HANDOUT 3

THE ARKANSAS GUIDE FOR

Promoting Family Engagement

Supporting infants, toddlers, and pre-school children and their families during transitions to achieve school readiness and to sustain learning gains through third grade.

A Resource for Early Childhood Professionals

Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

Arkansas Head Start Collaboration Office

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

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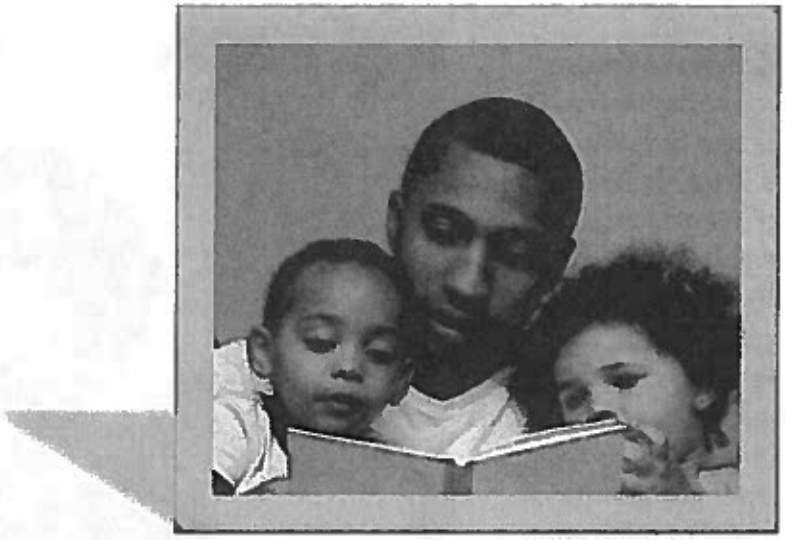


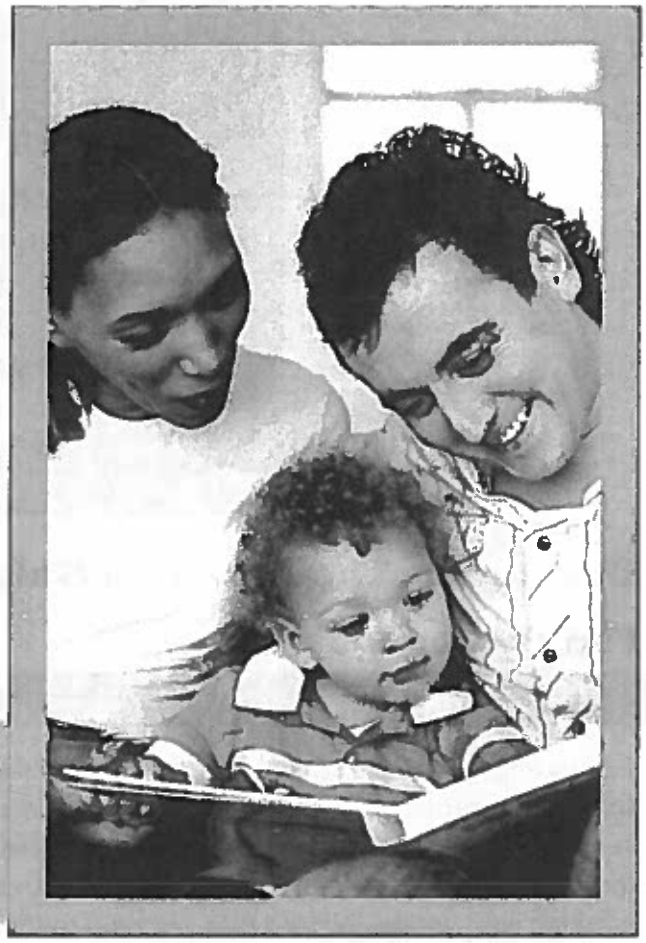
Developing The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement

Family engagement is critical for healthy child development. Research tells us that quality family engagement can have a lasting effect on a child's health, school readiness and later success in life. How do we define family engagement? When does it begin and what does it look like? How do we know what will work with today's families? What can we offer programs working with young children that will help them be more effective in engaging and empowering parents?

The Arkansas State Parent Advisory Council asked these questions and many more as they developed the Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement. The guide focuses on school readiness and transitions across learning environments. It suggests that school readiness is a continuous process, beginning at birth, continuing through elementary school and at its best, lays the foundation for ongoing success in school. Likewise, engaging families during transitions can ensure a positive experience that has the potential to help children throughout their school years.

The Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and the Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office recognized the need to include many voices to develop this guide and convened the Arkansas State Parent Advisory Council. Council membership includes parents and professionals from the wide range of programs, schools and systems working with young children. In seeking funding to support this work, Arkansas found a generous partner in the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This project aligns seamlessly with the W. K. Kellogg's mission of helping vulnerable children and their families succeed in school, work and life.

Arkansans appreciate that each family's needs are different and each community has unique characteristics and constraints. This guide was designed to offer a range of ways in which to engage families. The suggested strategies can be tailored to the operations of different programs serving children.



