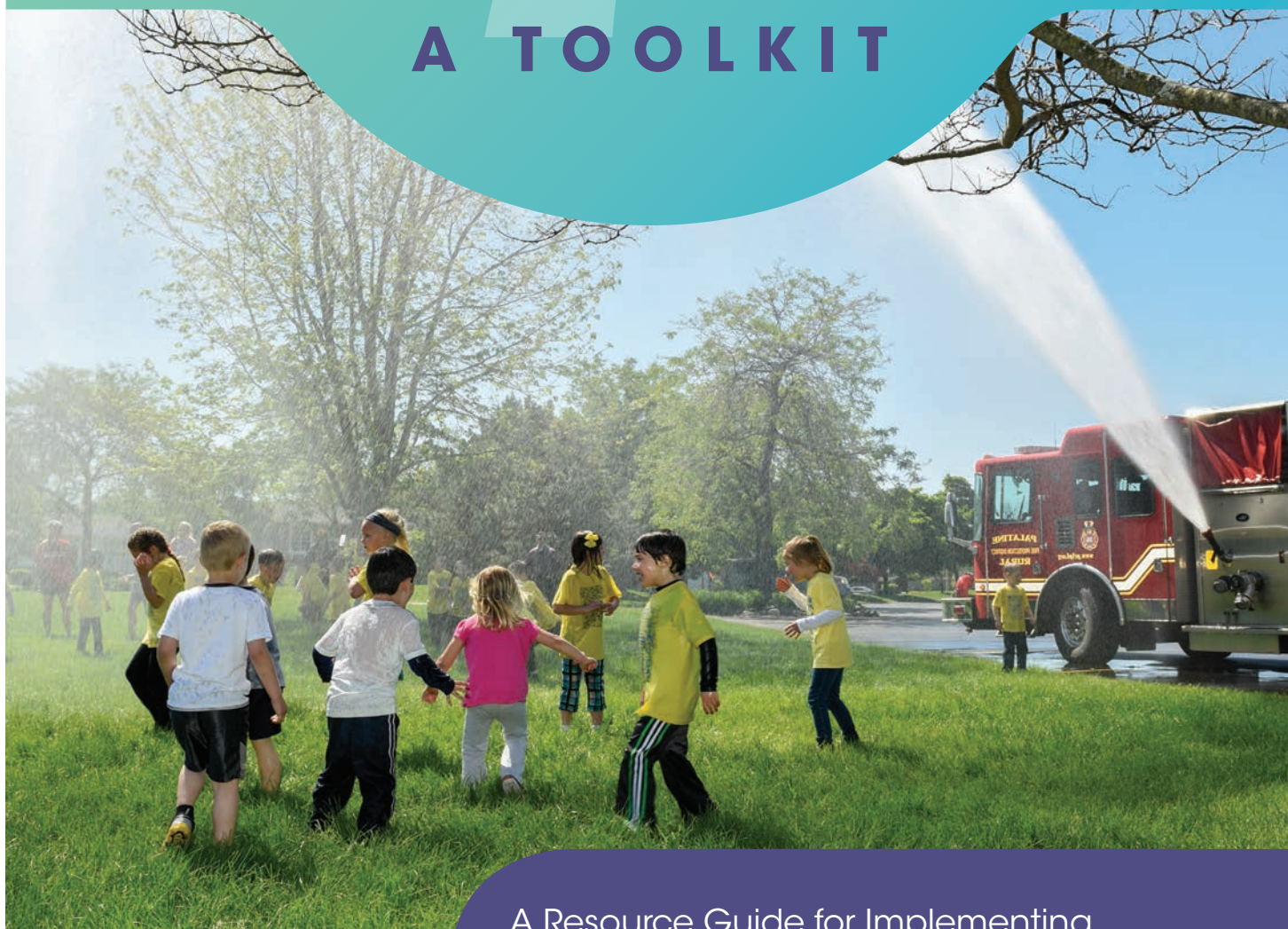THE
Seven Standards
OF *Quality* FOR
Family AND Community
Engagement

A TOOLKIT

illinois
action for
children

A Resource Guide for Implementing Partnerships That Strengthen Family and Community Engagement

Governor's Office of
Early Childhood Development

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ABOUT ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Illinois Action for Children supports children and families by offering a broad range of programs and services. Below is a succinct view of how we approach our work.

For more details, please visit our website at **www.actforchildren.org**

Mission — Our Purpose

Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.

Vision — Our Desired Future State

Illinois Action for Children envisions a future in which:
- Children and families are a priority;
- All children and families, especially those most vulnerable, have the opportunities and resources they need;
- A broad-based coalition of public and private funders and collaborators support our Mission; and
- Our diverse and talented staff demonstrates on a daily basis that every action can change a life.

What We Believe — Our Principles of Practice

These principles articulate what we believe, why we believe it, and guide us to do our work uniquely in our constituent communities.

As a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most, we believe that all children and their families, particularly those experiencing poverty, must have access to quality early care and education, and systems of family and community support that lead to success in school and in life.

Children

A. We believe that early education systems should promote the safety, health, happiness and education of all children.

- All children, regardless of socioeconomic status or race, should have access to quality early care and education programs and services.
- Early childhood programs should support the social, emotional and physical well-being of all children.

Parents and Families

B. We believe that parents and families know and want what is best for their children and their child care choices should be recognized and supported.

- Parents and families should demand affordable high-quality child care in the setting they choose.
- Low-income parents should have greater access to financial assistance that supports child care during the non-traditional work hours that so many of them work.

Child Care Providers

C. We believe that child care providers need opportunities and supports for continuous quality improvement to create better outcomes for themselves and the children in their care.

- Every family makes child care decisions based on their reality and we should support quality in the type of care they choose, including Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care.
- Child care providers should have access to high-quality trainings, and technical and financial support to advance quality in their programs.
- Child care providers should be paid at a level that is reflective of their skills, supports quality and fosters a well-educated workforce.

