote it, they will recognize certain characteristics in their children and families, such as:

- Children will display open communication between parents and providers
- Parents and families will identify and attend to a child's needs quickly
- Children will seek help from their parent or provider
- Families will establish rules or guidelines for behavior

But, what happens when families are experiencing challenging behaviors? This is a common concern and many times, providers and families are experiencing these concerns together. That is why it is even more important to work together to support the family and the child.

Children being suspended or expelled from early childhood programs is a problem that impacts the relationship between the parent and the program, and can also lead to a negative view of school that children and families carry with them throughout the rest of their lives. Additionally, parents may have difficulty finding adequate alternate care for their child, which adds to their stress.

There are no easy answers when it comes to challenging behaviors, but there are things that providers can do to help support families when experiencing challenging behaviors.

- Be sure to talk with the family as soon as there is a concern. Often, behaviors may have resulted from a change in the home or a disruption to their routine. Families and providers can work together to come up with strategies and solutions. Sometimes, knowledge of the situation

or the circumstances gives providers the information to be more understanding and empathetic to the behavior.

- Do not be judgmental. Providers know about best practices, child development and developmentally appropriate practices and we often assume our parents know these things, too. Many times, they do not and are learning as well. By listening to them and offering strategies that support their efforts, we can often eliminate challenging behavior.
- Share resources and strategies that are effective in the classroom. Many of the strategies can be used by parents in the home. Providers can support parents' efforts by making materials or showing them the strategies they use and helping them to modify them for the home. SEFEL is a great resource for parents and offers strategies that both providers and parents can use together.
- Listen to the family to learn about their concerns. Parents may be hesitant to talk about their child's behaviors for fear of being expelled from the program or because of deeper concerns they may have. Sometimes behaviors stem from an undiagnosed disability. This can be very difficult for a family, emotionally and sometimes financially. Providers must be empathetic and supportive to help them.
- Don't forget to take a look at your own program and practice. Sometimes a simple change in the environment, how transitions occur, or just the daily schedule can help children with behavior issues. There are resources available for programs and staff to have another opinion of how best to deal with challenging behaviors. The Maryland Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMH) Project can be a valuable resource for programs. For more information, see the Resource section.

Families and providers who have concerns regarding a child's development can use the following resources and should contact their local or office for more information.

- Early Intervention Services through the Local Infants and Toddlers Program - Early intervention is a system of coordinated services for children with disabilities, ages birth to three, that supports families in promoting the child's age-appropriate growth and development. Early intervention services are provided to the child through and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- Preschool Special Education Services through the Local School System - preschool special education services are provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to children with disabilities, ages three to kindergarten. Special education and related services continue to be available through an IEP for eligible children and youth from kindergarten to age 21.
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program (ECMH) - Behavioral consultants provide parents and providers with support and strategies for children with challenging behavior. If you have concerns about a child's behavior in your program, contact your local Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project partner or your local CCRC. They will work with you and the family to develop a solution.

The following are a few additional resources to help with challenging behaviors.

Resources	Description
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	This is a behavioral screening that providers and parents can do to identify concerns in their child’s behavior. Providers can work together to identify goals and strategies to teach appropriate behaviors and skills.
Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL)	SEFEL has a parent module that helps parents teach social emotional skills to their children and offers specific strategies to use. Materials are available through the website for free. Teachers also use SEFEL to teach social emotional skills and by working together, skills are reinforced at home and at school.
Making Access Happen	Making Access Happen was designed to support providers in addressing behavior challenges with young children. Each of the behavior support segments uses a video scenario of a challenging behavior to support the learning, discussion, and resources that will follow. Providers can personalize their experience by engaging with one or more segments as they consider what information to explore, how much information to engage with, and what tools and strategies to adopt in their experiences with young children.
Behavioral Support Plans	Behavioral Support Plans can be beneficial as parents and providers are working together to develop goals and strategies that are effective for the child, parent, and the provider. Components of a Behavioral Support Plan include prevention strategies, teaching replacement skills, responding to challenging behavior, person responsible/ timelines. SEFEL reviews and provides guidance for effective Behavioral Support Plans as well.

Collaborating with families is essential when developing **behavioral support plans**. Parents have information that may help to understand the child’s behavior and many times, parents and providers may be experiencing the same concerns. By working together, goals and strategies can be created that can help reinforce these new skills at home and in the classroom, ensuring positive outcomes for the family. The Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Development for Young Children provides resources for collaborating with families and the behavioral support. See the Resource section for more information.

QUICK TIP



Here’s a quick tip that can help providers and parents with behaviors.

Strategy - Describe what children are doing well so they know to do it again and they feel good about their accomplishment.

Descriptive Praise – For example, be specific in your praise for a job well done. Instead of saying, “Good Job” when children remember to clean up their area after playing, tell them, “You remembered to clean up your area after you finished playing! That’s awesome!”

Result - When children know what they did well, they are more likely to do it again!

Children who experience the deployment of a parent for military service often show higher levels of stress and anxiety than their civilian friends. Younger children may not have the tools to understand where mom or dad has gone or when they’re coming back. Older kids feel the burden of having to worry about the absent parent while they take on extra responsibilities at home.⁷ Providers may not always know what to do or say in situations like this, but remember that just checking in with families to see how they are doing or if they need anything is a family engagement best practice. Below are a few tips from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).⁸

- Maintain consistent schedules and routines.
- Be more alert to children’s behaviors, feelings, and conversations during play, routines, and other activities, indoors and outdoors. Through observation, teachers can identify children who are experiencing adjustment difficulties and may need additional assistance, such as counseling.
- Respect diverse family structures and living arrangements, such as children living with grandparents. For example, address correspondence to “Dear Family” rather than “Dear Parent.”
- Recognize and validate feelings children may experience during a deployment, such as guilt, resentment, fear, anxiety, confusion, and anger. A teacher might say, “Carl, it’s hard to be away from your dad. Would you like to write him a letter?”
- Display photos of the deployed parent at work in uniform.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

By participating in community meetings and committees, programs increase their capacity to respond to the needs and interests of their families. It can be overwhelming to keep up with all of the events that may helpful to families, but it is important for programs to be aware of these activities so they can appropriately refer their families.

Many providers and programs do not have the ability to offer additional programs, events, or workshops for their families, but programs may be able to enhance what they offer to parents through strong partnerships. For example, a local child care program may not have the funding or the staff to offer parent workshops. However, the program could partner with the local Judy Center which would allow the families of the child care program to attend a Judy Center workshop. This enables the Judy Center to reach more families that may need services, but also helps the child care program meet the needs of their families. When programs work together, we are supporting all children and families and ensuring their success.

Various types of programs may be limited in the services they can provide; therefore, it is essential to have strong partnerships within the community to improve our family engagement practices. The Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils (LECAC) are a great place to find resources and partners within the community and also become aware of new early childhood initiatives. For more information on the LECACs, see the Resource section.

FAMILY VOICE

When we first enrolled, I wasn’t that active, but now I am more active. The reminders from the school helped. I am able to be more engaged with my daughter and the activities. The program has really helped me to be more motivated with parenting. I have a child that’s willing to learn and that encourages me.

- Parent – Arlington Judy Center, Baltimore City





TEACHING AND LEARNING

As providers, one of the easiest ways we can support families in their relationships with their children is by talking with them about their child's development and behavior. By sharing information, we can help them overcome behavioral challenges and help them to better engage with their children. Ensure that families feel welcome to join and observe in the classroom and participate in home visits. It is these experiences that help families become part of their child's learning and development, and also gives them an opportunity to practice these skills as well. However, providers need to ensure that they are reaching the families that do not have the opportunity to come into the program. Many programs use monthly newsletters that highlight events and activities being offered. Programs may also send home weekly updates of classroom or program events. Providers can support families and children even further by offering activities that families can do together.

More and more programs are using technology to communicate with all of their families and share ideas and resources. Families feel connected to the program when they receive regular updates, announcements and reminders. By keeping families informed, providers are working to support their families and children.

TECH TIP



Another tool for your toolbox is the app Remind. The app Remind allows communication with individuals or groups, but it also offers a unique feature to structure people within classes so you can blast out reminders about upcoming events, things that are needed for the next day's activities, or any other reminders that you want. The great feature is you can schedule these in advance, and the system will automatically send them out to the groups you designate. So if you have a message for your three-year-old class and a different one for your four-year-old class, you can use Remind to send the information to the appropriate group. And if a child moves, it is as simple as a touch and drag to change your groupings. Remind also offers automatic translation into an ever growing list of languages and dialects.

The app also protects your privacy – creating a separation of your personal information like your cell phone number – from the parents, but allowing you to still have two-way communication that is stored and organized separate from your personal texts. Remind is available on all Apple, Android, and web-connected devices.

Chris Swanson, Ed.D., Senior Director for Quality Care and Education & Associate Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Center for Technology in Education

REFLECTION



Positive parent/child relationships are part of the foundation for school success. As a child care provider, you can promote positive parent-child relationships through your daily interactions with families, children, colleagues, and community partners.



GOAL 3

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT FAMILIES AS LIFELONG EDUCATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN

Parents and family members are their child's first teachers (i.e. The first ones in line to support their children's learning.). Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should create collaborative relationships with a variety of service entities to support and **empower** the family in its role as first teacher.

For children and families to be successful, early childhood educators and providers need to support parents in their understanding of the importance of the earliest years in a child's education. These early years set the foundation for a child's success in school and in life. When parents recognize the importance of providing early learning experiences, they are more involved and engaged in their child's learning from the very start.