This guide defines strategies to ensure successful transitions as children move from one learning setting to another. Whether moving into child care, from Head Start to a pre-Kindergarten classroom or from one grade to another, transitions can be challenging to navigate for everyone involved — children, parents, and the provider or teacher. Providers and teachers can offer critical supports during these times of transition and communication is critical. A strong system of family engagement will include multiple ways of communication. Today's young families use different ways of getting information — email, text and other web-based programs. A huge opportunity lies ahead in working with parents to find ways to connect more effectively.

This guide also focuses on respectful and two -way communication that seeks to welcome parents and honor their participation. It underscores the commitment of the state of Arkansas to support its youngest learners and their families. Arkansans hold families to be the most important link between the early childhood and K–12 systems. When children and their families experience success in the earliest years, they will have a stronger foundation for continued success in school and later, in becoming productive citizens. This guide is offered with the intended goal of seeing more families actively engaged in their children's development and education.

Guiding Principles

In developing the Arkansas Guide, the State Parent Advisory Council engaged in deliberate, thoughtful and candid conversation about the importance of family engagement, racial equity, communication and respect. The Council developed the following principles to guide their work:

1. Family engagement practices respect parents as their child's first teacher and recognize their importance in school readiness and later success in life.
2. Families are unique. We appreciate and celebrate all differences. Family engagement activities will demonstrate regard for different ways of knowing, doing or being, and will build on family strengths.

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3. Positive two-way communication must be modeled in order to build trust and relationships with all partners, including encouraging family-to-family interaction. Family engagement should create a safe environment where all questions are welcomed and ideas embraced.
4. The practice of engaging families must be achievable and sustainable. In order to support early childhood programs, current and proposed state-level early childhood and school age policies should be reviewed for their potential impact on the family engagement goals articulated in this guide.
5. Family engagement practices should create meaningful and ongoing opportunities for families to serve in leadership roles.

Purpose

The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement is designed to encourage intentional thinking and action related to family engagement. The guide is offered to serve all early childhood programs in Arkansas. In developing the guide, the Council recognized that the implementation of family engagement varies widely across early childhood programs, with some programs participating in well-designed and appropriately resourced systems while other programs have little to no specific plan in place and are without any resources to implement a family engagement plan. It is the hope of the State Parent Advisory Council that this guide will strengthen those early childhood programs that have systems in place to engage parents and will offer a path forward for those programs that are in the initial stages of beginning family engagement practices.

The specific purposes of this guide are to:

1. Ensure that family engagement is recognized as a core component of quality early care and education, especially as it relates to school readiness and transitions across varied learning settings,
2. Identify a set of common goals for family engagement that will promote policies and practices both at the state and local levels for agencies that provide care and education for young children, and
3. Recommend strategies that can be used to guide family engagement activities from birth through 3rd grade and support transition planning in local settings.

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Arkansas' Definition of Family Engagement

To better understand the term "family engagement", the State Parent Advisory Council reviewed definitions from the leading child development and education organizations including the Office of Head Start, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, The National Family, School and Community Engagement Workgroups and the Harvard Family Research Project. The Council studied the U.S. Department of Education's Family and Community Engagement Framework, the W. K. Kellogg Racial Equity Framework and the manual, *Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Linking Children, Families, & Schools*, developed by the National Center for Early Development & Learning and the University of Virginia. The Council compared documents from other states, including the *Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework* and the *Kansas Early Childhood Family Engagement Standards*. From this strong knowledge base, the State Parent Advisory Council crafted a definition that used language from the above experts and represents the Arkansas vision for family engagement, as follows:

> *Family engagement refers to the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and activities of families that support their children's positive development from birth through age eight (8). Family engagement builds relationships that promote family well-being, strong parent-child relationships and ongoing learning. Family engagement happens in many places, the home, early childhood program, school and community, and it is a shared responsibility with all those who support children's learning.*

Although not included in the definition, the State Parent Advisory Council strongly emphasized that successful family engagement activities can only begin with and be sustained through adequate resources. These resources could include a range of funding streams, including public-private partnerships. It is important to recognize that early care and education programs, particularly, are funded at significantly varying levels and that this impacts the range of activities programs can be implemented.

Organization of the Guide

The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement is designed to be user-friendly and intended to help plan family engagement activities, both strategically and for daily use. The guide begins by defining family engagement, as approved by the State Parent Advisory Council. Family engagement outcomes include: family well-being, positive family child relationship, families as partners and lifelong educators, family engagement in transition, family connections to peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders.

Next, the guide outlines child and family outcomes based on the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework. Similar to Head Start PFCE, the outcomes are arranged by program foundation areas that include program leadership, professional development, communications and systems and services. The program impact areas include environment, family partnerships, teaching and learning, and community partnerships. The

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guide outlines a set of strategies, mostly similar to the Head Start PFCE Framework, which programs and schools can use to reach the family engagement outcomes. The last section of the guide shares information on ways in which the document can be used, including a toolkit specifically designed for early learning professionals and a continuous improvement model to support ongoing assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation (APIE).