Early Childhood Systems

D. We believe that early childhood systems should align to provide consistent and progressive supports to parents, providers and their communities.

- Human Services and family support systems should align to provide learning opportunities to all children and professional development opportunities to all providers in all care settings.
- The State should support and fund innovative programs that reach the most at-risk families isolated by poverty.
- The State should support a continuum of quality throughout birth-to-three, preschool, and school-age programs.

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Welcome

Without family and community engagement, your early learning program can't succeed. That might be a pretty tough reality to accept at times, particularly when involving family and community is so often a challenge. Parents, we all know, are a child's first and most important teachers. Does your program truly share leadership with family and community to benefit the children in your care? If not, then it's time to act.

Illinois Action for Children seeks to raise standards of practice in this critical area. We do so as part of the Early Learning Council's Family and Community Engagement Committee leadership and from our "on the ground" experience in implementing partnerships to strengthen parent engagement.

We've developed "A Toolkit: Implementing the Seven Standards of Quality for Family and Community Engagement" as a handy way for ECE program leaders to assess the quality of their ECE programs and to measure success in family and community engagement. This toolkit can help enhance your efforts to provide high-quality services to children and parents—and to ensure long lasting results.

Your committed participation in Illinois Action for Children programs deserves applause. So, we thank you!

Getting Started

A rudderless ship at sea is not only aimless, it is potentially headed for wreckage. Someone skilled in seafaring must guide it to its destination. Likewise, someone skilled in all the ways of your organization should helm the use of this IAFC family and community engagement toolkit in assessing the success of your outreach efforts. So, launch the process by identifying that person and ensuring she or he is properly prepared. Here are the initial steps to take:

Identify a leader

Choose someone who is familiar with not just your family and community engagement (or FACE) efforts, but who also is fully aware of your mission and organizational goals as an early care and education provider.

Review all materials

Ensure that the leader—before proceeding to involve staff, families and community stakeholders—thoroughly reads the toolkit and devises any questions to be answered and notes any information that first needs clarification.

Build the team

Make sure that your FACE toolkit team includes members from up and down the ladder of the organization. Avoid the tendency and temptation to make this an exclusively internal process. The inclusion of parents particularly should be considered as important as the inclusion of staff.

Here is a list of Family & Community Partners in Learning participants with family and community engagement roles:

- ECE center owners;
- Executive directors;
- Governing boards;
- Program directors;
- Teacher staff;
- Consultation staff (i.e., infant/toddler specialists);
- Family service workers;
- Administrative staff;
- Home visitors;
- Bus drivers;
- Cooks;
- Janitors;
- Parents/guardians and caretakers;
- Extended family involved in child care; and
- Community partners.

Share the load

Having a FACE toolkit team means being able to rely on someone to whom you can delegate parts of a process. Encourage full buy-in by ensuring that team members' participation is identified as key and valued. Be ready to explain the essential role each team member will play and why the outcome is dependent upon it.

Meet regularly

A suggested timeline has been provided below to help you anchor your use of this toolkit in a framework that has an achievable beginning, middle and finish. Regular meetings will help the leader and team members to identify challenges, measure success and adjust the process.

Build an evidence portfolio

As you assess your FACE quality using this toolkit, place copies of evidence in a folder, in either a digital or physical collection, as you gather these materials through the weeks. The collected evidence should help you to track progress, facilitate team discussions and more readily identify areas for improvements.

Mind the timeline

Having an end goal will help to expedite the use of this toolkit in assessing your program's family and community engagement efforts. To foster momentum, after assembling your team, maintain weekly pacing of the assessment/reflection process. The process from beginning to end can take up to 16 weeks. For the first two weeks, the focus will be on completing the self-assessment. This is an important part of the process that can lead to improving and strengthening program quality in family and community engagement.

The FACE toolkit team will establish a schedule to meet and examine each of the seven standards of quality, allowing enough time for each standard, to complete the process.

At the end of the entire process, your ECE program should be able to determine areas needing improvement. The Program Goals and Action Plan chart (see page 68) can be used to record the development of goals, plans for action steps, needed resources, establishment of responsibilities and to create a timeline for improvements.

Here is a suggestion for structuring a timeline:

Weeks one and two	Assemble FACE team and complete self-assessment component
Week three	Standard 1
Week four	Standard 2
Week five	Standard 3
Week six	Standard 4
Week seven	Standard 5
Week eight	Standard 6
Week nine	Standard 7
Week ten	Development of Program Goals and Action Plan
Week eleven	Review completed FACE evidence portfolio

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to take more than one week to develop an action plan for one of the seven standards. Allow enough time for up to sixteen weeks (in total) for this process.

A Word on How to Involve Parents

They rush in. They rush out. Parents and caretakers often start the day off at a sprint. They must prepare themselves for work and get their kids ready for child care or the school day. Getting them to focus on anything beyond physically taking care of their children can be quite challenging.

Yet, they expect the best and assume your early care and education program has it all covered. Your responsibility is to move, touch and inspire them to join your program improvement efforts.

HERE ARE SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO DO JUST THAT:

- Let them know specifically that you are working on improvements. Reference what is in it for them, such as a better understanding of how your ECE program works for their child, for them as parents and for preparing children for later success in school.

- Tell them specifically how you would like them to help. Some may serve on committees, some may volunteer in the program, and some may help from home (such as making phone calls or shopping for resources that the program needs).

- ASK them to commit to helping. If they don't come through the first time, give them other opportunities to support the program.

- Encourage them along the way. Let them know that you appreciate their efforts.

- Make it interesting and fun. They may have their own ideas on how they and other parents might be involved.

- Explain why it's important and how it will help you help them as parents/family care providers.

- Make it specifically about their child. You will need to be observant to successfully do so.

- Apprise them of the outcomes and any plans for improvements. A mention in a newsletter or on a bulletin board or a photo of the outcome of plans for improvement will be noticed.

