

THE HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Parent and family engagement is essential to quality early care and education. Whether providing child care, conducting home visits, offering family support services, or intervening early when a child has special needs, the partnership with parents is fundamental to providing quality early childhood services. Evidence demonstrates that when the partnership is strong, children form better relationships, feel good about themselves, and do better in school. It is only natural that all of those who enter the lives of young children work together with other adults and parents to give a child safe, healthy, and meaningful early experiences.



The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) is funded by the Office of Head Start (OHS) to support and improve the engagement practices of Head Start and Early Head Start staff, as well as staff in early care and education and home visiting programs more broadly. In identifying and developing the best and most innovative practices and processes, OHS and NCPFCE have jointly developed a framework for programs that maps the program elements, common to many early childhood programs and services, that support integrated, comprehensive and systemic engagement with parents and the larger community of service providers.

The Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is founded on the belief that high quality, goal-directed relationships are essential at all levels – parent/child, parent/family, staff/parent, staff/staff, administration/staff, agency/agency, and policy-maker/agency. It also recognizes that the various programs and services that contribute to the care and education of young children need to be seen as an integrated whole. This begins with program foundations, proceeds to program impact areas, and continues to family and child outcomes.

The three elements of program foundations are leadership, continuous improvement, and professional development. In this model, leadership is fully committed to program-wide efforts at family engagement, programs have plans to review and improve their practices over time, and staff have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills.

These foundations lead to four elements of programs that are key to parent and family engagement:

- *Program environment* - families feel welcomed, valued and respected by program staff;
- *Family partnerships* - staff and families work together to identify and achieve goals and aspirations;
- *Teaching and learning partnerships* - families are engaged as equal partners in children's learning and development; and
- *Community partnerships* - communities support families' interests and needs and encourage parent and family engagement in children's learning.

AS A RESULT OF THIS SYSTEMIC, COMPREHENSIVE, AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT THE FOLLOWING ARE ACHIEVED:



Head Start Parent and Family Engagement Outcomes

1. FAMILY WELL-BEING	Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.
2. POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS	Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child’s learning and development.
3. FAMILIES AS LIFELONG EDUCATORS	Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school, and in their communities.
4. FAMILIES AS LEARNERS	Parents and families advance their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.
5. 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 EHS to HS, EHS/HS to other early learning environments, and HS to kindergarten through elementary school.
6. FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO PEERS AND COMMUNITY	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.
7. 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.

As a result of a genuine focus on partnerships with parents and communities, programs serving families of young children assure that children are healthy, emotionally secure, and ready for school. In the ongoing development of this approach OHS and NCPFCE continue to review and update evidence-based materials and practices, disseminate the best of these, and provide activities such as training and technical assistance, support of policy development, and further development of materials. All of these efforts are intended to further the development of the highest quality services for young children and their families.



The Office of Head Start National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement is a partnership between the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Children’s Hospital Boston and the Harvard Family Research Project, with the Council of Chief State School Officers, National PTA, and Save the Children as active members.

For further information, contact the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement at ncpfce@childrens.harvard.edu.