

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.