EDUCATOR VOICE

While working with families from other cultures, I have gained an awareness of how other cultures view teachers. For example, with some families, a teacher is held in very high regard and families do not feel that education is their role. They feel their child's education is the teacher's responsibility, not theirs. When we tell them the parents are the child's first teacher, they do not understand what this means. It is my responsibility to help my families understand their roles in their child's education.

- Taken from the Ready at Five, Symposium, April, 2016



FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

When programs recognize a family's needs and how to support them, they have a true partnership which supports early childhood learning. The mission of a program should include supporting staff as they bring parents into an educational partnership.

The chart below is a helpful guide to establish your goals and strategies to support families:

To support parents as their child's first teacher, <u>programs and providers</u> need to:	To be effective first teachers, <u>parents and families</u> need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relationships with families so that they see you as resource and a trusted source of information. Provide parents with resources and skills so they feel empowered in their roles as parents and teacher. Develop a consistent message about ways in which parents can help. Ask and listen to what parents and families need to provide learning opportunities for their children. Provide professional development to support staff to appropriately engage with families and collaborate with families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An understanding of how and when children learn, including an awareness of developmental milestones Ideas for supporting and planning spontaneous and intentional learning opportunities Knowledge of the benefits of early learning An environment in which learning is encouraged and supported

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To support families in learning about their child's development, early childhood educators and providers will need to expand their skill set as well. Teachers are responsible for informing families about children's progress, skills, and abilities, the **curriculum**, activities to reinforce learning at home, and even behavior modification, but do we support teachers in their efforts to do this? Staff receive training on how children develop and learn, but if teachers are being asked to educate families, then programs need to ensure that their teachers and staff have the skills to do this. The following is a list of training topics and strategies that will help teachers and staff to inform and support families.

Training Topics	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship building Communication Partnerships Professional ethics (confidentiality, boundaries, etc.) Cultural Proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create "learning communities" for staff. (This is discussed further in Goal 6.) Include teachers/teacher assistants in parenting education sessions so parents and teachers can share information about child development and program curriculum. Create safe and respectful environments where adults - staff and parents - can learn from each other and ask for the kinds of information they find helpful. Become familiar with education and training opportunities available to families within the community.



IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Early childhood educators often use phrases like “*parents are their child’s first teacher*” and “**teachable moments**” but we do not often think about how parents interpret these phrases and what they mean to them. Depending on a family’s experience, background and culture, these phrases may mean many things. Early childhood educators and providers need to be more intentional when using certain phrases and terms so that families know how to best support their child.

When you use the phrase...	Also say...
Parents are a child’s first teacher	A parent or family is teaching throughout their day. Children learn through their interactions and experiences with their family and also through the behavior they see and hear.
Teachable moments	These are times when your child is more likely to be open to learn something or be made aware of something. These are great opportunities to build skills, reinforce lessons and it also offers an opening for parents to communicate with their children. ¹
Children learn within their daily routine	To keep your child engaged and help to build skills, use the opportunities that occur in your day-to-day routine. For example, have your child help sort the laundry. They learn colors, build math skills through sorting and classifying, build language skills, and also learn responsibility by helping with daily chores.
Developmentally Appropriate Practices	What I’m doing with your child every day is just right for your child’s age, background, and personality.

By ensuring parents understand our messages, we are building relationships and supporting parents as they learn about their role in their child’s education. When speaking with parents, be sure to pay attention to the things they do and say. It helps to look for cues to ensure they understand your message.



TEACHABLE MOMENT

As a provider, one of the most important skills for you to help parents gain is the ability to recognize and capitalize on “teachable moments” in everyday life. A teachable moment can happen almost anywhere - in the supermarket, when picking your child up from child care or school, walking through a shopping mall or setting the table for dinner. Chances are that many of the valuable moral lessons that you learned from your parents as a child were not consciously taught at all. Rather, they were learned in the midst of casual moments of real life, just as our children’s real lessons come from being, living and interacting with us in a hundred different ways we could never predict in advance.¹

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When parents and families take pride in their roles as their child’s first teacher, they are becoming your partners in education. Starting this partnership in the early years and nurturing the relationship by listening to what parents and families have to say will help build a strong network.

Listening to families and gathering information about their family and child is the first step to supporting parents in their role as their child’s first teacher. Providers can use that information to make families feel included in the program, and also as a guide for the types of suggestions and strategies to offer the family. To expand our understanding of how this can be done, let’s look at the following example:

A father you have been working with really wants his child to do well in school. He came in to talk with you because every night he sits with his four year old daughter, Liv, for 30 minutes and they practice writing her name, but she gets upset and refuses to practice. It seems every night they end up in an argument. He wants Liv to do well, but she just doesn’t show any interest in her school work.

This is a common complaint for parents and one that many times can be easily solved. It may be necessary to first help the parent understand what is developmentally appropriate for that age and for that particular child. Parents may have the best intentions, but may be putting unrealistic expectations on their child or not fully understand how the best way their child learns a new skill.

Give parents specific strategies to help reinforce learning that can be done throughout the daily routine. Families are often not aware that they do not have to do anything new; they just need to include their children in the things they are already doing. These simple routines provide a lot of learning for children. Use the following chart to help families identify activities that they can do with their children and the skills they are building.

Activity	Skill
Sorting laundry	Identifying colors, math skills (classification), language, fine and gross motor skills (picking up, carrying)
Bath time (filling and emptying cups)	Language, math skills (measurement, comparison), fine motor skills (squeezing, pouring)
Helping to cook (as appropriate) mixing, stirring, setting table	Language, fine and gross motor skills (mixing, stirring, pouring), math skills (sorting and classifying)
Walking to the bus stop or driving to school or other places and pointing out letters and numbers, colors and shapes of signs	Language and literacy (identifying letters), identifying colors, math skills (identifying numbers and shapes)

QUICK TIP



Parents often feel that having children help with the chores around the house is not appropriate for young children, that it may take too long, be too difficult or not be done “right.” Parents may think, “It will be easier if I just do it.” We can help parents understand that by taking the time to teach children these routines and activities, they are supporting their child’s learning, building their confidence and helping them be successful. Another benefit – they are more likely to help with the chores as they get older if they learned how to do them when they were young!

FAMILY VOICE

We come every week. You can see in every center that learning is the goal. After coming here, my child asks me to help sort socks and tells me about the colors. She also talks about different types of food at the grocery store.”

- Parent, Storyville, Baltimore County Public Library

There are also many free apps and websites where parents can receive daily ideas for learning activities. Programs can support parents by creating a list of these free online resources for families. Here are a few to get you started.

App or Website	How it Works
Vroom - http://www.joinvroom.org/	Vroom offers activities within the daily routine that encourage skill building.
I Learn With Emotions (available in the App Store)	Children are encouraged to watch short videos or animated clips of real world scenarios and then are asked to identify the emotions felt by the characters by choosing the right emoticons. Children learn how to help engaging characters work through their emotional situations.
Counting 1,2,3 (available in the App Store)	Through four mini games, children learn how to count and recognize the numbers from 1 to 10. Games also focus on color names and on the pronunciation of numbers.
FitnessKids (available in the App Store)	FitnessKids contains 25 animated exercises that can be performed independently or in groups. Each exercise has buttons for music, movement and speed.

The Center for Technology in Education (CTE) at Johns Hopkins University developed *Tech for Tikes* which is a list of apps that promote learning and development in young children. *Tech for Tikes* was created to help parents and teachers identify which types of apps target critical areas of development and learning during the preschool years.²

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community organizations can play a huge role in providing parents with the knowledge they need to support their children's learning and be effective first teachers. Many community programs offer ongoing events and resources to give families fun ways to build skills together. For teachers, it is important to become familiar with community programs and what they offer. This information is valuable to parents and shows them different ways to engage their children in learning.

Local libraries and museums offer a variety of activities and play groups that provide learning experiences for children, but also encourage parents as they learn ways to support their children's learning.

EVERY CHILD READY TO READ @ YOUR LIBRARY

Public libraries in Maryland implement a number of strategies designed to meet the goals of the Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework. A signature initiative of the public libraries is Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library, a research-based early literacy outreach education program for parents and caregivers. The program enlists parents and caregivers as partners in preparing young children to read and provides them with effective tools and strategies, thus supporting families as lifelong educators of their children (Goal 3). The program also puts library resources into the hands of parents – connecting families to their communities (Goal 6). Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library supports families by engaging them in meaningful learning activities that provide a unique context for promoting positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2). Through the workshop(s), parents and caregivers learn strategies for developing emergent literacy skills through engaging parent-child activities that incorporate singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing. These practices are all familiar to parents and caregivers, which makes them easy to use and integrate into everyday life. Through the Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library program, families gain access to knowledge, resources, and community supports that help them engage in positive parent-child interactions and foster their young children's emergent literacy skills. Through the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Grant, every library system in Maryland received a copy of the Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library toolkit. Library staff are trained on the program and parents and providers are encouraged to talk with their local librarian about how their library is making use of the resources that Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library provides. For more information on the national program, see: <http://everychildreadytoread.org/>



EDUCATOR VOICE

Through programs and activities, such as Every Child Ready to Read, or in the Library Café discussions, we are offering a learning structure for parents to think about how to be their best. For example, we give tips to parents encouraging them to ask questions of their young children when they are in the grocery store – “What is the name of this fruit?” When families are driving in the car – “Let’s sing The Wheels on the Bus song.”