The Family Engagement Framework

The Arkansas Family Engagement Framework is designed to support early childhood programs in building or enhancing program areas into a positive system for change in delivering services to children and families. The pyramid framework, shown below, provides a layered structure, beginning with areas that build a strong foundation for improving family engagement. The internal components of the framework show the inter-relatedness of concepts, values, and practices for having a great family engagement system. Research suggests that engaging in these areas and components can move early childhood programs towards an ongoing system of continuous improvement, leading to the ultimate goal that every parent, staff, and administrator seeks — positive and lasting outcomes for children.

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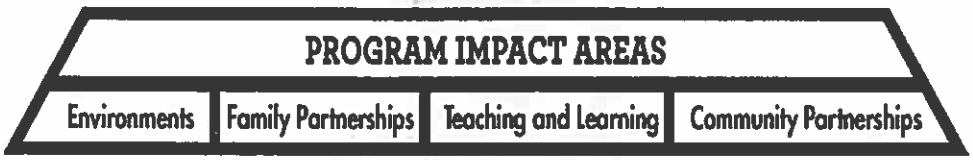
The Family Engagement Framework Components

Strong foundations are critical to support lasting change. Program foundational areas are envisioned as the over-arching fundamental activities necessary for programs in order to achieve success in family engagement activities.

- ***Program Leadership*** ensures that programs operate from a clear vision and with strategic plans that empower staff, parents and communities to work together on behalf of children.
- ***Professional Development*** refers to the ongoing and comprehensive training, development, and recognition of staff that promotes continued career development and opportunities for gaining new insights.
- ***Systems and services*** recognize the broad interrelated structure of supports needed to assist families rather than the delivery of a single service. It includes ongoing planning and encourages thoughtful questioning about the way in which a program conducts its work.
- ***Communication*** can take many forms, including written, face-to-face and online. It includes two-way conversations initiated by both parents and staff. At the center of effective communication is a welcoming and respectful atmosphere. When families feel accepted, they are more likely to be more engaged.



Once a solid foundation is in place, programs can focus on more specific family engagement activities based on existing opportunities and/or identified needs.

- ***Environment*** ensures that staff and families build relationships and work together on family goals for children's learning and development.
- ***Family Partnerships*** provide opportunities for staff and families to work together to identify and plan ways in which to achieve their goals.
- ***Teaching and Learning*** engages families in activities that focus on child development and learning. Programs ensure that families have access to and understand information about their child's progress.
- ***Community Partnerships*** encourage linkages with other networks, such as health, social services, businesses and higher education, in order to afford greater opportunities for children and their families.

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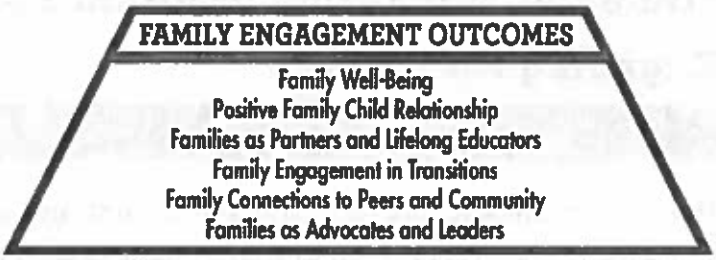
The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement identifies six outcomes that are consistent with Arkansas' definition of family engagement. These outcomes are derived from the Head Start PFCE Framework and defined as follows:



- ***Family Well-Being*** – Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.
- ***Positive Family Child Relationship*** – Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.
- ***Families as Partners and Lifelong Educators*** - Families participate as critical partners in their child's education while advancing their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences to support their parenting, careers, and life goals.
- ***Family Engagement in Transitions*** – Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including from prekindergarten to other early learning environment and from kindergarten through elementary school.
- ***Family Connections to Peers and Community*** - Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or information social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.
- ***Families as Advocates and Leaders*** – Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, or in community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.

CHILD OUTCOMES

School Readiness
Successful Transitions
Sustained Development and Learning Through the Third Grade

Child outcomes — school readiness, successful transitions, and sustained development and learning through the third grade — form the basis for the family engagement framework.

- ***School Readiness*** generally refers to a child's preparation cognitively, socially and emotionally to succeed in school. Head Start defines school readiness as "children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life". The Arkansas Department of Education identified a list of skills that will help a child be prepared to enter kindergarten, recognizing that children entering school with these skills are likely to be more successful.
- ***Successful Transitions*** focuses on ensuring positive experiences for children, families and teachers as children move across early learning environments.
- ***Sustained Development and Learning through Third Grade*** is a recognized hallmark for success in school. Research shows that students who are unprepared to start school often fall behind, frequently leaving them unable to read by the end of 3rd grade.

