



Engaging families part 1: Essential partnering plans

From the start, families need to know how important they are as essential partners in professionals' work with children. The first contacts and efforts made with families sets the tone for how the relationship progresses.

“Research demonstrates that family engagement is a dynamic, interactive process that provides a pathway to student success.”

– Harvard Family Research Project

Make plans

Engaging families takes time and intentional planning. It is helpful to put your plans and ideas into writing an action plan. Action plans state the objectives, methods, and predicted outcomes of your plans. When developing your plans, partner with family members from your program.



Present good information

Families that are given clear programming information will have many of their questions answered and resources to refer to. Provide the following:

Program and policy/procedure (handbooks) – include careful and clear information on policies, procedures, and educational philosophy.

Welcome letters – create an informative and inviting welcome letter that shares your background, visions for your work, invitations for involving families, and contacts to reach you.

Good communication

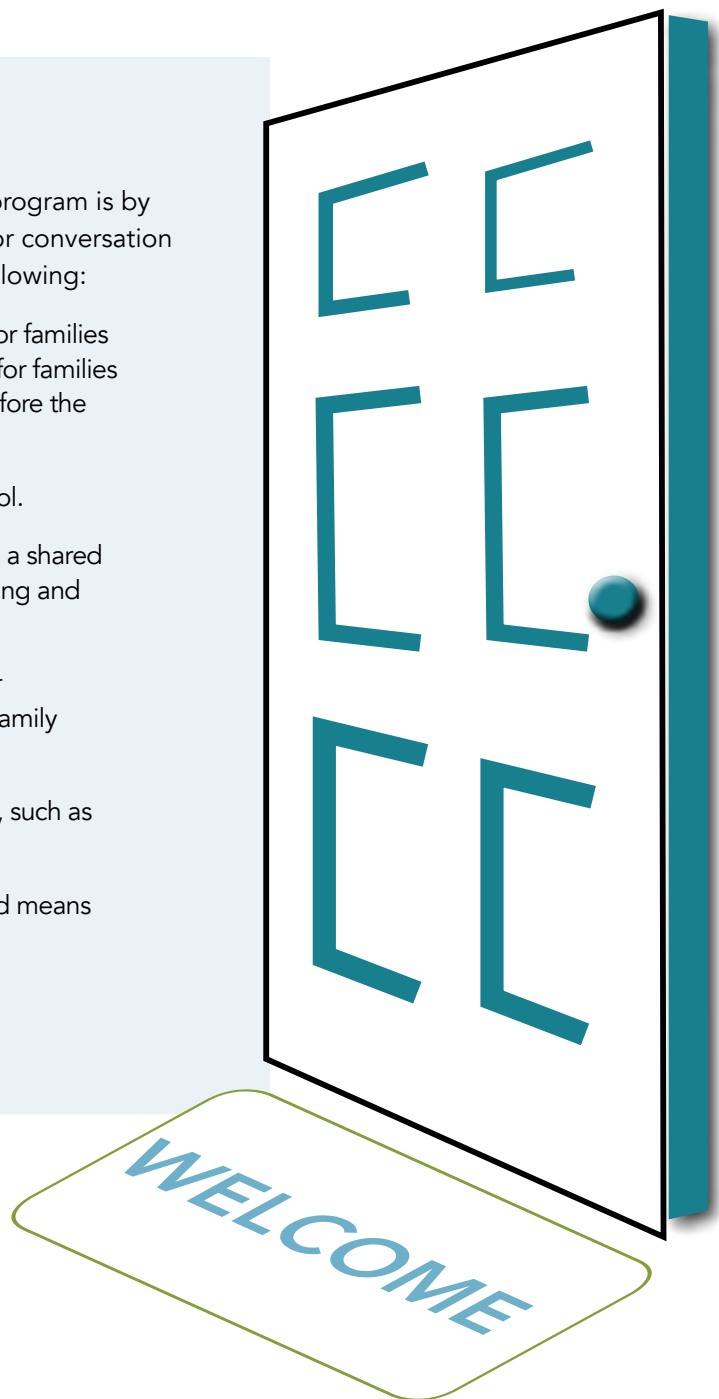
Good communication is essential. Think about the many ways to provide communication:

- **Newsletters** – a great way to share larger amounts of information, such as documentation of a project, songs, books, and of course, program news.
- **Daily journals** – a notebook or binder that goes from home to school and back. These include brief notes of daily happenings and information for parents.
- **Parent bulletin boards** – displays announcements, articles, and documentation of projects.
- **Mailboxes** – provides ongoing communication options for parents, teachers, and children.
- **Electronic options:** phone calls, email, e-newsletters, website, and blogs

Spend time together

The best way to get to know families in your program is by spending time together. Families need time for conversation and opportunities to interact. Consider the following:

- **Visitations** – provide the time needed for families to visit the program. Initially it is helpful for families to visit in small groups or individually before the program starts.
- **Home visits** – connects home and school.
- **Parent/teacher conferences** – provides a shared responsibility to support children's learning and development.
- **Open door policy** – programs that offer open-door policies often have positive family involvement experiences.
- **Special events** – plan for special events, such as an art show or open house.
- **Volunteer** – provide multiple outlets and means for families to volunteer.



References

Harvard family research project, harvard graduate school of education. Spring 2008. *The evaluation exchange*, volume xiv, number 1 & 2. Retrieved november 10, 2009 from <http://www.Hfrp.Org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/current-issue-building-the-future-of-family-involvement>.

Rti (response to intervention) action network. *Engaging families in early childhood education*. Retrieved july 11, 2008 from <http://www.Rtinetwork.Org/essential/family/ar/engagingfamilies>.