- Cecil County MD Public Library

LEARNING PARTIES

One effective family engagement initiative implemented in Maryland is Learning Parties, created by Maryland's Ready at Five. Guided by a trained facilitator, the interactive, hands-on, parent-child parties promote positive parent-child relationships (Goal 2). Based on the belief that parents are lifelong educators of their children (Goal 3), Learning Parties teach parents how to make everyday moments learning moments through playing, singing, talking, reading, and engaging in fun, developmentally appropriate learning activities. Learning Parties also connect families to their peers and community (Goal 6) by cultivating social networks and enabling parents to meet, talk with, and learn from other parents/families. Often, Learning Parties are held in schools and bring preschool children and their families into a school environment prior to being enrolled. As such, they support the goal of family engagement in transitions (Goal 5). Ready at Five has developed a Learning Party Curriculum in seven key Domains: Language & Literacy, Math, Science, Social Foundations, Physical Well-being and Motor Development, Social Studies and The Arts. Additionally, Ready at Five has developed the Learning Party curriculum to be aligned to the Vocabulary Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment Through Stories (VIOLETS) program, which they also developed. This program is often offered to children and their parents/families enrolled in classrooms implementing the VIOLETS Read Aloud Program. Health Learning Parties, developed by the School of Medicine, University of Maryland and Ready at Five, are offered in the University's Health Clinics. The Learning Party series for each domain includes curriculum for four 90-minute Learning Parties (for a total of 28 across all domains) during which parents learn a variety of techniques and strategies for supporting children. While parents are learning, their children are in another room building their skills and abilities while participating in activities related to the content that is being provided to their parents. At the Learning Parties, parents have an opportunity to practice the activities with their children while trained Learning Party leaders provide positive feedback and constructive suggestions. Parents are also given activities to complete with their children at home, as well as a variety of books, developmentally appropriate materials, and educational toys to start a learning library in their home. Learning Parties have been offered to hundreds of parents and children throughout Maryland's 24 jurisdictions at no cost to participants. For more information, see the resource section.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Classrooms and early learning settings are often the best place for parent's to learn how to support their child's learning. When families feel welcome and a part of the school or program community, they are engaged in their child's development and learning.

To support parents as they become familiar with their role as their child's first teacher, programs can provide many opportunities in the classroom or learning environment. For example, some programs have a parent job board when parents come in to volunteer. Similar to a child's job board, it provides a list of several activities that parents can do in the classroom or child care setting. By spending time in the child's setting, families have opportunities to practice these skills and then apply them at home as well. Here are a few that activities that parents can do in the classroom or child care setting and also use at home.

- Read a story to children- Parents learn how to read stories to children and how to ask questions about the story.
- Helping children in small group activity (art, writing, etc.)- Families learn how to help children with their activities and learn the importance of **scaffolding**. For activities to do in the classroom, Johns Hopkins CTE, created a Pinterest page with all kinds of engaging activities across the seven domains of learning. For more information, see the Resource section.
- Helping children in classroom centers- Families practice **facilitating** children's play and to follow the children's lead. They also learn about the skills children are developing during their play.

Providers often hear from families that “children just play.” It is important to let parents and families know what skills children are developing through play so they recognize its importance and value. To help parents understand what children are learning, Purdue Extension created a *Block Party*. Teachers and providers set up their classroom with different types of activities that children do in the block area. They included all types of blocks of different sizes, colors and textures. Families would rotate through each center which had different types of blocks. Each center had a poster explaining what skills children were developing and how the parents could engage with their child during the block play. Parents left with an understanding of why play is important and how their children learn. They also left with new skills to support their child's learning at home.³ For more information on this activity see the Resource section.

When providers invite families into the classrooms and early learning settings, families not only discover new ways to encourage their child's learning, but they also learn about their child's development. This helps parents recognize their child's developmental milestones, and also gives the parents opportunities to discuss any concerns or address questions they have with the provider. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is a simple screening tool that parents can do with their children to identify their child's strengths and weaknesses and identify any areas that might be of concern. This tool can also be a great way to start conversations between the provider and the parents where they work together to establish goals for the child. For more information on the ASQ see the Resource section.



EDUCATOR VOICE

Parents are asked to do the Ages and Stages Questionnaires as their child is enrolled in the program and teachers do them as well. This gives them a developmental perspective of their child. Parents are encouraged to ask for suggestions if they are having difficulties with child rearing. We also share a Backpack Connection Series each month. The Backpack Series provides a way for teachers and parents to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. The monthly handouts help the parents to stay informed about what their child is learning at school and offers specific ideas on how to use the strategy at home. We encourage parents to embrace their role and know that we will work with them to do what is most beneficial for the child.

- Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center, Baltimore City



QUICK TIP

Remember – Learning begins at birth. Simple activities such as supervised tummy time helps build fine and gross motor skills, cooing and babbling are the beginning stages of language development and responding to a child's cries sets healthy foundations for social and emotional wellbeing. Sharing this information with families can also help them support younger children they may have at home.



REFLECTION

We often assume that parenting is automatic for families and they naturally know how to support their child in all areas of development. While parents are the experts on their child, they may need more support to help their child be successful. We must ensure that we are supporting, encouraging, and helping parents gain the skills and knowledge needed to ensure their success in the role as their child's first teacher.



GOAL 4

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Research has documented the link between parental education – particularly maternal education levels – and positive school readiness outcomes. When parents and other adults in the family strive to achieve their educational goals, they become a positive example to their children regarding the importance of education. Therefore, a goal of Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should be to support parents and families to advance their own interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

Programs such as Head Start, Maryland Family Support Centers and Maryland Judy Centers follow the two generational approach, which addresses the education and wellbeing of both child and parents. When programs help to educate families and empower them with skills to help them economically, they can help change the future for that child and family.



EDUCATOR VOICE

I worked with a young mom who had three children in our program. I noticed that she always worked closely with the Family Service Worker (FSW). The FSW said it wasn't always that way. It took a while, but eventually this young mom became more comfortable with the FSW and they worked together on many things. The FSW helped her with parenting strategies, effective discipline for her children and helped her to find classes to go back to school. She also helped her with things like clothing and food for the children; she really supported this mom however she could. I've worked at Head Start for a long time and this is one of the parents that have always stayed in touch. The mom now has her Master's Degree, a job she loves and she just bought a house. Her children do really well in school, too. The little boy in my class graduated from high school last year and has joined the Army. His little sister, who was also in my class, will be graduating high school soon and going to college. Whenever someone asks me why I like teaching so much, I tell them about this family. Together we supported the whole family – the children and the parents – and because of this, they continue to be successful long after our program.

- Anonymous – Head Start Teacher

HEAD START PROGRAMS

One of the defining features of Head Start is a strong emphasis on family engagement. In fact, the *Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework* served as a model for the development of the *Maryland Family Engagement Framework*. Head Start programs in Maryland are designed to meet all of the goals of family engagement outlined in this Framework. Some ways in which Maryland's Head Start programs meet the family engagement goals include providing numerous parent trainings aimed to promote family well-being (Goal 1) and connecting families to their peers and to the community (Goal 6) through opportunities to network and share experiences. Families are also empowered through the adult education component that supports the educational aspirations of parents and families (Goal 4) as well as through participation in Head Start Policy Councils, which support the development of families as leaders and child advocates (Goal 7). Head Start programs strive to engage families in a variety of ways. Programs offer many opportunities for parents to build their skills as members of the workforce (e.g., English for Speakers of Other Languages and computer trainings) as well as attend trainings on topics such as child development, abuse prevention, parenting techniques, and kindergarten transition. Furthermore, programs seek to connect families to resources to meet their individual needs, inviting families to attend collaborative forums with other community agencies and connecting families with food pantries, clothing, mentoring, social services, and job training. Programs are required to have a Policy Council, a form of shared program governance in which parents discuss issues and make decisions on program policy, budget, and curriculum; perform community outreach; and give testimony at county council and board of education meetings to advocate for Head Start and all preschool programs. These examples of family engagement take place in all programs operated by the state's 19 federally funded Head Start grantees. For more information, see the Resource section.

FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

There are many reasons that families choose different early learning programs. Many of those reasons are practical – parents work and they need someone to take care of their children. However, many times families choose an early care or early education program because they value the educational experience their child will receive. To create a high quality learning environment, programs must value continued learning for staff and families. When education is valued for all, staff, families and children are encouraged and motivated to learn and grow. These programs establish standards or policies that allow for opportunities for adult learning and are aware of community programs that can support their program's and parent's goals.

For example, MSDE accredited programs ensure that staff meet the qualification requirements outlined in the accreditation standards and continue pursuing professional development opportunities. Early childhood teachers in a MSDE accredited program are required to have at least an associate's

degree and hold a Maryland Child Care Credential. To achieve a credential, staff must complete a specific number of hours of Core of Knowledge training, have a number of years of experience, and earn professional activity units. For more information on MSDE Accreditation and Credentialing, see the Resource section.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing professional development is essential for staff to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field including new programs and practices, routines, pending policy, legislation and regulatory changes. Professional development is also needed for staff to develop skills to help support families in meeting their learning goals. Staff should be prepared to engage with families appropriately at all times and should develop knowledge about different kinds of education and training opportunities available for families such as:

- ESL programs or classes
- GED classes
- Computer skills training
- Trainings or programs at the local college

UNITED WAY FAMILY CENTER

The United Way Family Center, operated by the Ben Franklin Center for Community Schools at Ben Franklin High School (BFHS) utilizes various interventions in their multigenerational model to engage and support families. While Family Center staff provides child care to infants and toddlers, the Family Services Coordinator and interns from the University of Maryland School of Social Work provide direct services to parenting students to support them educationally and enhance their parenting. These services include case management, counseling, psychoeducation, groups, and play sessions. Lunch groups are held daily to facilitate building a strong bond between parent and child.