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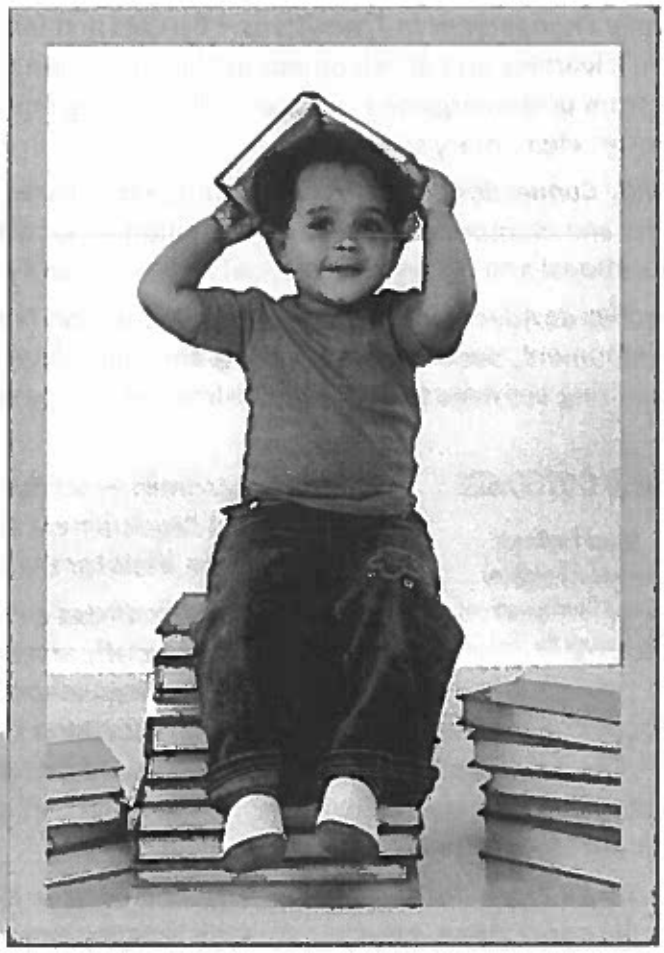
Strategies Supporting Program Success in Engaging Families

The State Parent Advisory Council adapted the strategies used in the Head Start PFCE Framework to address the family engagement outcomes. Additional strategies were added to reflect priorities specific to Arkansas including school readiness, successful transitions across learning environments and sustained learning gains through third grade. Using the design of the Head Start PFCE Framework, the strategies are first grouped by Family Engagement Outcomes. Within each of the Family Engagement Outcomes, strategies are listed that will support the Program Foundation and the Program Impact areas.

When parents are engaged, children succeed!



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Family Well-Being — Strategies

Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

1. Ensure staff members have appropriate training and supervision and manageable caseloads.
2. Incorporate goals related to family well-being into work plans and strategic planning.
3. Develop relationships with community members and community organizations that support families' interests and needs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

4. Develop knowledge of relationship building that is grounded in cross-cultural responsiveness and strengths-based perspectives.
5. Reflect on daily practice and personal experience to increase self-awareness and effective relationship building with families.
6. Develop knowledge of professional ethics around confidentiality, boundaries and self-determination.
7. Gain knowledge about mental health, child development and a variety of parenting practices, including unique ways to engage fathers.
8. Develop knowledge and skill in supporting families around financial literacy and financial stability.
9. Develop skill in coordination and collaboration with community partners.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

10. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to family well-being.
11. Link families with support systems and resources and conduct purposeful follow-up to determine their effectiveness.
12. Review individual and system-wide family successes, helpful referrals and effective staff practices to evaluate family services.
13. Collect and assemble data on individual families so that programs and schools can review the effectiveness of family services and determine needed services.
14. Consult a mental health professional or counselor with appropriate credentials and experience to be a resource for staff and program needs around family well-being.

COMMUNICATION

15. Promote two-way communications to ensure all ideas are heard and valued.
16. Engage in honest dialogue with families about their expectations and staff/ program objectives.
17. Promote cross-service area teamwork.
18. Encourage understanding of family needs and interests within the community.

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Program Impact Areas

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

19. Welcome all families—and all family structures, sizes and arrangements.
20. Initiate relationships with families that are receptive, responsive and respectful.
21. Include family-friendly spaces with pictures and materials that affirm and welcome all families.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

22. Use family partnership assessments or checklists as a tool for relationship building and as a basis for ongoing individualized family services.
23. Help families identify their interests, articulate their strengths and needs and accomplish and/or develop goals.
24. Use informal home visits, as appropriate, to establish relationships with families and to identify and support their interests and needs through the family partnership process.
25. Assist families in using resources and systems of support regularly and continuously over a period of time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

26. Participate in program meetings, such as cross-service teams, to ensure that information about services related to family and child well-being can inform teaching.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

27. Participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interests of families.

Positive Family Child Relationships — Strategies

Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

28. Ensure staff members have appropriate training, effective supervision, and manageable caseloads to support families and their relationships with their infants, toddlers, preschool and K-3rd grade age children.
29. Incorporate goals related to positive parent-child relationships into program, school work plans and strategic planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

30. Gain knowledge about:
    - the needs of parents who are parenting a child with a disability;
    - unique ways to engage fathers;
    - how mental health and wellness affects families;
    - communication styles and relationship building;