- Reward them when it's done, no matter the outcome. Any effort to succeed helps to make it easier next time. Even if the desired outcome is not immediate, efforts still may lead to future program improvement.

Introduction to Standards for Family and Community Engagement

The stronger the relationships and partnerships between your ECE program and parents, families and the community, the stronger the children in your care.

The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement has described effective family and community engagement as:

"Building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike. … Family engagement happens in the home, early childhood program, school and community and is a shared responsibility with all those who support children's learning." *

To shape children who are healthy and ready for school, an ECE program's family and community engagement must be foundational and comprehensive. It should resonate throughout a program.

Taking a few extra steps to ensure strong family and community engagement will be well worth the effort. Your children stand to reap remarkable benefits. A great place to start is making sure that every staff member understands how children develop best alongside family and community engagement as they learn in your ECE program and why. Such widespread understanding should fuel all steps taken to engage family and community.

Positive, ongoing interactions and relationships with families and communities can be then built by ensuring your program reflects:

- respectful attitudes toward families;
- knowledge about families;
- goal-oriented and relationship-based partnerships with families;
- cultural and linguistic responsiveness toward families;
- welcoming environments; and
- family-friendly policies.**

Many of these elements are addressed in the Head Start Performance Standards as well as in the National Association for the Education of Young Children quality standards that emphasize the importance of strong family-provider partnerships.

Bottom line: You'll want to infuse family and community engagement efforts with excitement—but make it meaningful. This toolkit can be your guide.

(Office of Head Start, The National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, n.d., p. 1)

**(Forry et al., 2012)*

THE
Seven Standards
OF Quality FOR
Family AND Community
Engagement

Here are the seven standards at a glance:

STANDARD 1
System-wide family and community engagement policies in writing

STANDARD 2
Relationship-based approach to working with diverse families

STANDARD 3
Goal-oriented approach to working with families

STANDARD 4
Active community engagement and community partnerships

STANDARD 5
Systematic collection of data to improve program practices

STANDARD 6
Staff knowledge and training to build strong family program relationships

STANDARD 7
Transitions

FRAMEWORK FOR STANDARDS AND EVIDENCE: HOW DO YOU PROVE THAT YOUR PROGRAM PERFORMS AT PEAK LEVELS?

The main idea behind this toolkit is to aid ECE programs in assessing their effectiveness in meeting the seven standards of quality, which are critical to every early childhood center-based program and classroom, and to support family and community engagement policies and practices that should be hallmarks of any ECE program.

Action Items:
Where to Aim

Along with providing seven standards your ECE program should meet, this toolkit encapsulates seven corresponding action items that, when recognized as important, aimed for and achieved lift your program to an award-worthy level.

Want a bull's-eye for your ECE program in family and community engagement?

ULTIMATELY, EFFECTIVE ECE PROGRAMS:

- stress family and community engagement policies in writing;

- encourage staff to build relationships that acknowledge the diversity of families;

- share leadership, responsibility and decision-making in nurtured partnerships with families on behalf of their children;

- collaborate regularly with community organizations and services;

- collect data systematically and use it to improve overall family and community engagement program practices;

- provide staff with training and ongoing professional development opportunities to build knowledge around family and community engagement; and

- support healthy transitions and adjustments for young children going from home to center enrollment or to elementary school.

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM 1

System-wide, written family and community engagement policies

STANDARD 1:

The ECE program leadership promotes and implements written, system-wide family and community engagement policies and a family-friendly environment.

ACTION ITEM:

Stress family and community engagement policies in writing.

STANDARD 1 and ACTION ITEM:

Stress family and community engagement policies in writing.

1. Ensure that your ECE program has a written family and community engagement policy that clearly articulates the importance of families in the program and in the lives of their children.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- The written policy accounts for diversity. There are strategies to remove cultural, linguistic, and logistic barriers that prevent family engagement. These strategies show ways to fortify relationships with families of different cultures and backgrounds as well as with families who have diverse experiences, needs, strengths and abilities.
- The written policy requires communication with families to be conducted in families' preferred language and through families' preferred means of communication.
- All staff members have a clear understanding of the family engagement policies and the rationale behind the policies. Program leadership communicates family engagement policies to all staff in ways they can understand and implement.
- The written policy articulates that family-focused events, activities and conferences for families are scheduled at times that are convenient for family work and school schedules.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Written policy that includes all of the indicators

2. Program environment makes all families and family members feel welcome and program staff demonstrates a commitment to serving families as well as children in the program.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Program has a designated area for families to meet that is comfortable and inviting.
- Program supports breastfeeding and offers a welcoming environment for nursing mothers.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Completed family surveys that indicate families feel welcome;
- A photograph in your portfolio showing evidence of designated areas for families; and
- Written policy on how program supports nursing mothers.

Stress family and community engagement policies in writing.

1

3. Program facilitates the development of family-to-family social networks and supports.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- There are scheduled and informal opportunities for families to network and socialize with other families through program events, family support groups, and family learning activities within the program (e.g., leadership education and training, informal discussion groups, informal networking opportunities).

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Photographs of family social events;
- Calendar of events;
- Fliers or invitations to families;
- Website postings of events; and
- Newsletters.

4. Program has recruitment and hiring policy that seeks to hire and/or train staff that reflects the cultural/ethnic background of children/families served.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Written hiring policy that articulates recruitment procedures to hire potential staff members who reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families and children in the program.

5. Program hires staff willing to pursue ongoing professional development around working with families.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program has dedicated staff with responsibility for family engagement as evidenced by written job description OR program has staff trained in family engagement techniques and approaches who can share this with other staff.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written job descriptions; and
- Documentation of staff qualifications, e.g., resumes, training certificates.