The Family Center engages the entire family unit from intake throughout their time in the program to create strong relationships and support students in gaining new skills. Using a comprehensive approach to defining family allows anyone that the student identifies as their family to participate in services. Non-student parents and the students' parents, grandparents, and guardians are encouraged to tour the Family Center with the potential student to ensure that everyone understands expectations and their role in the model. They are also able to participate in daily activities, such as lunch groups. The Family Services Coordinator conducts home visits with students and their families. Home visits are an important opportunity to learn more about a family and engage parents that may not be able to participate in Family Center activities due to work or other barriers. Quarterly evening events are also held to engage with parents and family members that work during the day. The Center provides transportation to family members for these developments. A partnership with Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was developed to deliver services on site for parenting and expectant services.

Below are snapshots of Workforce Development (WFD) services provided to parents/guardians of the children who attend Ben Franklin High School.

ESOL

Mrs. Garcia*, Latino parent of a BFHS student and a WFD participant, came for assistance in improving her command of the English language. Her daughter currently interprets for her. Mrs. Garcia works at a hotel. Her daughter explained that her mother is not paid consistent wages and feels that her mother is being treated unfairly. Mrs. Garcia wanted to learn conversational English to increase her opportunities for better employment. She enrolled in ESOL class at the Ben Center and has shown improved command of English.

GED

A former BFHS student, Kevin* and his child participated at the Family Center. He enrolled in the GED class at the Ben Center while his son continued to visit the Family Center. Kevin maintained almost perfect attendance in GED. His post-test scores for Spring 2015 reflected an 18 point gain in Reading and a 4 point loss in Math. When tested at the end of the Fall 2015 class, Kevin had an increase in Reading of 9 points and 8 points in Math. Every 5 points gained is equivalent to a grade level.

Workforce

Ms. Johnson*, the maternal grandmother of a BFHS student was referred to WFD from the Family Stability Program for assistance with finding employment. Ms. Johnson had already earned her GED and had several years of work experience in food preparation. She said cooking was her passion along with caring for her grandchildren. Ms. Johnson was unsuccessful in finding employment on her own and was becoming discouraged. A review of her resume revealed that it needed to be updated. Once updated, the workforce development coordinator assisted her in filing the online application to several adult assisted living communities. Ms. Johnson obtained an interview and was subsequently hired full-time at \$10.00 per hour with benefits including health insurance. Ms. Johnson has since maintained that position for over a year.

Teen Parent Support and Early Childhood Development

Karen*, a teen mother that utilizes the Family Center for child care for her son, participates fully in all services provided. Her grandmother works with Workforce Development and will often meet with the FSC or other center staff to check in on progress for her granddaughter and great grandson. She also has participated in lunch groups multiple times and attended evening activities. The student's mother is unable to take part in many activities due to her work schedule, but meets with the FSC during home visits and has some phone contact. The student's brother also attends Ben Franklin, and while he is not parenting, also checks in with Family Center staff to support his sister and nephew.

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.


IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Supporting parents and families to achieve their educational goals may seem overwhelming, but programs can make minor changes that will make a big difference. For example, Judy Centers always include an announcement in their newsletter listing a contact person and phone number for the local Community College. This simple practice allows families to contact someone directly about any questions they may have in pursuing their education and career goals.

JUDY CENTER ADULT EDUCATION

Many programs have parent meetings or offer parent trainings. Programs can survey the parents to determine their interests and offer trainings or workshops that meet their needs. This not only ensures that parents will be more engaged and participate more, but will also support their interests' and goals.



Parent Name: _____

The Judy Center is planning parent education for the upcoming school year. We would like feedback from parents on topics you would like to see. **Please check all that apply.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Safe Sleep
<input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition	<input type="checkbox"/> English Classes
<input type="checkbox"/> Health Related Topics	<input type="checkbox"/> Children with Disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> GED/Continuing Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance/Budgeting
<input type="checkbox"/> School Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer/Internet Assistance
<input type="checkbox"/> Mealtime Troubles	<input type="checkbox"/> Potty Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Bedtime Routines	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Days and times you would like for playgroup.

Please select the day you prefer most:	Please select the time you prefer most:
<input type="checkbox"/> Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> 9-11
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> 12-2
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday	

When offering parent meetings and trainings, programs can do the following:

- Ensure that meetings and trainings are announced routinely and held when families are available – Send home fliers, put announcements in newsletters, sometimes even calls or texts home can be friendly reminders for families about upcoming events.
- Ensure announcements are inviting – Announcements should feel friendly, welcoming and inviting. Try to send fliers out in multiple languages so all families feel included.
- Ensure that language is not a barrier to parent participation – Try to have interpreters at meetings so that all parents can access the information. Having interpreters also helps parents feel welcome and part of the group.

Many programs create information or job boards. Parents and families can look for resources on classes, training, and job opportunities that support their personal growth and career development. Having this information readily available allows opportunities for families to not only connect with resources in the community, but it also allows for opportunities for families to connect to other families with similar personal or professional goals.



EDUCATOR VOICE

One of the most simple and free things we do to help families is to identify the parents that do not have a high school diploma and then call them to offer GED/ABE classes. In March of each year parents come into the schools to register their children for Pre-K and Kindergarten. On the registration page there is a space where parents are to list their level of education. We review all applications and list those parents who note that they did not graduate from high school. We call those parents and ask if they are interested in completing their diploma. If they agree, we give their information to the Adult Educator coordinator and they contact the parents. This is a very easy and no cost activity that really helps our parents.

- Allegany County Judy Center

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

When families want to pursue their education or career goals, they may look to their providers to help them because of the relationship that has been established with them. Knowing how to help parents in this area can be difficult so it is necessary to be aware of the community resources available so that appropriate educational and training referrals are made. An easy way to support families in reaching their goal is to create a list of community resources and keep them nearby so that you can refer families quickly and easily.

List of community resources

- Judy Centers
- Adult education/Training classes
- ESL classes
- Job Training
- Workplace Literacy
- Communication

These are just a few ideas to start a community resources list to support parents' and families' personal growth and career development.

Many times parents are overwhelmed with wanting to go back to school or wanting additional job training, but they do not know where to start. Breaking down their goal into smaller steps can make this daunting task seem achievable. For example, Family Support Centers and Head Start programs use Family Partnership Agreements to create goals for families. If a parent's goal is to go back to school to complete their GED, they may break this down into smaller tasks, like contacting the community college for information for the GED class; getting a schedule of classes; and determining how to pay for the GED class. When it is broken down into steps, it feels less overwhelming. We are providing encouragement and supporting parents in taking the steps necessary to reach their goals. Assisting families in developing their own education and training goals not only helps families to achieve their personal and professional goals, but it helps to link families to the necessary supports they need to accomplish these goals.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The family partnership agreement process refers to the set of opportunities offered to families to develop and implement individualized goals. This process includes the responsibilities of families and staff, timelines, and strategies for achieving those goals. How to set goals, implement them, and document the process can be different for each program and each family. A family partnership agreement is not just a form to fill out; it is the process through which you support families. Therefore, it is an interactive experience that happens over time and can include many different types of interactions, such as: helping families identify and reach their goals; identify and use their strengths and resources; and advocate for their children; offering

opportunities for family members to enhance their skills or build new ones; providing access to community resources; emergency or crisis assistance when needed; and supporting any pre-existing family plans.¹

What are some of your strengths?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What skills would you most like to learn?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

FAMILY GOALS:

My family goal(s) for this year is:

What are the steps needed to achieve this goal?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What barriers might prevent you from achieving your goal?

Family Signature: _____ Date: _____

FSW Signature: _____ Date: _____

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Having community partnerships is helpful to build the capacity of a program, particularly when the goal is to increase educational and training opportunities for families. By forming partnerships with educational resources, including higher education institutions and adult educators, programs are better able to respond to parent's needs and interests. Programs can invite representatives from different educational programs to speak at parent meetings to introduce them to a variety of programs and provide additional information. Also, by working together with community partners, programs can create or enhance their trainings specific to the needs of their parents.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR PARENTS

The Carroll County Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) conducted a Parent Leadership Training by bringing together different community partners. The facilitators of the training, directors from the Carroll County Family Support Center, Judy Center, Head Start and the Parent Educator from the Public School, gathered families from all programs with similar interests and needs. The training discussed school readiness and the importance of preparing children for school and how parents can be involved in their children's learning including working together with their schools and programs. The training also provided an interactive communication activity. Parents were given opportunities to practice essential communication skills needed in their everyday life, their

professional life and with their child's school. Parents left with skills and materials they could use immediately, helping them to feel more confident.

By working together as community partners, the LECAC was able to give parents a training that supported their interests and goals and connected them to their peers and community.

For more information on Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, see the Resource Section.

FAMILY VOICE

Many parents assume that is the teacher's responsibility to take care of everything when it comes to education and school, but parents need to be involved, too. Our children's education is just as much, if not more, our responsibility as it is the teachers and we need to set that example for our children.

- Parent, Carroll County Parent Leadership Training



EDUCATOR VOICE

At our program, we have an innovative, short term, for credit program, for pregnant or parenting high school students. The program is designed to address the needs of pregnant teens and teen parents who are having difficulty with attendance, related to securing appropriate child care and/or are having social issues related to pregnancy. It allows students to continue to earn high school credits and avoid dropping out of school due to a lack of appropriate supports. The Family Center provides child care, case management, and all other support services to the parent and child. The public school provides education staff, curriculum oversight and some transportation for students. While attending the program at the center, students are encouraged to locate appropriate child care and develop network of supports systems that would allow for the student to return to public school.