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- expectations for school readiness;
- child development;
- the potential effect of transitions on children and families;
- the effect of trauma on parent-child relationships; and
- a variety of parenting practices.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

31. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to supporting positive parent-child relationships

COMMUNICATION

32. Promote cross-service area teamwork.
33. Use surveys and ongoing conversations with families to reflect on staff relationships with families and identify areas for improvement.
34. Identify and use multiple ways to better understand participants' parenting practices, and use this information to improve parenting education and parenting supports.
35. Ensure that families understand the importance of school readiness.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

36. Hold the child and family in high regard and partner effectively with different groups of parents.
37. Provide opportunities that support parents' needs to connect with other parents for reflection, information, ideas and support.
38. Support parent-child relationships in a way that values the culture and language of the family and recognizes how different cultural influences may influence family development.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

39. Provide opportunities for parents to learn the developing role of young parents (for adolescent parents), and/or about their roles as new mothers and fathers.
40. Foster meaningful, reciprocal relationships between mother and child, and father and child in a manner that is both culturally receptive and responsive.
41. Help families identify appropriate practices that complement the stages of their developing child.
42. Support parents and families in ensuring the health and safety of their children.
43. Support a father's efforts to connect with and be responsible for his child at all ages and stages of development.
44. Support families in seeking support from mental health consultants or other community agencies when there are parent-child relationship challenges that require additional services.
45. Foster strong co-parenting relationships as appropriate.

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Program Impact Areas

TEACHING AND LEARNING

46. Engage with parents as equal partners in learning about their child while acknowledging parents' premier role as their child's first teacher.
47. Foster meaningful, reciprocal relationships between mother and child, and father and child in a manner that is both culturally receptive and responsive.
48. Talk together with families about the child's signals in ways that help families explore these signals and understand and respond to their child's behavior.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

49. Engage community partners to help support the needs and goals of new parents.
50. Engage community partners to better understand and help support the needs of families who are parenting during stressful and challenging times.

Families as Partners and Lifelong Educators — Strategies

Families participate as critical partners in their child's education while advancing their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences to support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

51. Collaborate with programs and school systems to support and empower families in their continued role as their child's lifelong educators.
52. Incorporate goals related to families as lifelong educators into program and school-work plans and strategic planning.
53. Form agreements with education entities and organizations that support staff and families' education and training goals.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

54. Prepare staff to engage parents in meaningful and creative ways in parent meetings and trainings.
55. Include teachers/teachers' assistants in parenting education sessions so parents and teachers can share information about child learning and development, and program curriculum.
56. Create "learning communities" for staff.
57. Develop knowledge about different kinds of education and training opportunities available to families.
58. Develop staff skills to support families in meeting their learning goals.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

59. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to families learning goals for themselves and their children.

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60. Maintain information about educational resources (GED, adult education, ESL, employment opportunities, workplace literacy, parenting skills, job training, job preparation skills, etc).

COMMUNICATION

61. Promote cross-service area teamwork.
62. Identify ways to obtain and use information to improve family-staff relationships, strengthen family literacy practices, and better understand the impact of family-staff relationships with respect to teaching and learning.
63. Ensure that parent meetings and trainings are announced routinely, that announcements are inviting, and that language is not a barrier to parent participation.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

64. Welcome and support families as learners and encourage their observation and participation in their child's classroom (or home-based) activities.
65. Support and encourage parents to share tips on everyday learning practices with staff and other families.
66. Provide opportunities for families to connect with other families in the program or community that are working to achieve similar learning/educational goals.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

67. Support relationships between parents and their children as part of the foundation for interactions around early learning.
68. Invite past program parents and community volunteers to share their educational and career experiences with families.
69. Encourage parents in working toward their own literacy goals and follow-up on referrals to ensure that families are enrolled and have the necessary supports to complete their education and/or training.
70. Invite families to volunteer or apply for jobs in the program in ways that support their parenting, career or life goals.
71. Make information available that supports parents' personal growth and career development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

72. Support parents as learners in parenting education programs that help parents learn more about their child's learning, development and behavior and encourage family literacy activities between parents and children.
73. Provide opportunities for families to observe and participate in child learning and development during home visits and in classrooms.
74. Consistently engage with families to gather child information and parent observations to inform teaching.
75. Share information about children's social, emotional, and cognitive development and the importance of the home language (with families of children who are dual language learners).
76. Share information about the Arkansas Child Development Early Learning Standards.
77. Engage parents in conversations to learn about children's progress and use a database/management information system that is accessible to families and that assists teachers in sharing children's progress in an understandable, family-friendly format.

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Program Impact Areas

78. Engage with parents as equal partners in learning about their child while acknowledging parents' premier role as their child's first teacher.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

79. Support family experiences with community resources that support children's learning and development, such as libraries and museums.
80. Share information with families about resources and services for dual language learners, children with disabilities and other needs of vulnerable families.
81. Link families to community resources for internships, volunteer activities and other experiences that expand their knowledge and skills and build on their career interests.
82. Form partnerships with educational resources in the community and beyond, including higher education institutions, to support families' learning interests and educational goals.
83. Form partnerships with adult educators who creatively enhance education and training opportunities for families.