6. **Program offers support and supervision to all staff around implementing family and community engagement policies. Staff is supported in their family engagement efforts through regular opportunities to reflect and communicate with supervisors, management and program leadership through team and individual meetings.**

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

■ All staff meets regularly as a team to review family engagement policies and implementation; to share questions and experiences; and to enhance their engagement practices, interactions and relationships with individual and groups of families.

■ All supervisors have regular opportunities for reflective supervision with staff around their work with families.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

■ Written staff development and supervision plans;

■ Calendars of staff meetings;

■ Agendas for staff meetings; and

■ Supervisor-staff meeting notes.

STANDARD 1 IN ACTION

Concordia Place, located in Chicago's North Center neighborhood, critiqued its family and community engagement collaterals, such as fliers and other written materials, and realized some could use a polish. Said the site's director: "There were a couple of things [where] we saw, 'Oh, we do have this in place, but maybe it needs to be worded differently so that people understand exactly how we do this or how often we do it or why we do it.'" SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

1. **Who are the people in your agency responsible for implementing family and community engagement policies?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. **How has the staff been trained in the areas of family and community engagement? List the professional development training and support they have had within the last year?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM **2**

Relationship-based approach to working with diverse families

STANDARD 2:
The ECE program uses a relationship-based approach to engaging families and all staff members demonstrate respect for families' culture, language, family composition and circumstances.

ACTION ITEM:
Encourage staff to build relationships that acknowledge the diversity of families.

Encourage staff to build relationships that acknowledge the diversity of families.

2

7. Program staff understands the diverse backgrounds of families in the program, including culture, language, ability, family composition and circumstances, and uses this knowledge in interactions with families. Program staff actively works with families to bring their strengths and resources to the program and recognizes families as assets to the program.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Program staff is familiar with the individual strengths and resources that families bring to the program and uses this knowledge to develop a culturally and linguistically responsive program for all families.

- Program has knowledge of life transitions that families may experience (e.g., new baby, divorce, death, incarceration, etc.) and understands how these transitions may impact children in the program's care.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written implementation plan that shows how the program uses information about individual families to develop responsive programming;

- Sample enrollment applications and/or notes from family meetings that show program's knowledge of family backgrounds, strengths and needs;

- Completed family surveys that indicate program has collected information about family backgrounds and strengths;

- Written documentation that shows program knowledge about changes in family life that may impact a child's experience in the program; and

- Staff members' ability to articulate knowledge about individual families in the program and give examples of how they acknowledge and respond to family backgrounds and experiences.

Encourage staff to build relationships that acknowledge the diversity of families.

2

8. **Program staff recognizes the important role that fathers play in the lives of their children and makes intentional efforts to include and welcome fathers in all aspects of the program.**

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Documentation of father involvement in the program (e.g., photographs, correspondence with fathers, etc.);
- Fliers, notices, agendas, activities and events planned with the needs of fathers and male caregivers in mind; and
- Photos or feedback from fathers and male family members reflecting the effect of such efforts.

9. **Communication with families is reciprocal, collaborative, positive, transparent and responsive to families' goals, interests, needs, expectations and language preference, thereby minimizing power differentials in all interactions with family members.**

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Program uses a variety of communication modes (e.g., email, text, voicemail, in-person, etc.) that are responsive to families' schedules and preferences.
- Program communicates with families of infants daily about caregiving routines, such as feeding, sleeping and diapering/toileting.
- Conferences allow two-way dialogue where family members are given opportunities to share information about their own observations and knowledge of their child as well as learn from program staff about their observations of children in the program.
- Translators are available if needed.
- Written documentation or records demonstrate individual meetings with at least five families.
- Documentation or records reflect meetings with at least 75% of families in program, four times per year.

STANDARD 2 and ACTION ITEM:

Encourage staff to build relationships that acknowledge the diversity of families.

2

- Written documentation show regular meetings as well as other communications with families through a variety of modes (e.g., newsletters, emails, website postings, notes home, logged phone calls, etc.).
- Agendas and notes from conferences demonstrate two-way dialogue with families.
- Resumes of staff or translators show language fluency.
- Written documentation — e.g., fliers, web postings, emails, bulletin boards, etc. — in families' home languages show that families have been informed about any available translation services.

STANDARD 2 IN ACTION

Said a family support specialist at Jeanne Kenney YMCA Day Care in Chicago: "One thing I noticed is that we really didn't have anything that was for parent support — as far as like a parent support group. So, I facilitated 'The Chat & Chew' before our parents and teachers' meetings. We wanted to work on it, so it could be for everybody because 'parents and teachers' is just for ages 0 to 3." SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

REFLECTION ON: Relationship approach

STANDARD 2: The ECE program uses a relationship-based approach to engaging diverse families and all staff members demonstrate respect for families' culture, language, family composition and circumstances.

Here are some examples of ways your organization can recognize and respond to diverse families. How do you help build healthy relationships with families based on these issues? How have you used the following ways of building relationships thus far?

_____

CULTURE

Such as ethnicity
or place of origin

_____

LANGUAGE

Does child/family speak a language
other than English at home?

_____

DIVERSE ABILITIES

Health challenges,
various learning style

_____

FAMILY COMPOSITION
Single parent,
grandparents, etc.

_____

CIRCUMSTANCE
Loss of job, relocating

_____

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM 3

Goal-oriented approach to working with families

STANDARD 3:

The ECE program uses a goal-oriented approach to working with families through creating opportunities for collaborative decision-making about goals for their children, their families and the program.

ACTION ITEM:

Share leadership, responsibility and decision-making in nurtured partnerships with families on behalf of their children.

Share leadership, responsibility and decision-making in nurtured partnerships with families on behalf of their children.

3

10. Program builds working partnerships between families and staff on behalf of children and seeks regular input from families about their children's growth and development.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Families are routinely given opportunities to offer ideas, suggestions and feedback for program enhancements.
- Staff and families discuss conflicting assumptions, complex feelings and challenging issues that may impede collaborative partnerships and develop ways to address them.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written plan for how families can provide input and offer ideas about the program;
- Written conflict resolution plan;
- Completed family surveys in which families indicate that they are treated as equal partners; and
- Written plan for building partnerships with families around children's development and growth.