- Washington County Family Center



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Supporting parents and families in meeting their education and career goals is a necessary part of school readiness for young children. When families value education, they will be more engaged in their child's education and learning. Programs can support parent's learning by offering trainings in early childhood education and development, but also by including parents as volunteers in the classroom. Parents will learn strategies and skills for their children that can be reinforced at home, modeling the importance of education for their children.

TIPS TO HELP ENGAGE PARENTS VOLUNTEERS

- Provide simple lesson plans for the parents to do so they can participate in the life of the classroom.
- Talk with your parents about their interests and their specific skill set. Provide a lesson plan that is appropriate for the parent's interests and skills. This helps them to feel confident when working with the children.
- Have a Parent Committee that works with the teachers to identify a project, event or a need for the school so that they can work together with program staff.
- Include a Family Engagement idea of the month in the monthly newsletter.

Families may not feel comfortable to volunteer if they are not clear on their role. When programs give parents specific jobs or responsibilities, parents understand their purpose in the classroom and become more comfortable, confident and engaged.

REFLECTION

Children learn by example and the best way to encourage their learning is by being a positive role model and valuing education. When programs provide an environment that encourages learning for all, families and children are successful.



GOAL 5

TRANSITIONS

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT FAMILIES THROUGH THE CARE AND EDUCATION TRANSITIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

*When a child transitions to a new early care and education provider or to the formal education system, the child and the family change setting, teacher, and learning culture. These transitions are challenging for parents and families, and often for providers and teachers, to **navigate**. Therefore, Maryland initiatives and the practices of early care and education providers should support families as they make transitions with their children to new learning environments.*

We talk a lot about transitions and try to support parents in the many transitions families have: Kindergarten, daily routines, into and out of different early care and education programs. What is meant by transitions and why can this be so challenging? Transition means change. Change can be difficult for many people, especially young children. For example, in a **structured environment**, young children are expected to stop playing and move easily into the next activity. They may be expected to transition into new programs or different activities that may be unknown to them because there are different rules; therefore, they do not know what to expect. This can be difficult for children and sometimes for their parents as well.



DEFINITION OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS

Changes in educational providers, programs, situations, or age/grade levels.



PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

To ensure transition strategies are in place to support all families and all types of transitions, effective leadership is essential. Program leadership can create and promote policies and procedures to ensure smooth transitions.

For example, early childhood programs that are accredited through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are required to develop transition plans for children entering and/or moving to a new group of children or program that communicates children's individual strengths and needs. Specifically, programs need to show the following:

- A written plan/policy for drop off and pick up.
- A system of noting when children and youth arrive, when they leave, and with whom they leave.
- Written plans/activities with local schools to connect school and child care staff.
- Evidence that staff and families are engaged in practices that encourage children's smooth transitions when entering a program and throughout the program.

For more information on MSDE Accreditation, please see the Resource Section.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Families have many different options available within the child care community. Child care providers should be aware of the range of services available in their area, including early intervention services and public pre-k, and share these resources with families as needed. This helps support families as they learn to navigate these educational systems and advocate for their children. The following is a chart providing strategies and resources to help programs support parents during transitions.



Type of Transition	Strategy/Resource
<p>Daily Routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classroom transitions ▪ Within program transitions 	<p>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions with daily routines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Maryland Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (SEFEL) website, created by the University of Maryland, provides a vast amount of information and specific strategies for transitions, including printable visual aids and social stories. ▪ Training for staff and parents is also available through this website. ▪ Your local Child Care Resource Center also provides training and resources for transitions. <p>For more information on the University of Maryland’s SEFEL and Local Child Care Resource Centers, see the Resource Section.</p>
<p>Between Programs</p>	<p>Provide staff with developmentally appropriate strategies for transitions between programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with local school and child care programs with dually enrolled children and set up transition plans for teachers, child and family. ▪ Communicate on a regular basis about the progress and/or concerns of dually enrolled children.
<p>Special Education Services</p>	<p>Provide staff and parents information regarding Early Intervention and Special Education services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with the Local Infants and Toddlers Program (LITP) and Local School System Child Find Office to learn about programs and services for children with disabilities, ages birth to kindergarten, and their families. ▪ At the request of the family, participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to foster positive communication between programs, early intervention providers and preschool special educators. ▪ Communicate regularly with early intervention providers and preschool special educators to contribute information about strategies that have worked in your program for the child and to add to information shared by the parents. <p>For more information on early intervention and preschool special education services, see the Resource Section.</p>
<p>Kindergarten and School Readiness</p>	<p>Provide staff with training and information on Kindergarten Transitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be aware of and refer parents to Kindergarten workshops in the community. ▪ Partner with local schools and have Kindergarten teachers present at a parent meeting about the Kindergarten transition. ▪ Plan a field trip to the local school’s Kindergarten classroom. ▪ Meet with the local school or the local early childhood advisory council meeting to discuss transitions and how to work together to plan for them. <p>For more information on Local Early Childhood Councils, see the Resource Section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The Second Step Curriculum</i> provides information and resources to teach young children the self-regulation and social emotional skills they need to be successful in school. ▪ The <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> define the key aspects of development and learning that are the foundation for a child’s school and life-long success. These Standards act as a guide for educational and programmatic decisions by child care providers and early childhood educators. For more information on <i>Second Step</i> and the <i>Maryland Early Learning Standards</i> see the Resource Section.



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.

COMPLETE THIS BEFORE THE MEETING - Bring it to the meeting to share

The Good News: (Something that is going right. Something your child has accomplished this year. Someone that is working well with your child. A strategy that has been successful, etc....)

Our frustrations: (Something that you would like changed. A problem that has arisen or that has been not been addressed. A strategy or tactic that has not been tried or implemented. Something that is not being done that is already in the IEP, etc....)

Our child's frustrations: (Something your child is challenged by or struggles with. A subject that is particularly difficult. A scheduling concern that your child has trouble with, etc....)

What our child needs: (The solution to your frustrations and your child's frustrations. A strategy, implementation, proposed schedule change, a creative solution that has not been tried, etc....)

(Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy 2012)

Example of at the meeting worksheet³

- 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

FAMILY VOICE

Having a child on the autism spectrum brings many new challenges to both the child and the parents, as everyone is introduced to the rigors of attending the school system at an earlier age than the child's peers. While the parents understand the benefits of early education and support, it does not change the fact that it can be intimidating knowing your child needs to be on a school bus on his way to an Intensive Structured Learning Environment (ISLE) classroom, while other kids his age might be laying down for nap time.

During Pre-Kindergarten years, my child attended half-day sessions in an ISLE classroom (along with a small number of other special needs children) and the other half at Kid's Campus Early Learning Center with typical aged peers. I felt this was a "best of both worlds" scenario, as my son was getting the early education he needed with the school system and he got to "be just a regular kid" at day care...all in the same day.

We made an extra effort to introduce the ISLE classroom teachers to the day care teachers, where they could discuss common goals for my child. This collaboration and information sharing proved to be greatly beneficial to my child's development. This included social, educational and building personal confidence in him. Day care staff were invited and happily attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to listen to educational goals for my child and made the extra effort to incorporate those goals into daily activities.

The IEP school staff was rather surprised when we invited day care representatives to participate in the meetings, but the joint efforts between teachers of the ISLE classroom and day care have paid immeasurable positive dividends in development for my son. Daily lesson plans and exercises from the ISLE classroom were shared, repeated and reinforced at day care during the pre-Kindergarten years. Those extra joint efforts from both early learning environments were absolutely crucial to my son's success.

After the transition to Kindergarten, my son began attending full school days and only attends after care hours at the day care, but the social development that was encouraged in his younger years with the typical peers is clearly evident now. Classmates include him in games, encourage his participation and make sure he gets a turn with activities they do. "Inclusion" is what any parent wants for their child, but for a parent of a child with special needs... it's a dream come true.

- Parent, Kids Campus Early Learning Center, Calvert County, MD

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Often times, early childhood programs and services work with some of the same children and families. Therefore, it makes sense to work together and establish community partnerships to truly be effective when supporting effective transitions. Here are some ways that providers can work together in the community to support families.

- Attend and participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interests of families.
- Help coordinate services for children and families as they transition from one early childhood setting to another, private or public, child care or elementary school.
- Work together with **the Local** Infants and Toddlers Program and **Local School System Child Find Office** to share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities, **including any special health care needs**. Remember *Memorandums of Understanding*, known as MOUs, are a good practice. Form a written partnership agreement as to how programs in the community will work together to support transitions for families and children.

Your local Early Childhood Advisory Council is a great place to meet representatives from all child and family serving agencies. By participating in these meetings, you can learn information about community partners such as **preschool** special education and early intervention services, health services, Judy Centers, or Child Care Resource and Referral Centers. You can also network with organizations and programs to form partnerships to better support your families with transitions. For more information on Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, see the Resource Section.

By working with your community partners and communicating between programs, you can find ways to ensure smooth transitions for children and families.



TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Preparing families is essential as children transition from early childhood programs to a formal school setting and throughout their school age years to support students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. As we already know, fostering a relationship between home and school helps to build relationships with families that support their well-being, sustain strong parent-child relationships, and provide opportunities for ongoing learning and development.

When families are equal partners, students have better attendance, better academic performance, and a more successful pathway into a formal classroom setting. Early childhood programs must be intentional and culturally responsive in their efforts to engage all families, just as schools must be as equally intentional to reach out to early childhood programs to support families in this process.

