



## Engaging families part 2: Rethinking family involvement

Research shows that family involvement makes a difference in promoting school success for every child of every age. Along with success comes a joy and satisfaction of building home and school partnerships that grow and develop over time.

"Children's cognitive and behavioral skills, while important, are not enough to ensure school success. Of equal or greater importance are the support and involvement of the child's family and positive relationship between home and school."

– Amy Schulting, "Promoting Parent-School Relationships During the Transition to Kindergarten," Harvard Family Research Project

### Think about and answer:

1. What are your definitions of family involvement?
2. How will you connect families to your program?

### Rethinking involvement

Many researchers are rethinking typical family involvement strategies. No longer is the family involvement focus simply volunteering, but rather involving families in the child's overall learning process. Research shows that planning collaboratively with the family makes for greater success all around.

### Connect, value, and share

How might you connect families to their child's learning? Begin by listening and inviting families to share their ideas, concerns, and opinions. Discover what families would like you to know about their child – this information provides a deeper understanding of the child and family. It also demonstrates that family ideas and contributions are valued.

Create a precedent that encourages collaborative planning and developmental discussion. In doing so, both the family and the early learning professional can reveal ideas that support the child's learning process.

### Build partnerships: Share connections to children's learning

- Take time to share with families how much you value their involvement.
- Provide families appropriate information on child development and resources pertaining to their child's age, development, and specific needs.
- Share your plans and goals for children's growth and development.
- Share how the activities, projects, and environments in your program support the learning process.

## Questions to answer – Answers to questions

A useful way to gather information is to develop a collection of questions that will help in getting to know the children and their families. What might you want to know? Plan a time where you can meet families and discuss your ideas.

Consider using a letter format such as the following to share your questions:

*Dear Families,  
Please consider helping me  
to get to know your child  
by answering the following  
questions. I look forward  
to talking with you and  
planning for your child's  
learning experiences.*

In the words of the famous psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, **"the family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development."** By rethinking and carefully planning how you engage families, you can tap into what Bronfenbrenner describes as the most effective system for supporting child development.

Dear Families,

Please consider helping me to get to know your child by answering the following questions. I look forward to talking with you and planning for your child's learning experiences.

1. What are some of your wishes and dreams for your child?
2. Describe something your child likes to do again and again.
3. How do you know when your child is upset? What does she do when she is mad? Sad? Frustrated? What comforts your child when feeling these emotions?
4. Describe experiences where you have seen your child having fun and laughing; what was she doing?
5. What are some family traditions and celebrations that are special to your child?
6. What are some current learning and development goals that you have for your child?
7. Share your ideas and experiences about family involvement – how would you like to be involved in the program/learning process?

Other ideas you wish to share:

### References

Harvard Family Research Project. *Family Involvement Makes A Difference*. Retrieved November 10, 2009 from <http://www.Hfrp.Org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference>.

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