11. Program staff works with families to enhance their capacity and confidence to support their children's learning.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program staff helps families to identify their own goals, interests, strengths and needs regarding their caregiving roles and their children.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Documentation of conferences and discussions with families (e.g., conference agendas and detailed case notes on each family's interests, goals and needs for their children).

STANDARD 3 and ACTION ITEM:

Share leadership, responsibility and decision-making in nurtured partnerships with families on behalf of their children.

3

12. Program creates frequent and ongoing opportunities for family members to participate in and share leadership responsibilities and decision-making around program operations and prepares families for these roles.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program has an advisory body or committee that includes 25% of parents or other primary caregivers.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written plan that articulates opportunities for family leadership in the program;
- Parent advisory body or committee member list with roles indicated (e.g., family member, staff, etc.); and
- Written plan for training or preparing families to serve on advisory bodies or committees.

STANDARD 3 IN ACTION

Northern Illinois University's award-winning child care program, which also is a teacher training lab, emphasizes interconnectivity of ideas between parents and staff. Said its co-director for operations: "We provide parents opportunities for evaluating our programs. We also give them opportunities for evaluating our practicum students and they give lots of feedback regarding that. … We're always seeking advice." SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

REFLECTION ON: Family goal-setting

STANDARD 3: The ECE program uses a goal-oriented approach to working with families through creating opportunities for collaborative decision-making about goals for their children, their families and the program.

How does the staff build working partnerships with families around the issues of goal-settings?

Who are the staff members working with families to develop goals for children and their families?

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_____

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_____

_____

_____

What are other ways that staff members learn about the needs of children and their families and then support them in reaching their goals?

_____

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_____

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM 4

Active community engagement and community partnerships

STANDARD 4:

The ECE program initiates and promotes broad and active community partnerships on behalf of families, children, staff and community.

ACTION ITEM:

Collaborate regularly with community organizations and services.

Collaborate regularly with community organizations and services.

4

13. Program has active and ongoing collaborations with community organizations and services.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Program takes a leadership role in community activities and coordinates events with community organizations to respond to the needs and interests of enrolled families and enhance connections between families and community resources.

- Program takes a leadership role in efforts to educate the broader community about the importance of early childhood education and/or other family and child-related issues.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written cooperative agreements between program and community organizations that include narrative statements describing the nature of the collaborations;

- Documentation (such as calendars, meeting notes or minutes, event agendas, fliers, etc.) that shows evidence of the program having active and ongoing connections with community organizations and events;

- Job descriptions that describe community engagement expectations for staff; and

- Documentation of participation and collaboration in community-wide events that publicize the importance of high-quality early childhood education.

14. Lists of program and community resources and services for families are updated on a regular basis to respond to families' home cultures, interests, needs and language of choice.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Resources and services that match the needs and interests of families.

Collaborate regularly with community organizations and services.

4

15. Program advocates on behalf of families by facilitating their ease of access to community resources as well as creating opportunities for families to advocate for themselves, their children and their communities in regards to needed resources and services.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program supports families of children with special needs in seeking support and resources for themselves and their children, both within the program and in the community.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written plan that shows staff members have time in their schedules to help families access resources and services;
- Documentation of family leadership roles in family workshops and meetings (e.g., agendas, participant lists, etc.); and
- Written materials for families and/or documentation of workshops that help families become advocates for themselves and their children in identified areas of need.

16. Program works with eligible families, both current and prospective, to seek and access child care assistance and other financial support if needed.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Newsletters, individual emails, letters, conference notes, web postings that offer information about child care assistance program.

STANDARD 4 IN ACTION

FACE self-assessment and reflection at Ezzard Charles Montessori School, located on Chicago's South Side, led to a key improvement in the realm of community partnerships. They filled a missing need. Said the site's executive director: "That was a community service agreement with another day care center. We do now partner with another day care center. They don't have infant and toddler and we do." SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

STANDARD 4: The ECE program initiates and promotes broad and active community partnerships on behalf of families, children, staff and community.

4

How does the staff build partnerships with families around the issues of goal-settings? Also, list three community partners with whom you have connections:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Why did you select these community partners?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How have you connected with community partners?

_____
_____
_____
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_____

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM

5

Systematic collection of data to improve program practices

STANDARD 5:

The ECE program has systems for collecting and using data related to family and community engagement for improving program practices. The ECE program collects and shares relevant data with families.

ACTION ITEM:

Collect data systematically and use it to improve overall family and community engagement program practices.

Collect data systematically and use it to improve overall family and community engagement program practices.

17. Program has systems in place for collecting data on family and community partnerships in collaboration with families. Data includes but is not limited to:

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Families' knowledge about their child's emotional and developmental growth;
- Families' experiences in the program;
- Staff experiences with families; and
- Staff/family/community experiences with community partnerships.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written plan for how the program gathers data from families, staff, and community partners; and
- Evidence of data (e.g., completed surveys; in-take interviews; individual records/files for each child and family in program; and other evaluation protocols).

18. A variety of data collection methods are used and are accessible to all family members. If surveys are used, they are available in families' preferred language.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Use of data collection methods that respect families' time; and
- Use of data collection methods that are most likely to capture families' knowledge about their children and their actual experiences in the program.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written plan that describes specific data collection methods (e.g., surveys, suggestion boxes, interviews, focus groups, etc.) and a rationale for these methods that includes how these methods are responsive to family interests, schedules, and language preferences;
- A written summary documenting that at least 60% of families complete surveys; and
- Completed surveys from at least five families.

STANDARD 5 and ACTION ITEM:

Collect data systematically and use it to improve overall family and community engagement program practices.