Children and families may experience the following when transitioning into kindergarten:

- Being the youngest students in a large elementary school
- Riding the bus or walking to school for the first time
- Meeting teachers and peers
- Being responsible for completing homework
- Adjusting to a longer day
- Eating in the cafeteria
- Remembering to bring multiple items to school

To help alleviate the stress of the transition to kindergarten, teachers and providers can:

- Identify the elementary schools in your area for your parents
- Find out about any transition activities at the school or at the library and refer parents
- Bring school system representatives to your program to talk about the transition to kindergarten
- Ask children and families to share their questions and concerns about the transition to kindergarten
- Let children practice being a kindergartener by providing school materials in the dramatic play area
- Organize a field trip to the local school to let children see a kindergarten classroom and the cafeteria



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.⁴

Learning Progress Form		
Child's Name: Last _____ First _____ Date of Birth: _____ Elementary School* where child will attend Kindergarten (Howard County only): _____ *Elementary school can be found using school locator at https://hcps2.securesites.net/SchoolLocator/index.jsp <input type="checkbox"/> Child with IEP <input type="checkbox"/> Child with PSP Parent/Guardian #1 Name: Last _____ First _____ Parent/Guardian #2 Name: Last _____ First _____ Language(s) Spoken at Home: _____ Date: ____/____/____ Completed by: (Your Name): _____ Date: ____/____/____ Program Name: _____ Program Phone Number: (____) _____-_____ Program Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Type of Program: <input type="checkbox"/> Head Start <input type="checkbox"/> Child Care Center <input type="checkbox"/> Family Child Care <input type="checkbox"/> Private Nursery School <input type="checkbox"/> Public PreKindergarten Parental Consent Form* Signed to release this information? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No *File Consent Form with sending program; do not send to receiving school. Learning Styles (please check all that apply): Prefers to play: <input type="checkbox"/> alone <input type="checkbox"/> with a friend <input type="checkbox"/> in small groups <input type="checkbox"/> Is capable of working: <input type="checkbox"/> independently <input type="checkbox"/> in a group Comments: _____ The purpose of this form is to articulate the child's progress in preschool and readiness for kindergarten. - Identify the child's overall progress within each domain as Satisfactory or Needs Support. - Check specific items where the child is Satisfactory. - Write a comment for areas that you would like to share additional information. - Return completed forms for children attending an HCPSS kindergarten to Early Childhood Programs, Howard County Public School System, 10910 Clarksville Pike, Ellicott City, MD 21142. Detailed information about the learning domains can be found in Supporting Every Young Learner: Maryland's Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy Birth to Age 8 (http://tinyurl.com/indpedagogy).		
Learning Domain	Progress	Comments
Social Foundations: The Social Foundations domain focuses on children's personal and social development, including their engagement in learning and interactions with others. It includes: <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness and expression of emotion <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships with adults - Seeks help as appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation with peers - Listens to others <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution - In respect of others <input type="checkbox"/> Self control - Maintains attention during an activity Persistence <input type="checkbox"/> Working memory - Responds to directions - Follows routines independently <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving <input type="checkbox"/> Initiative - Willing to try new things - Shows eagerness and/or curiosity Guides/Pedagogy pp. 22, 82-84, Appendix 1: 130-166 *Items are assessed in the Early Learning Assessment		

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!





GOAL 6

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD CONNECT FAMILIES TO THEIR PEERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Personal networks are a key source of support for families with young children. Learning from one another and sharing common experiences can inform parent and families about resources, expand parenting strategies, and offer a source of comfort. Maryland initiatives and the family engagement practices of early care and education providers should support parents and families to form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and enhance social well-being and community life.

We have all heard the expression, “It takes a village to raise a child.” However, these days it seems more parents are left on their own to figure out appropriate parenting. Families are bombarded with information, but how do they know which information is credible? Social media is one of the most favored ways to communicate, yet comments from these websites on certain parenting practices can be harsh and critical, making parents feel they have to be perfect all the time. How can this be expected of new parents? How can this be expected for moms who are working and taking care of others in their families? To help families through day to day struggles and difficult situations, teachers, educators and providers are often there to listen and understand, but sometimes more help is required and we need to be prepared for those times. To help families when they are in need, providers should be aware of, and share information on available community resources. Also, a “learning community” can be created where families and staff feel comfortable sharing and learning from one another. Our children learn from their parents, their neighbors, their teachers and the community in which they live. Although it may not always seem like it, it still does take a village to raise a child.



LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Ellen Galinski, author of *Mind in the Making*¹, defines learning communities as groups “of people who come together to learn with and from each other and then seek to act on what they learn. Their reason for being is ongoing inquiry for the sake of improvement.” This emphasis on learning with and from each other, and then taking action from that shared teaching and learning, truly speaks to the power of collaboration.

By building and acting as a community, participants from all different areas of early childhood education (e.g., teachers, parents, and administration) can come together to enact new policies and design new practices in response to family and community needs that are tied directly to children’s development.

FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Early childhood classrooms are viewed as communities. Children are taught to look at their classmates as friends and children have jobs in the classroom to teach responsibility. They work together to take care of each other and the classroom. The same is true for early childhood programs and family serving agencies. Programs that support good family engagement practices provide environments where families feel welcomed and included as part of a larger community of parents and families. Family engagement efforts should build connections between families, peers and the community and support families’ interests and needs. Community partnerships enhance programs and enable programs to better support and connect families to community resources. The following programs are great collaboration models.

- **Judy Centers**
May partner with other agencies to provide adult education, parenting classes, child development programs, health services, good nutrition etc.
- **Libraries**
May work with local child care providers and other child care programs and agencies to plan library visits, storytimes, and share additional community resources for families.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start Programs**
May partner with other agencies to provide services to families regarding good nutrition, adult education, financial stability, child development, parenting classes, etc.
- **Local Child Care and Resource and Referral Centers**
May partner with programs to provide information on quality early childhood practices and training for staff and families.

MOUs

MOUs should address what services will be provided for staff and families and how services for each program will be delivered.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Creating a learning community - an environment that is safe and respectful where all adults, including staff and parents, can learn from each other – is important. Everyone can ask for the kinds of topics/information that they need and find helpful means for investing in high quality professional development and coaching. This is needed to support staff as they develop skills to engage children and families in appropriate ways at all times. Parents will participate differently because of past experiences, cultural reasons, and their personalities. Staff must be prepared to recognize and build on parent strengths.

10 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES² ARE THAT THEY:

1. Bring new players together.
2. Seek to reach the most “in need”.
3. Focus on learning from and with each other and share a belief that there is expertise amongst everyone.
4. Focus on active learning that is experiential and engages participants in **self-reflection** and self-discovery.
5. Use new media to connect in creative ways.
6. Actively create new curricula based on sound principles of child and adult learning and development.
7. Focus on assessment, but tie assessment to child development.
8. Reframe teaching as teaching AND learning together.
9. Connect policy to practice.
10. “Pay it forward.”



IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Programs that employ good family engagement practices will welcome and value families, but also recognize the support that families need to be successful and help to build those systems and connections. According to the Head Start Research to Practice Series on Family Outcomes, there are two key competencies that allow families to actively participate in their child's school:

- **Cultural Capital** –refers to the knowledge and skills needed to understand and participate in educational or other systems in a particular culture, or more simply, institutional or formal knowledge and support.
- **Social Capital** – refers to the relationships that help provide resources or information, more simply, relationships and support networks.

Parents need both social and cultural capital to engage in a program, but what does this mean? For parents to be actively engaged in a program, they will need peer to peer support as well as community resources and support. Use the following chart for examples of both.

Social Capital (relationships and support networks)	Cultural Capital (institutional knowledge and support)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A neighbor or family member who can transport to or from the bus stop. • A neighbor who keeps the key to your house in case of emergencies. • A Mommy or Daddy Weekly Support group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of school start and stop dates. • Kindergarten transition information. • Awareness of adult education classes and information. • Early Intervention and Special Education Services.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Families look to their child care programs and schools for a certain level of support. They often seek information from these programs regarding their child's development and parenting strategies. They also look at these programs as a safe and secure place for their children while they are at work. Providers should recognize the formal and informal types of support systems that parents rely on and help them to not only recognize the supports they have in place but to utilize them when needed.

Formal Support Systems	Informal Support Systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctors and Pediatricians • Early Child Care and Family Care programs • Local School Systems • Libraries • Other family serving agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members and extended family • Neighbors and friends • Recreational groups • Religious institutions

When providers bring these systems and families together, they create opportunities for families to build support networks and strong relationships that can support families through their child's entire educational career. Strong support systems are especially important in **migrant** communities where families might rely on each other for assistance with language, or for navigating new and unfamiliar educational systems, or social services. These support systems may simply provide needed emotional support during a transition period.

SCENARIO

Jennifer recently had a beautiful baby girl. She had a two year old toddler and a six year old at home. Her husband worked long hours and was gone for most of the day. The first few nights being at home were very difficult and the baby was soon diagnosed with a disability and was medically fragile. Jennifer was extremely overwhelmed with the amount of care needed for her newborn and her two older sons. She felt that she often was doing it alone since her husband was gone for most of the day.

Jennifer's provider worked closely with her and listened as she described how difficult everyday seemed for her with the doctor's appointments, medical care and the normal day to day life with three children. After asking her a few questions, the provider recognized that Jennifer's sister and friends lived nearby and had been helping to baby sit and get the older child to and from school while Jennifer was at the doctor or caring for her newborn (informal supports). Jennifer was really overwhelmed with not understanding how to help and support her newborn and who to go to for all of her questions and concerns. The provider was able to get her information regarding special education, as well as support groups in the area where she could meet other parents of children with disabilities (formal supports). By helping this mom to recognize the supports she already had in place, the provider was also able to identify additional supports she needed and then give her useful information.