Family Engagement in Transitions — Strategies

Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including prekindergarten to other early learning environments, and from Kindergarten through Elementary School.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

84. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development and partnerships related to child and family transitions.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

85. Conduct joint transition trainings across preK, EHS/HS and local educational agencies.
86. Gain understanding about the realities early childhood programs and public schools face and acknowledge both barriers and opportunities in building local partnerships (differences in policy, regulations, budgets, organizational design, etc).

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

87. Use surveys and K-12 data sources (where possible) to review transition activities and to better understand opportunities and challenges.
88. Use information from various data sources to improve transition practices with families and community partners.

COMMUNICATION

89. Establish ongoing communications and agreements between local educational agencies.
90. Support families in developing relationships with staff and other families with similar needs.
91. Create opportunities for families to ask questions and voice concerns about transitions.

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Program Impact Areas

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

92. Welcome and engage families as partners in transition planning.
93. Create a culture of supporting families during transitions as they are the key to creating continuity for children.
94. Help families identify and understand quality criteria in early childhood settings as children make transitions to new service options, new classrooms, or new home visitors.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

95. Use the family partnership process to help families develop transition plans for themselves and their children.
96. Provide families with information, training and connections to future early care and educational settings to help facilitate the transition process for parents and children (e.g., information about what families might expect of K-12 instruction and training about how to deal with disagreements between parent and teacher).
97. Ensure families know about their rights under federal and state laws, such as their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

98. Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child's strengths and challenges prior to transitions.
99. Share information about activities and everyday interactions with children that promote school readiness.
100. Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss child development so that families are prepared to have similar discussions with teachers in PreK and K-12.
101. Provide families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

102. Coordinate services for children and families leaving early childhood programs through program-school partnerships.
103. Provide advocacy training and opportunities for families to develop and use advocacy skills in the context of their child's lifelong learning.

5 Family Connections to Peers and Community — Strategies

Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

104. Ensure that systems and staff development facilitate opportunities for parents to develop relationships with their peers through meetings, trainings, support groups, mentoring programs or community referrals.
105. Incorporate goals related to family connections to peers and community into agency work plans and strategic planning.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

106. Conduct staff training on facilitating peer activities that help parents and families:
    - enhance parent-child relationships;
    - strengthen their role as educators;
    - reflect and set learning goals;
    - learn about transitions; and
    - encourage parent leadership and advocacy.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

107. Ensure that systems and staff development recognize opportunities for parents to develop relationships with their peers through meetings, trainings, support groups, mentoring programs or community referrals.

108. Provide families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

COMMUNICATION

109. Use related surveys and ongoing relationships with families to understand the opportunities and challenges related to parent connections, peers, and community, and use the information to improve practices.

110. Use information from community assessment, self assessments and related surveys to improve practices related to parent connections, peers and community.

111. Engage in honest dialogue with families about expectations for their child's learning and development during times of transition.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

112. Create safe and respectful environments where parents can lead and learn from each other and ask for the kinds of information that they find helpful as individuals and members of a group.

113. Provide space and resources, if necessary, for monthly events chaired by parents, for parents.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

114. Facilitate (or refer parents to) parental support and/or educational groups where families can share their concerns (e.g. children's special needs, dual language learner) for their children.

115. Talk with parents about the formal and informal social networks (support, amusement, help, education, etc.) they have and explore interests or needs in forming new (or renewed) social connections.

116. Individualize opportunities for peer-to-peer connections for different groups of parents (e.g., fathers or grandparents).

117. Support parents interests and goals with skill-building volunteer opportunities in the program and community.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

118. Encourage parent-to-parent support when participating in parent meetings about children's learning and development.

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Program Impact Areas

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

119. Collaborate with community organizations that share parents' concerns and interests.

120. Link families with meaningful support networks, peer-to-peer groups, and volunteer opportunities in the community.

Families as Advocates and Leaders — Strategies

Families participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, or community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

121. Ensure that parents' opinions are heard and included in the program planning processes.

122. Incorporate goals related to family advocacy and leadership into agency work plans and strategic planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

123. Provide training on the multicultural principles, leadership development, and advocacy for staff and families.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

124. Ensure that systems and supports are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to engaging families as advocates and leaders.

COMMUNICATION

125. Share information with families about existing parent-to-parent organizations, family peer networks and/or parent-initiated school-community efforts in order to foster continuity in leadership and advocacy roles

Program Impact Areas

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

126. Create an environment that welcomes parent leadership and advocacy in the program.

127. Work with parents to arrive at agreed upon understandings of how to partner and how to collaborate with each other within the program.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

128. Provide opportunities for parents to identify their strengths as leaders/advocates and to use them in the program and community.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

129. Provide parent mentoring opportunities that could include staff, alumni parents/families, elders, and professionals in the community to serve as a resource and support for parent leadership development.

130. Partner with parents to engage advocacy groups that work on issues related to child, family and community needs.

131. Form partnerships with parent-to-parent organizations or other K-12 parent groups to facilitate connections for families.