5

19. Program uses data collection to inform ongoing program improvement and program staff demonstrates a willingness to change practices and policies based on data about program quality and family experiences in the program.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Staff and families routinely utilize data to build plans for program practices with children designed to foster their development and learning.
- Staff routinely utilizes data to build individual plans for staff practices with families.
- Staff and families together routinely assess the quality of their referral system and community partnerships that serve children and families and develop strategies for improvement (e.g., service delivery, service coordination, family and community programming).

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written program improvement plan that includes how data will be used to inform quality improvement activities; and
- Written documentation of changes in program practices or policies that includes relevant data as rationale for such changes.

20. Program has systems in place for sharing data with families in ways they can understand.

INDICATORS: SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- Program staff meets regularly with individual families to share, translate and discuss data on their child's progress and achievements and help families use data to develop goals and plans for their children.
- Program staff meets regularly with families to share, translate, and discuss data on the quality of family-program relationships and family involvement and develop strategies for improvement.

STANDARD 5 and ACTION ITEM:

Collect data systematically and use it to improve overall family and community engagement program practices.

5

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Written documentation of sharing and discussing individual child data with families (e.g., conference notes, etc.);

- Written documentation of staff sharing and discussing data on family involvement with families (e.g., meeting notes, meeting agendas, newsletters, web posting, etc.); and

- Records documenting how all data and assessments that are shared with families are kept in program files.

STANDARD 5 IN ACTION

An example of how Northern Illinois University's child care program effectively collected and used feedback solicited from parents, per its co-director for operations: "One person questioned the handling of emergency procedure. So, I responded that we were going to be formulating a sheltering in place protocol, and I was going to be working with our emergency management coordinator through the NIU police department. I let them know, 'This is feedback that I got from you as a parent and now here is what I'm going to do about it.'"
SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

REFLECTION ON: Collection and use of data

STANDARD 5: The ECE program has systems for collecting and using data related to family and community engagement for the purposes of improving practices. The ECE program collects and shares relevant data with families.

The following are examples of the types of data you might use in your program. Think about the types of data and how you can use them or if you have been successful using them in your program. How have you used any of the following with success? How is the information gathered and shared with families?

• FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW

• WRITTEN SURVEYS

• QUESTIONNAIRES

• CONFERENCE NOTES

_____

How do you provide feedback to families?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What is the response from the families?

_____
_____
_____
_____

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM 6

Staff knowledge and professional development to build strong family program relationships

STANDARD 6:

The ECE program staff has knowledge and training in how to build strong family-program relationships. ECE program staff also has knowledge about the strengths, needs and experiences of individual families as these areas relate to child and family well-being.

ACTION ITEM:

Provide staff with ongoing professional development opportunities to build knowledge around family and community engagement.

STANDARD 6 and ACTION ITEM:

Provide staff with ongoing professional development opportunities to build knowledge around family and community engagement.

6

21. All staff has ongoing training in working with diverse families and has knowledge about family systems, their dynamics, cultural and economic factors that shape lives of families (see examples below).

Every staff person has a written plan for continued personal and professional development in working with families based on his or her own learning needs. AND program provides opportunities for staff to engage in training on adult learning styles and relationship-based approaches to working with adults. Such training should include, but is not limited to:

- Communication strategies;
- Reflective listening and reflective practice;
- Perspective-taking;
- Developing partnerships;
- Conflict resolution;
- Team building; and
- Cultural competency and responsiveness.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

- Training and professional development calendar that shows regular opportunities for all program staff to attend training on family and community engagement;
- Participation and attendance certificates that show training or professional development related to working with families;
- Lists of specific trainings, workshops or other professional development activities that document content related to working with diverse families and understanding family systems; and
- Individual professional development plans for staff that include a focus on working with families.

STANDARD 6 IN ACTION

Northern Illinois University's child care program ensures ongoing training at the professional level for its nonstudent personnel. Said its co-director for operations: "We provide conference opportunities. … Three days out of the year, I close the center and we do professional development days where I have guest speakers coming in talking about everything from the NAEYC code of ethics to reflective supervision." SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

REFLECTION ON: Staff knowledge and training in the area of family and community engagement

STANDARD 6: ECE program staff has knowledge and training in how to build strong family-program relationships. ECE program staff also has knowledge about the strengths, needs and experiences of individual families as these areas relate to child and family well-being.

Who are the people responsible for providing training to staff on family and community engagement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please provide examples of the types of training offered to staff on family and community engagement.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was the training helpful? Please indicate why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7

STANDARD AND ACTION ITEM

Transitions

STANDARD 7:

TThe ECE program facilitates healthy transitions and adjustments for children and families. Smooth transitions for children and families are facilitated for children changing caregivers within an ECE setting; moving from one ECE setting to another; or going from one ECE setting to elementary school (e.g., from Early Head Start to Head Start; from child care/HS/ pre-K to elementary school; etc.) whether these are on a regular basis or a one-time transition. The ECE program helps children and families develop skills around managing these transitions.

ACTION ITEM:

Support healthy transitions and adjustments for young children going from home to center enrollment or to elementary school.

Support healthy transitions and adjustments for young children going from home to center enrollment or to elementary school.

7

22. Program staff helps families and children transition from home to the program and from the program to home while fostering children's healthy attachments and development in ways that are responsive to family needs and preferences.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

■ Program provides families information on separation and attachment.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES?

■ Documentation of a written plan for each family regarding home-program adjustments and transitions; and

■ Written information for families on separation and attachment.

23. Program has a written continuity of care plan, developed with families, for children who make regular or one-time transitions between classrooms and/or caregivers within the program.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

■ Efforts are made to minimize unnecessary transitions for children.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

■ Written documentation of continuity of care plans and individual child transition plans (if transitions within the program are made, written rationale is given for the transition and an implementation process is described).

Support healthy transitions and adjustments for young children going from home to center enrollment or to elementary school.