The mom looked toward her provider as support and a safe place to ask questions. It opened the door to a larger support network that not only helped the family during a difficult transition period, but provided one that will continue to be a support throughout their children's education.

FAMILY VOICE

It's important to have a school and organization like the Judy Center to care so much and do so much for your children and family. It makes a world of difference especially when you have five kids and your husband works extremely long hours. To know that the school and the Judy Center work together along with the community makes you feel good and a part of something special. My family has been to many of the Judy Center events – Family Nights, Harvest Fest, field trips and many others over the years. I have been able to meet and build relationships with a lot of parents I probably would not have known if it was not for some of the trips and events the Judy Center offers.

- Parent, Charles County Judy Center



TEACHING AND LEARNING

We often think of the child's classroom when talking about teaching and learning, but remember, in a learning community, staff, parents and children are learning. When programs create peer networks for parents, they feel comfortable to participate in the program more fully, including in the child's classroom. They will be more likely to ask questions of the teachers and staff regarding their child's development. To fully support families in this area, staff can:

- Encourage parents and caregivers to participate in training opportunities regarding child development and social and emotional development, (e.g., Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning).
- Parents, teachers and staff can exchange information about their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. This includes talking about the importance of the home language (with families of children who are dual language learners).
- Encourage parent-to-parent support when participating in parent meetings about children's learning and development.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Strong community partnerships enhance early learning programs and support parents in a variety of ways. To continue to build on your community partnerships:

- Participate in community meetings and initiatives that will build your program's partners and increase your ability to respond to parent needs. Your Local Early Childhood Advisory Council (LECAC) is a great place to start to build those connections with other early childhood educators and family serving agencies. For more information on your LECAC, see the Resource Section.
- Enhance family experiences with community resources that support children's learning and development, such as libraries and museums. Reach out to the local library for activities and events in the area that you can share with parents. You may also find that you can schedule periodic trips or story times for your program and build a partnership.
- Share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities and special health needs. Connect with early intervention and preschool special education offices so that you can give parents updated information and help to support families with children with disabilities.

TO BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY WITHIN YOUR PROGRAM:

- Schedule events at your program that bring together families, staff and community representatives.
- Help establish relationships between staff members and families. This helps staff quickly identify each family's needs.
- Find families who are knowledgeable about the community and ask them to participate at events and meetings with parents.

EDUCATOR VOICE

We had Mr. Kofi's Wolf Trap Parent Involvement Workshop at our program and had everyone participate; all of our parents were involved and were able to appreciate each other a little more. These events help our program become a community beyond its identity as a learning institution. Cooking with parents, attending behavior training, attending Parent Café's, all allow parents to empathize with the fact that they all have similar problems and can get to know and help each other. These activities have helped parents build rapport with each other and have promoted supportive friendships between parents. Sometimes parents just need someone else to talk to who shares the same concerns.

- Greenbelt Children's Center, Prince Georges County

EDUCATOR VOICE

Seventy-seven parents and children showed up at our first Library Café. We partnered with the Judy Center and the Early Learning Division at our local school system focused on the Title I areas. Many of the families had not been to the library before. All staff were on deck, including our library director, staff and volunteers, to meet and greet families, guiding them through the evening's activities. Our volunteer coordinator happens to be a culinary arts school graduate and prepared a special array of refreshments. Every Child Read to Read's five practices were at the heart of our activities – four activity stations were set up in the library with one take-home activity-one activity per practice –talk, sing, read, write, and play. Our goal was to create a pleasant experience with the hope that parents would want to come back. We believe we're moving in the right direction because we had several crying children who didn't want to go home.

- Wicomico County, MD Public Library

MARYLAND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Maryland Public Libraries offer a wide variety of programming for children from birth to age five and for their caregivers. Our researched-based early literacy workshops and programs support parents and caregivers in their roles as their child's first teacher. Literacy rich story times are designed to foster a love for language and the library through age appropriate stories, music, finger plays and movement. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to try these activities with their child at home. By talking, singing, reading, writing and playing with their children, parents and caregivers help build the strong literacy foundation necessary for school readiness. In addition to books and music, many libraries have early literacy themed backpacks for checkout. Other library programs may include bilingual story times, art, music, dance, STEM activities, as well as fun and informative Library Café's for preschoolers and their families. Activity centers, found in the children's areas at many libraries, encourage free play, which is how young children learn best. Please check out the State Library Resource Center to access many library services and resources.

REFLECTION

When programs support family engagement practices to build community and peer networks, the entire program and community benefit. Relationships that children, families and the community build support one another not only in education, but in all other areas of life.





GOAL 7

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILIES AS LEADERS AND ADVOCATES

When parents and families are empowered, they can be a strong force for positive change in their child's education and in many other areas of life. Therefore, family engagement practices of early care and education providers should support families to participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, and community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.

Families often look to their child care provider and school as the experts for their child's education. They may not feel comfortable telling teachers and providers what is needed and what they feel is best for their children. It is important to work with, and empower, parents when preparing children for school. When parents understand their child's development and how learning occurs, they not only help them learn at home, but are then able to recognize and ensure their child receives quality education experiences. Parents develop the skills to participate fully in their child's program, advocating for what is needed. As the child continues through school, parents continue to advocate for their families, contributing to their success.



FOUNDATIONAL AREAS

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We know it is important to empower parents or caregivers in becoming leaders, but how do we do this? We often tell them to participate at meetings and to voice their opinions, but it is not enough to simply tell them what to do, we must teach relevant skills. Educators and providers can do this by modeling leadership skills and allowing parents and families opportunities to practice these new skills in their programs. This builds the parent's confidence so that they might advocate for their children in other settings. To do this, program management must intentionally plan for parental participation in program planning, such as:

- Parent Meetings or Parent Councils – These are parent led meetings. Staff need to train the parents to coordinate and run the meetings, ensuring parents have a voice in all program decisions.
- Mentoring – Many programs will work closely with parents, and as they gain new skills, they then become mentors to new parents. This gives parents an opportunity to practice leadership skills with their peers.
- Planning activities – Many programs will allow parents to plan center events or committee meetings, giving parents leadership roles in the program.

EDUCATOR VOICE

We will often have parents who have been attending the program for a while help new parents who have just started to attend. This gives parents an opportunity to act as mentors and explain the program to new families, making them aware of the program's services and other community programs.

- Kent County Family Support Center

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When supporting families as they grow into leaders, providing professional development and training for both families and staff is essential. Staff members need to be aware of how they can provide support and can help to coach and teach families the skills they need to help their children. Ensuring the program is supportive of training for both staff and families can be challenging. To meet everyone's needs, programs can:

- Provide staff training in the following areas:
 - Professional Ethics (confidentiality, boundaries and self-determination)
 - Diversity
 - Relationship building
 - Collaboration with families
 - Communication

- Form partnerships with adult educators who creatively enhance education and training opportunities for families.
- Provide advocacy training and opportunities for families to develop and use advocacy skills in the context of their child's lifelong learning and in other ways of interest to the parent.

More information on professional development is available in the Resource Section.

MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Maryland Family Network, Inc. (MFN) has developed and offered Parent Leadership training since 2000. The curriculum and service delivery has changed over the years, and has been shaped to meet the needs of families. However, the underlying concept has always been that parents are their children's first teacher and who better to advocate for their children than their own parents (Goal 3).

The goal of the Leadership Program is to provide parents the opportunity to recognize, build, and enhance the skills necessary to take an active and effective leadership role within their families, schools, and communities. As a result, parents are able to influence policy and program service delivery within the systems in which they participate (Goal 7).

The program is comprised of introductory and advanced level trainings. Each training consists of two, six-hour days of skill-building for a total of 12 hours. The introductory level training is designed to increase parents' self-confidence, discovery and enhancement of leadership abilities and style, and to develop an awareness of the impact they can make through advocating for the needs of themselves and their families (Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

The Leadership Institute for Parents curriculum is designed to strengthen the leadership abilities of parents and to increase the confidence and ability of parents to advocate. Parents get to meet other parents from around the State, affirming their needs and dreams while joining collaboratively with their peers. The Leadership Institute Curriculum (Part I) offers seven core topics that serve as an introduction to the skills necessary for advocating effectively and expanding parents capacity to get their needs met. Parents develop an awareness of their "power", responsibility for making effective decisions, and serving as change agents in their communities (Goal 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7).

The Leadership Institute for Parents curriculum—Part I provides training and practice in the following areas:

- Understanding leadership
- Active listening
- Critical thinking
- Decision-making
- Communicating with impact
- Public speaking and advocacy; and
- Action planning.

The curriculum provides opportunities for parents to master the definition of leadership and to dispel any related myths—the goal being that they can all be leaders! Parents engage in activities to sharpen listening skills, make informed decisions, and strengthen abilities to effectively communicate with others. The training involves actual practice with public speaking within small and large groups. Incentives/prizes are provided to stimulate active participation during the various individual and group activities. By the second day, these incentives are no longer needed as participants willingly engage in the myriad of activities (Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

During the action planning session, parents are tasked with deciding how they will use the learned skills. Parents can decide on a project or an activity to demonstrate use of their leadership skills.