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Continuous Improvement System

Moving Early Childhood Programs to a System of Continuous Improvement

Own a piece of "APIE" in your program by assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the success of your family engagement system. This section will explore ways for you to review your existing family engagement process using strategies for each of the six family engagement outcomes. If you do not have a family engagement system, this guide will help you to create one. The family engagement strategies outlines specific things that you should be doing in your program to enhance services for children and families.

In using the strategies to create a system of continuous improvement, the first step is to assess your program. You can assess your program by asking yourself two questions: (1) Is the strategy currently being utilized in your program? (Yes or No) If yes, the second (2) question would be: Is the strategy effective or does it need improvement? You will be able to check one of these areas (effective or needs improvement).

The next step would be to use the answer from question one and the areas that needs improvement from question number two. Programs should create an action plan to address all areas that need improvements. Please note that planning also includes creating a family engagement team to work as a team to create a family engagement system of continuous improvement, set goals, and to plan appropriate activities for staff, families, and children.

Use the action plan to implement goals for completing your family engagement strategies. These strategies are integrated within each component of the family engagement framework.

At the end of your program year, you will be able to evaluate the success of your plan by identifying:

- What worked,
- What did not work, and
- Challenges, and Barriers (if any).

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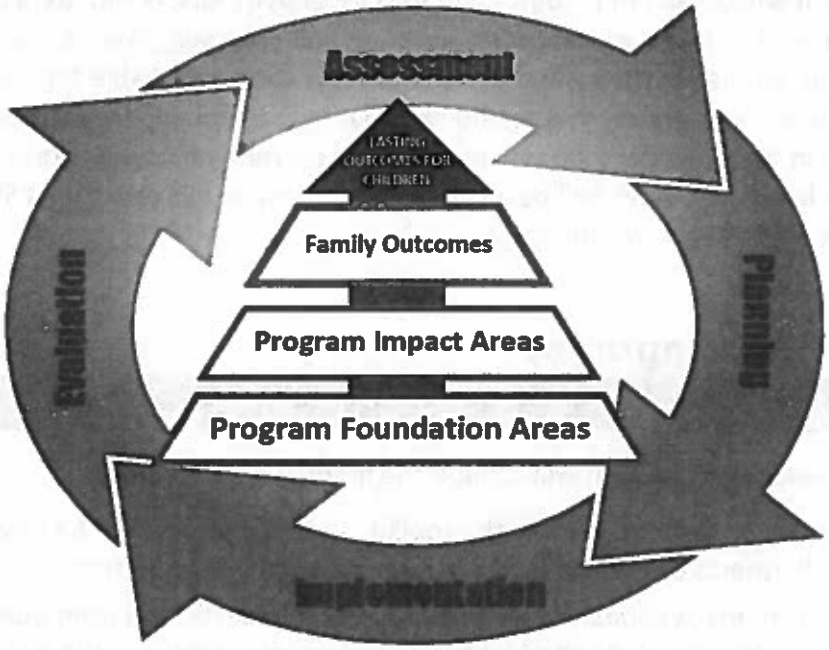
Ongoing Continuous Improvement



This is an ongoing continuous improvement model. It allows opportunities for programs and schools to measure the success of the number of family engagement strategies completed in each of the three areas in order to have lasting outcomes for all children. It also creates a visual for moving forward in establishing next steps for all programs and/or schools. The end result will be for programs/schools to have a quality annual family engagement plan that will lead to positive outcomes for children and families.

Enhance your program or school by owning pieces of APIE for continuous program improvement!

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Family Engagement Toolkit

Family engagement toolkits will be available to support each of the six family engagement outcomes. The toolkit will consist of resources, materials, activity kits, online data and information, stories, and so much more. These materials will offer suggestions and activities that staff and parents can use in their program. The toolkits will be available for staff and families to check out and use as they create and implement their family engagement plan. They will be housed in the Child Care Aware sites that are currently in place across the state of Arkansas. An online list of resources will be available for review at the Head Start State Collaboration Office website (www.arheadstart.org).

Professional Development

The professional development system will include the following six strategies:

1. Using the guide, framework, and the toolkit, specific training will be developed to address all aspects of the Guide for Promoting Family Engagement.
2. Train-the-trainers sessions will be held in order to identify and train qualified early education professionals to conduct the family engagement training statewide.
3. Trainers will conduct the training to all early childhood programs in five locations multiple times across the state. All programs, centers, and schools will be encouraged to attend.
4. The training for family engagement will be offered at no cost to the participants in the initial year. In subsequent years, the training will be available through the state's early childhood education professional development registry. The training for the Arkansas Family Engagement Guide will also be recorded by the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) and placed on the Arkansas Ideas website as a course on Family Engagement. Participants will be assessed and awarded a certificate documenting the number of training hours, once training has been completed.
5. The HSSCO in collaboration with the AETN will produce family engagement training DVDs to use in areas across the state in order for programs, especially in rural areas, to access the training. A specific code will be assigned upon completion of the training. The code will be used for the participant to be assessed, whereby, once mastered, a certificate will be awarded documenting participation and training hours.