7

24. Program helps families who use multiple ECE and child care arrangements to develop transition plans for their children and themselves.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program builds partnerships or collaborates with other ECE programs that families may use to facilitate transitions between programs for children and families.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Lists of other ECE arrangements in the community that can serve as referrals for families needing additional or alternative care.

25. Program enhances school readiness for children by helping families develop a transition plan for their children and themselves in preparation for entry into elementary school.

INDICATOR: SIGN OF SUCCESS

- Program builds partnerships or collaborates with local school districts in developing transition plans for children and families as they enter elementary school.

CAN THE PROGRAM PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE?

- Written plans for transitions across ECE arrangements and written plans for each child in the program transitioning to elementary schools.

STANDARD 7 IN ACTION

Making sure parents and children experience smooth intake into Northern Illinois University's child care program is paramount to the program's success. Said its co-director for operations: "We schedule an individual orientation with each family. We talk about a lot of things that relate to practices and policies to help them understand what life is like at the [child development lab]. I also educate them … on being in a program that is a lab school and how different that might be from typical child care." SEE FULL PROFILE UNDER TOOLKIT USER PROFILES.

STANDARD 7: The ECE program facilitates healthy transition and adjustments for children and families. Smooth transitions for children and families are facilitated when changes in caregiving occur within an ECE setting.

Transitions occur:

- **From the family home to your program;**
- **Within the program from birth to 3 years of age;**
- **Within the program from 3 to 5 years of age;**
- **From the program to kindergarten; and**
- **To after-school, summer or other program.**

Provide examples from the list above of the transition processes that occur in your program.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Now that you've reviewed the seven standards through self-study, it's time to see where your program stands and if you are ready to start the self-assessment process.

Family AND Community Engagement Materials

Program Overview

Family and Community Engagement Self-Assessment Instructions

Family and Community Engagement Self-Assessment

Family Engagement Questionnaire

Community Engagement Questionnaire

Program Goals and Action Plan

Toolkit User Profiles

Definitions

Research to Support Standards

Program Overview:

Describe your program. After you have done so, you'll move on to assessments toward making improvements.

1. **Briefly describe your program (setting; size; accreditations; vision; history with children who are hard to reach or have special needs; etc.).**

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. **Briefly describe any other relevant information or highlights about your program, such as changes in neighborhood demographics, number of years in operation, history of growth or reduction in size.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Family AND Community Engagement Self-Assessment
INSTRUCTIONS

Conducting the self-assessment is an important process that can lead to improving program quality in the realm of family and community engagement. The self-assessment is based on the seven standards of quality:

- System-wide family and community engagement policies in writing;

- Relationship-based approach to working with diverse families;

- Goal-oriented approach to working with families;

- Active community engagement and community partnerships;

- Systematic collection of data to improve program practices;

- Staff knowledge and training to build strong family program relationships; and

- Transitions.

Getting Started

To ensure that the data you collect reflect how your program policies and practices currently meet the standards and reveal areas for improvement, you should consider the following before beginning the process:

BEGIN THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The information will be used to create the Program Action Plan.
Please contact (773) 356-8123 during the process if you have questions.

Family AND Community Engagement Self-Assessment

PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For each question on the Family and Community Engagement Self-Assessment, check "Yes" or "No" to indicate your program's readiness for making family and community engagement improvements.

AS YOU CONDUCT THE SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM SERVICES, BE SURE TO EVALUATE:

- Current method used to build meaningful relationships with families;

- Staff approach for working with families to identify goals, areas of improvement and needs;

- Definition of family and how it is viewed across the agency;

- Documentation tools and systems used for accurate tracking and follow-up with families;

- Staff's working knowledge of community resources and community partnerships;

- Plans to develop community engagement;

- System to cultivate a family plan that ensures goals are met; and

- Assistance to pregnant women in obtaining prenatal and postpartum care.

In addition to this self-assessment, a Family Engagement Questionnaire for at least 75 percent of currently enrolled parents should be completed along with a File and Documentation Checklist and Community Engagement Questionnaire. Find the Family Engagement Questionnaire at the end of this tool.

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 1**

The ECE program leadership promotes and implements written, system-wide family and community engagement policies and a family environment.

1

THE ECE PROGRAM LEADERSHIP PROMOTES AND IMPLEMENTS WRITTEN, SYSTEM-WIDE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICIES AND A FAMILY ENVIRONMENT.

1. **Program has written family and community engagement policy that clearly articulates the importance of families in the program and in the lives of their children.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

2. **Program environment makes all families and family members feel welcome and program staff demonstrates a commitment to serving families as well as children in the program.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

3. **Program facilitates the development of family-to-family social networks and supports.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

4. **Program has a recruitment and hiring policy for finding and training staff that reflects the cultural/ethnic background of children/families served.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

5. **Program hires staff willing to pursue ongoing professional development around working with families.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

6. **Program offers support and supervision to all staff around implementing family and community engagement policies. Staff is supported in their family engagement efforts through regular opportunities to reflect and communicate with supervisors, management and program leadership, including through team and individual meetings.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 2**

The ECE program uses a relationship-based approach to engaging families and all staff members demonstrate respect for families' culture, language, family composition and circumstances.

2

7. **Program staff understand the diverse backgrounds of families in the program, including culture, language, ability, family composition, and circumstances and uses this knowledge in their interactions with families. Program staff members leverage the strengths and resources of families for the program by treating families as assets.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

8. **Program staff recognizes the important role that fathers play in the lives of their children and make intentional efforts to include and welcome fathers in all aspects of the program.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

9. **Communication with families is reciprocal, collaborative, positive, transparent and responsive to families' goals, interests, needs, expectations and language preferences, thereby minimizing power or authority over families.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 3**

The ECE program uses a goal-oriented approach to working with families through creating opportunities for collaborative decision-making about goals for their children, their families and the program.