Advanced Leadership Institute for Parents is held during MFN’s Annual Staff Development Conference (Goals 1-7). It is also conducted for two days, six hours each. Topics include:

- Review of Leadership Concepts
- Managing Stress
- Maintaining Healthy Relationships
- Positive and Negative Self-Talk
- Looking Like a Leader—Presenting and Dressing for Success
- Closing Exercise

The highlight of day two of the training is the closing exercise. Parents present what they have learned in leadership training to the network staff. Some of the parents showcase the projects they developed after attending Part I. Others conduct role-plays or skits demonstrating the use of leadership skills. A number of parents give speeches focusing on what leadership and the related training has meant to them. Staff are inspired by the participants and what they have learned. The closing exercise is also an affirmation to the staff as to the strengths of their participants.

The practice and use of leadership skills is pervasive in Family Support Centers (FSC) and does not begin and end with the training. Family Support Centers are required to provide formal leadership training in the FSCs on a quarterly basis. Other opportunities provided to parents are inclusion of at least two parents on the Center’s advisory board. Also, FSCs have parent committees. The committees meet monthly and are facilitated by parents with assistance by staff. Agendas and minutes are generated by the parents. The purpose of the committees is to provide parents a venue for input into FSC operations, particularly activity and program planning. A fundamental philosophy of Family Support is that all parents have strengths. Underlying the Parent Leadership Training is that “Parents do make the difference!” (Goals 1-7).



FAMILY VOICE

“If I can speak up for myself here, with all these people, then I can do it anywhere else for my child because I need to.”

- Parent, Maryland Family Network Parent Leadership Training

EDUCATOR VOICE

“Parent Leadership Training is so important. This training gives parents a safe place to practice these skills.”

- Instructor, Maryland Family Network Parent Leadership Training

IMPACT AREAS

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

As parents are building their leadership and advocacy skills, they will become more comfortable and participate more fully in the program. Families will be more receptive to new experiences. To support families as they grow into these new roles, make sure to:

- Create events that give opportunities to practice new leadership skills.
- Ensure that parent meetings and trainings are announced routinely, that announcements are inviting, and that language is not a barrier to parent participation. Send announcements home in the family’s language, when possible, and provide interpreters for meetings. To cut down on cost, many programs use their partners to collaborate for parent meetings. For example, two programs can invite their families to a parent meeting. One program provides the food and location while the other provides the interpreters.
- Engage in honest dialogue with families about their expectations and staff/program objectives and have agreed upon understandings of how to partner and collaborate with each other. Many parents may not understand what their role is within the school or program so giving them specific jobs or responsibilities, such as typing up parent meeting minutes or creating flyers for family events, may be helpful.

Instead of saying...	Say...
Parents need to come to parent meetings.	We have monthly parent meetings. Parents help create the agenda by letting us know their concerns and interests. Please let us know what topics interest you so we can provide that for you.
We have an open door policy. You can come to the school anytime.	We have an open door policy which means you are welcome at the center anytime. While you are at the center, you can volunteer in classrooms, help us plan parent meetings, or help us create parent information boards, etc.
You are required to attend parent teacher conferences.	We view families as partners in the children’s education. Parents are the experts on their child and the information you have is essential to the child’s success. We review the assessment information and develop and achieve goals together.

Communication to families should include three types of information:

- Information about what is happening at the program (schedule changes, meals, policies)
- Information about important content (school readiness information, developmental milestone guidelines)
- Information about the child (sharing portfolios, anecdotal about the child's daily activities)

Remember, communication is key! Both informal and formal communication is essential to family engagement.

Informal Communication	Formal Communication
Emails/phone calls (Be sure to find out the parent's preferred method to communicate.)	Newsletters
Bulletin Boards	Conferences
Conversations at pick up and drop off times	Materials sent home

Communication from families can be spontaneous, elicited, or prompted. Let parents know the best way to communicate with you (emails, phone calls or face to face) and promote your open door policy (remember to be specific and tell them how to participate in the program). When asking parents or caregivers for information, here are some things to include:

- Medical and logistical information (allergies, emergency contacts).
- Parent observations about their child's growth and development and any concerns they may have.
- Information about a child's dislikes, likes and interests. This helps plan for children in the classroom and builds on their existing skills.
- Ask families what type of information they would like to get from the program or school and how often. When parents are given the information they need, they communicate more openly and are more engaged with their child's school or program. Many programs use an All About Me form or activity. This may include questions about the child and the parents and gives teacher useful information about that family and their interests and needs.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Having strong family partnerships will support you as you work with families to help them become leaders and advocates. To start, you will need to assist families in identifying their interests, help them to articulate their strengths and needs, and work with them to develop and accomplish their goals. The following are a few tips to get you started:

- Assist families in using resources and systems of support as necessary and appropriate. Remember the EcoMap from Goal 1? Using this method, or a variation of it, can really help families identify their resources.
- Families with children with disabilities may need support as they navigate the special education system and advocate for their children. The first place to start is knowing and understanding their rights. Ensure that families are aware of services and know about their rights under federal and state laws, including their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Many times parents are just given the Maryland Procedural Safeguard Notice, which explains their rights under IDEA. Remember to help parents understand this document; it is not enough to just give it to them. Discuss the information and give clear examples of what is being explained so that parents understand the information. A link to the copy of the Maryland Procedural Safeguard Notice is available in the Resource Section.
- Provide opportunities for parents to identify their strengths as leaders/advocates and to use them in the program and community. This could be as simple as having parents design the parent information board or having them collaborate with staff and coordinate meetings and events for the school.
- Share information with families about family peer networks and/or parent initiated school community efforts.
- Partner with parents to engage in advocacy groups that work on issues related to child, family, and community needs or on other issues of interest to parents. Remember to look to your county's Local Early Childhood Advisory Council and other local advisory councils. Many of these groups invite parents to attend these meetings because the parent's perspective is valuable to the work they are doing!

QUICK TIP



Remember it is not enough to tell a parent to attend a meeting or to just take them to the meeting. As staff, we must prepare them for the meeting so they know what to expect and how to participate.

- Tell them what the purpose of the meeting is and list two or three questions they can ask to help them participate.
- Attend the meeting with the parent so you can coach them and make them feel more comfortable.
- Sometimes just looking the part can help the parent feel more comfortable! Giving parents a notepad, pen, and a bottle of water helps them to look and feel more prepared. (Next time you're at a meeting, look around the room. Nearly everyone will have these three items!)

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Leadership is important but how does it impact teaching and learning? Remember that when families understand their child's development and understand the importance of their role in their child's education, they work as partners with their teachers and provide information that is needed for the child's success in the classroom. The following strategies will help parents be a part of their child's education:

- Make sure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss child assessment data. This could be any screenings or assessments that are completed as well as the children's portfolios (a collection of the children's work throughout a period of time). This helps families to see how their children are progressing and gives them an opportunity to discuss specific developmental skills and milestones. Reviewing this information with them helps prepare families to initiate and/or participate in similar discussions with teachers in the formal education system.
- Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child's strengths and challenges. This helps families and providers to work together to develop appropriate goals for the child.

QUICK TIP



Remember - Educators and early care providers may be the expert on education and child development, but the parents are the experts on their child. Their information is critical to ensuring children's success!



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are essential to a program's success in supporting parents and families. Not only do these strong partnerships create opportunities to link families to community resources, but it also allows opportunities for parents to be involved in community organizing activities. This allows families to advocate for their children to improve their development and learning experiences. Programs can:

- Link families with support systems, peer-to-peer groups, and resources, like Parent Café's and Library Cafes.
- Participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interest of families.
- Share information with families about resources and services for children with disabilities and special health needs.
- Collaborate with community organizations that share parent concerns and interests.

Helping families to become leaders and advocates gives them a wide range of duties. Think of the several examples discussed. Family advocates can provide information to staff and to other families; they can organize events and assist in the classroom. Family advocates can also help raise awareness and participate in leadership meetings, and even testify in support of legislation around an issue.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Research shows that children are more successful in school when their families are involved in their development and education. For children with disabilities, the importance of parent involvement can be even greater.

Very often, parents are the only or best source of information about their child's strengths and the impact a disability has on their child's development or learning ability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that parent be equal members on the team that evaluates their child's abilities and creates an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet the unique needs of their child.

The Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/ Early Intervention Services maintains a network of local Family Support Services coordinators that assist parents of children with disabilities to fully participate in planning early intervention and special education services for their child.

- **Family Support Network** coordinators for families of children ages Birth to three years
- **Preschool Partners** coordinator for families of children ages 3-5 years
- **Partners for Success** coordinators for families of children ages 3-21 years

Family support service coordinators are available in each Maryland jurisdiction to:

- Answer questions about early intervention and special education services
- Help foster connections among families
- Provide resources and lend library materials
- Organize parent trainings
- Facilitate parent support groups
- Support families in planning for transitions
- Informally assist parents in resolving concerns with local school systems
- Provide information about Maryland's formal process for resolving disputes with local early intervention systems and local school systems

EDUCATOR VOICE

Parent involvement is crucial to our program's success! Our parents complete an annual survey on the center policies, procedures and educational philosophy. This feedback is essential for us as we grow and meet the needs of our community here at Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center.

- Johns Hopkins Bayview Child Development Center, Baltimore City

FAMILY VOICE

The staff encouraged me to keep coming to the program, even when I didn't want to. They encouraged me to get my GED and helped me to find a job. When I started at the Family Support Center, my goal was to get my GED before my daughter graduated high school. She not only graduated high school, but she is enrolled in college.

- Parent, Our House Family Support Center, Maryland Family Support Network Spring Training

REFLECTION

Improving the outcomes for children and families takes more than just telling parents they need to be advocates for their children. Leadership and advocacy are skills taught through modeling, coaching and practice. When this is done successfully, parents have not only improved their family well-being, but they have modeled motivation, persistence and accomplishments for their children and have improved their family's outcomes.