The Arkansas Guide For Promoting Family Engagement will be posted on the websites with the DHS/Division of Childcare Early Childhood Education, Department of Education, and the Head Start State Collaboration Office/AHSA. The professional development competencies that are currently in place in Arkansas will remain the same.

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Family Engagement Resources

- The National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement (http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family) offers a wealth of information including the Head Start Family Engagement Framework, helpful tools to support parent engagement including award certificates, research, webinars and videos, and program assessment. A special section for parents offers many resources including guidance for parents of children with special needs. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, frequently referred to as the PFCE, can be found at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/framework).
- Harvard Family Research Project (www.hfrp.org), established in 1983, is a premier national resource focused on family and community engagement research, practices, policies and strategies. The website contains the most current research on family engagement, including the quarterly publication of the FINE (Family Involvement Network of Educators) newsletter. Numerous materials are available to support early childhood professionals in building family engagement practices including the Case Toolkit (http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/professional-development/create-your-own-case-toolkit-building-your-family-engagement-skills-and-knowledge). The Harvard Family Research Project partners with state and national agencies on family engagement. Latest information from these partnerships is available at http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/informing-family-engagement-policy2/partnerships.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), is recognized as the foremost professional membership organization for early childhood professionals. NAEYC's Engaging Diverse Families Project (http://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement) identifies family engagement principles, exemplary programs and numerous resources that are adaptable for early childhood programs.
- The W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930, supported the development of the Arkansas Guide for Family Engagement. WKKF focuses on community and civic engagement as well as racial equity, recognizing that both are critical in establishing conditions in which all children, especially vulnerable children, can realize their full potential. The website (https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/racial-equity) provides information on WKKF funded projects and a Racial Equity Resource Guide (http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/index.cfm) that can be customized for personal use or for sharing with colleagues.
- The *Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships*, a publication of SEDL funded by the U. S. Department of Education, suggests ways to design family engagement initiatives supporting educators and families in working together focused on student achievement and school improvement. The paper describes three case studies and offers recommendations for improving family school partnerships. The framework can be found at http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf

•The National Center for Early Development and Learning Kindergarten Transition Project at the University of Virginia (https://www.pakeys.org/uploadedcontent/docs/Transition%20into%20Formal%20Schooling/Enhancing%20the%20transition%20to%20kindergarten%20Linking%20children%20families%20and%20schools.PDF) suggests an approach to promote successful transitions for children, their families and schools. The manual includes guiding principles and offers concrete strategies, activities and timelines for use by early childhood educators.

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•The TEC Center (Technology in Early Childhood) at Erikson Institute studies the appropriate use of technology with children from birth to age 8, including ways in which to use technology for parent engagement. Research and useful materials can be found at http://teccenter.erikson.edu/about-the-tec-center/.

•The RAND Corporation released "Families, Powered On", a publication that identifies reasons that are barriers to family engagement in early childhood programs and offers ways to use technology to keep families connected to programs. The policy brief is available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR673z5/RAND_RR673z5.pdf.

•The *Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework*, developed by the Maryland State Department of Education, offers an early adaptation of the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. The Maryland Framework is available at http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/docs/MD_Fam_Engage.pdf.

•The Kansas Coalition for Effective Family Engagement, a project of Kansas Families and Schools Together, developed the *Kansas Early Childhood Family Engagement Standards.* More information about the project and the standards can be found at http://www.kcefe.net/home.html.

Resources offered by the State of Arkansas include the following:

•The Department of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, within the Arkansas Department of Human Services, offers a wealth of information on topics for parents, child care providers and others interested in early care and education. For more information, visit http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/Pages/default.aspx.

•The Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office provide the most current information on Head Start and Early Head Start programs in the state. For more information, visit http://www.arheadstart.org

•The Arkansas Department of Education provides information for parents on enrolling children in school, kindergarten readiness and suggestions to ensure smooth transitions into kindergarten. For more information, visit http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/federal-programs/enrollment

•The Arkansas Department of Health offers wonderful information for new parents and information about child health, safety and development. http://www.adhhomecare.org/index.htm

•The Arkansas Department of Higher Education provides information on scholarships and other programs to support enrollment in advanced education programs. http://www.adhe.edu/Pages/home.aspx

•Child Care Aware programs operate across the state of Arkansas to provide training for early care professionals and referrals for parents seeking quality child care. This informational brochure includes information about the services and a map showing the service area of each agency. http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/dccece_documents/ccrrbrochure.pdf

•The Arkansas Safe Babies Court Teen Project, a pilot project with Zero to Three, http://www.zerotothree.org/maltreatment/safe-babies-court-team/arkansas-safe-babies-court.html, is studying innovative ways to provide services to families in crisis and stem the tide of children entering the child welfare system.

•The Arkansas Early Childhood Asset Map, http://argis.ualr.edu/aecamrg/, provides a variety of information on early childhood services, including mapping services, a resource guide, and data from the *Getting Ready for School* publication.

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Terms and Definitions

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