



Universal PreK (UPK) Café: Special Series Issue #3 Family Engagement April 14, 2021

Dear Friends,

The Early Education Team is excited to share its third issue of the UPK Café Special Series. The series focuses on recovery, reconnection, and resources to support school district recovery and implementation plans with this issue focusing on Family Engagement.

Meaningful Family Engagement

Family engagement is essential in promoting healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development learning experiences for children from PreK through Grade 12. When families are meaningfully engaged in their children's learning, they can positively impact their child's health, development, education, and well-being.

Strong family engagement happens when family members share a primary and meaningful role in all decision-making that impacts their child. Meaningful family engagement is about improving outcomes for all children and their families and happens at both the system and service level.

Meaningful family engagement and partnerships are anchored by:

- mutual respect
- shared responsibility
- bi-directional communication
- commitment to a common vision and shared goals for each and every child and their family.

Family engagement can look like:

- Collaboration of team members that includes the family, educators, and providers
- Prioritization of their child's unique strengths and needs
- Consideration of the family's hopes and wants for their child

Engaging Culturally Diverse Families

Each and every young child (birth through Grade 3) and family in Vermont has diverse strengths rooted in their unique culture, heritage, language, beliefs, and circumstances. They have gifts and abilities that should be celebrated and nurtured. Full participation means promoting a sense of belonging, supporting positive social relationships, and enabling families

and early childhood professionals to gain the competence and confidence to positively impact the lives of each and every child and their family ([Vermont Guiding Principles for the Full Participation of Each and Every Young Child and Their Family](#)).

Culturally and linguistically responsive interactions with families can look differently depending on the family, but all should be:

- **Respectful** - Professionals recognize and regard families' and their own identities as multidimensional. We are all individuals and members of multiple social and cultural communities.
- **Reciprocal** - Professionals acknowledge that families have much to contribute and that we work together to find, share, and use information in support of families' well-being
- **Responsive** - Professionals focus on connections between the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of families and your own.

Culturally and linguistically responsive practices are also inclusive. As you seek to engage families across in your school community, be sure to invite input from all the groups of families represented in your area. Identify and lessen or eliminate barriers to families' participation. This includes potential barriers to access as they relate to race, ethnicity, life conditions, geographical locations and settings, language, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, differing abilities, religion, family characteristics, and other ways that families may be unique.

If you are unable to reach certain groups of families directly, draw upon partnerships with community organizations that serve these families to help you connect. Tribal organizations, faith-based organizations, libraries, social service agencies, community programs, and local cultural programs and associations often have relationships that you can tap into. Seek out and build relationships with community leaders whom families trust, and then reach out to families together.

Family Support and Well-being

When families are healthy, safe, and economically stable, their children's health and well-being can thrive.

Support services such as early care and education, housing and food assistance, and physical and mental health care positively contribute to the well-being of families and their children. When families face challenges that cause stress, including poverty and homelessness, their health and wellness can be negatively impacted. Engaging families as active participants in problem-solving and goal setting can help them identify and use their own strengths to address the challenges they face.

We hope that this issue of the UPK Café can be used to learn about yourself, your program, and to help you collaborate in the best interests of the children and families you serve. Celebrate your successes and recognize the areas that need improvement. Take advantage of this opportunity to enhance engagement for each and every family you collaborate with.

Resources

[AOE's K-12 Family Engagement Toolkit](#)

The AOE has identified the following definition of family engagement: Effective family engagement requires a collaborative effort on the part of teachers, administrators, and families to support the success of students both in and out of school. Families are essential partners in understanding and meeting the needs of their child and must know how their child is progressing in school and what they can do to support their child's learning and development at home.

Families and communities engage in the following ways:

- Building trusting collaborative relationships among school staff members, families, and community members.
- Recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs as well as class and cultural differences; and
- Embracing a philosophy of partnership in which power and responsibilities are shared

U.S. Departments of Education – Health and Human Services (ED-HHS):

[ED-HHS Policy Statement on Family Engagement](#)

On May 5, 2016, the U.S. Departments of Education ([ED](#)) and Health and Human Services ([HHS](#)) have issued a policy statement and executive summary on the implementation of effective family engagement practices from the early years to the early grades.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

[Understanding the Power of Parent Involvement](#)

This blog entry shares one educator's experience while working to engage with families and the trials and tribulations during that journey.

The Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System (ECTA):

[Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices](#)

This resource explores the importance of family engagement and practice strategies for building relationships with families.

Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center:

[Family Well-being](#)

This resource presents a summary of selected research, program strategies, and resources intended to be useful for Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs.

Websites/Webinars/Video Series

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)

[Partnering with Success: Stories from Early Childhood Professionals and Family Engagement](#) In

this webinar, three panelists give their perspective of an inclusion early childhood special education classroom teacher, a program coach, and a mental health specialist. Each of the panelist will share successful tips and strategies for engaging and connecting with families in-person and virtually.

Connecticut School-Family-Partnerships

[Parent Teacher Conversations: Making Real Connections](#)

This video-based workshop will show you how to engage families, teachers, and students in designing a School-Parent blueprint for action tied to your School Improvement Plan. Each step in the easy 10-step process includes planning forms, templates, and sample documents to help you create your own School-Parent Compact.

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) partnered with The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSy)

[Engaging Families and Creating Trusting Partnerships to Improve Child and Family Outcomes](#)

The ECTA Center partnered with the DaSy Center, Ann and Rud Turnbull, and invited guests to facilitate an interactive four-part web broadcast series aimed at supporting early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) systems leaders with building capacity in personnel and families to develop trusting partnerships.

If you have a resource you'd like to share on **UPK Café** or have been forwarded this issue and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Leslie at leslie.freedman@vermont.gov.

Thank you!