

Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families

Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement

What is Family Engagement?

Connecticut parents, educators, philanthropists, state and local officials, social service professionals, and community organization leaders, after many rounds of discussion, thoughtful review, and revision, have answered this question loud and clear:

Family Engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth through college and career.

Full means that families, educators and community partners collaborate closely and consistently in promoting children's learning and development. This includes making sure that ALL children not only have access to high quality learning opportunities, but also the supports they need to succeed.

Equal means that families and educators recognize that both bring valuable knowledge to the table. Parents know their children, culture, and community. Educators are trained in curriculum and child development. Their deep knowledge and skills are complementary, overlapping, and essential to ensuring success for all children.

Equitable means that families are empowered to work with educators, public officials, and community partners to remove systemic, structural, and organizational barriers that perpetuate inequities and injustice. This includes ready access to ample opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to become full and equal partners in that deliberate and intentional work.

Family engagement means that parents are seen as welcome partners in the education of children, and have a valued voice in the school. As a result, families are active participants, and communication is flowing between home and school. We believe that family engagement means mutual respect, honesty and trust.

Connecticut Parents,
August 2017

The purpose of Connecticut's common definition and framework of family engagement is to encourage shared understanding and collaboration, making it easy for all parties – families, educatorsⁱ, providers, and community partners – to understand what is expected of them and what effective practice looks like.



Connecticut Early Childhood
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Guiding Principles

High-impact strategies to engage families can produce dramatic gains in children’s social and emotional development, academic achievement, and success in life. Feedback from participants in the process informed the establishment of guiding principles that reflect a partnership mindset and are grounded in the research.

1. BUILD COLLABORATIVE, TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS FOCUSED ON LEARNING.

For example: Offer getting-to-know-you meetings in smaller, informal settings. Make relationship-building home visits. Co-design with families a pre-school-elementary school transition program.

2. LISTEN TO WHAT FAMILIES SAY ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN’S INTERESTS AND CHALLENGES.

For example: Pay attention to different cultural perspectives and use families’ ideas to create programming, tailor instruction, improve discipline practices, design professional development, and recruit early learning providers, school leaders and staff.

3. MODEL HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING PRACTICES.

For example: Share how families can engage children in interactive play, reading, and hands-on math activities that promote problem solving. Invite families to visit the after-school program, meet staff, and join the activities. Host “classroom visits” for families to see first-hand what their kids are doing in class and how the classroom is set up for learning.

4. SHARE INFORMATION FREQUENTLY WITH FAMILIES ABOUT HOW THEIR CHILDREN ARE DOING.

For example: Talk about the kindergarten readiness skills young children must learn, then report regularly about their progress. Explain your school or program’s high achievement goals and ask families about their ideas to help their kids reach them.

5. TALK WITH STUDENTS ABOUT HOW THEY WANT TEACHERS AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT THEIR LEARNING.

For example: Include students’ ideas in Title I school-parent compacts, personal learning plans, and requests for professional learning. Respond to what students say about social and emotional issues. In middle and high school, set up an advisory system, so that all students have someone who knows them well and who can be their advocate in the school and the primary contact for their families.

6. CO-DEVELOP CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG STAFF AND FAMILIES.

For example: Build students’ home cultures into programming and curriculum. Invite families and early learning providers/ teachers/community learning program staff to share their cultural and family traditions. Showcase the diversity in your early learning setting, school, or after-school program.

7. SUPPORT PARENTS TO BECOME EFFECTIVE LEADERS AND ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN.

For example: Collaborate with initiatives that develop parents’ knowledge and skills to become civic leaders and problem-solvers. Provide information about how the education system works, from early childhood to higher education, and how to advocate for their children’s needs and opportunities within that system.

It is important for me to know what my daughter is learning; when you are not from this country you can be totally lost!

The teacher teaches us what to expect when our children go to school and how they can be prepared. They give us activities for the children and for the parents too.

Connecticut Parent
July 2017

I hope that teachers and staff will be open minded and disregard implicit biases that are disrespectful and hurtful to families. Meet families half way on their ground; listen to their needs and wants; and gain knowledge of the community they service.

Connecticut Parent,
August 2017

¹ The terms family/ies and parent/s are used to represent any adult caretakers who have responsibility for the well-being of a child or children.

ⁱⁱ The term educator is used to mean any person who teaches or is involved in planning or directing experiences that promote learning and development.