3

10. Program builds working partnerships between families and staff on behalf of children and seeks regular input from families about their children's growth and development.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

11. Program staff members work with families to enhance families' capacity and confidence to support their children's learning.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

12. Program creates frequent and ongoing opportunities for family members to participate in and share leadership responsibilities and decision-making around program operations and prepares families for their roles.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

The ECE program initiates and promotes broad and active community partnerships on behalf of families, children, staff and community.

4

---

13. Program has active and ongoing collaborations with community organizations and services.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

14. Lists of programs and community resources and services for families are updated on a regular basis to respond to families' home cultures, interests, needs and language choice.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

15. Program advocates on behalf of families by facilitating their ease of access to community resources as well as creating opportunities for families to advocate for themselves, their children and their community in regards to needed resources and services.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

16. Program works with eligible families to seek and access child care assistance and other financial supports, if needed.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 5**

The ECE program has systems for collecting and using data related to family and community engagement for the purpose of improving program practices. The ECE program collects and shares relevant data with families.

5

17. Program has systems in place for collecting data on family and community partnerships in collaboration with families.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

18. Various data collection methods are used and are accessible to all family members. If surveys are used, then they are available in families' preferred language. Confidentiality guidelines are articulated in a data sharing agreement policy.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

19. Program uses data collection to inform ongoing program improvement and program staff demonstrates a willingness to change practices and policies based on data about program quality and family experiences in the program.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

20. Program has systems in place for sharing data with families in ways families can understand.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 6**

ECE program staff has knowledge and training in how to build strong family-program relationships. ECE program staff also has knowledge about the strengths, needs and experiences of individual families as these areas relate to child and family well-being.

6

21. All staff members have ongoing training in working with diverse families and have knowledge about family systems and the cultural and economic factors that shape families' lives.

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment: **STANDARD 7**

The ECE program facilitates healthy transitions and adjustments for children and families. Smooth transitions for children and families are facilitated for children changing caregivers within an ECE setting; moving from one ECE setting to another; or going from one ECE setting to elementary school, whether these are on a regular basis or a one-time transition. The ECE program helps children and families develop skills around managing these transitions.

22. **Program staff helps families and children make the adjustment from home to the program and from the program to home in ways that foster children's healthy attachments and development and in ways that are responsive to family needs and preferences.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

23. **Program has a written continuity of care plan that is developed with families for children who make regular or one-time transitions between classrooms and/or caregivers within the program.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

24. **Program helps families who use multiple ECE and child care arrangements to develop transition plans for their children and themselves.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

25. **Program enhances school readiness for children by helping families develop a transition plan for their children and themselves in preparation for the entry into elementary school.**

a) ☐ Yes (Please attach a written copy)

b) ☐ No (Provide written explanation below as to why it does not exist and what steps the program has taken, if any, to establish polices. Use additional sheet if necessary.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now that the Family and Community Engagement Self-Assessment has been completed, review areas where additional work may be needed.

Family Engagement Questionnaire

1. **How do you learn about various opportunities that your child's program offers? Can you name some of them?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **What are some of the different community programs offered by the ECE program?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. **How are you involved in the ECE program with your child and has the program benefited your family?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. **Have you participated in staff-parent conferences to understand your child's progress or challenges he/she may face while in the ECE program?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. **Do you know what to do if you have a complaint regarding the ECE program in which your child is currently enrolled?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. **Are there needs you have expressed for which you have not received services?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. **Do you think the program staff values you as an asset to the ECE program?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. **Would you like to see any changes or services added?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. **What do you like best about the program?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. **Would you refer another family to enroll their child in this program?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Community Engagement Questionnaire

HAS YOUR PROGRAM ESTABLISHED ONGOING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FOLLOWING COMMUNITY AGENCIES?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Providers of child care services

Yes ☐ No ☐ Child protective services/agencies

Yes ☐ No ☐ Family support services/agencies

Yes ☐ No ☐ Local elementary schools

Yes ☐ No ☐ Post-secondary educational institutions

Yes ☐ No ☐ Mental health care providers

Yes ☐ No ☐ Organizations and businesses that provide transportation services

Yes ☐ No ☐ Services for children with disabilities

Yes ☐ No ☐ Healthy food and nutrition services

Yes ☐ No ☐ Additional organizations and businesses that provide support and needed resources to families

BARRIERS (IF ANY) TO YOUR PROGRAM ANSWERING "YES" TO ALL OF THE ABOVE ITEMS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

DOES THE PROGRAM PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Parent workshops

Yes ☐ No ☐ Family literacy activities

Yes ☐ No ☐ Medical, dental, nutrition and mental health education

Yes ☐ No ☐ Community advocacy opportunities, including advocating for children with disabilities

Yes ☐ No ☐ Family rights and responsibilities concerning the education of their children

Yes ☐ No ☐ Classes to improve families' knowledge of prenatal care, fetal development, labor, delivery and postpartum wellness

Yes ☐ No ☐ Volunteer opportunities

Yes ☐ No ☐ Staff trainings with community providers

ARE THERE PROCEDURES IN PLACE TO IDENTIFY AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES TO ATTEND PARENT/AGENCY MEETINGS?

Yes ☐ No ☐

BARRIERS (IF ANY) TO YOUR PROGRAM ANSWERING "YES" TO ALL OF THE ABOVE ITEMS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Program Goals and Action Plan

Item # (Item number from self-assessment)	Goal (What should change?)	Action Steps (What will we do?)	Resources (What, who can help?)	Responsibilities (Who?)	Timelines (By when?)

Lisa Schmidt
FCNS Child Development Lab
Northern Illinois University
70 Gabel Hall, DeKalb, IL 60115
http://www.chhs.niu.edu/cdl/

Northern Illinois University's award-winning child care program gets a lot right when it comes to family and community engagement. Lisa Schmidt, co-director for operations, had suspected they were on the right track. After all, the Illinois governor's office awarded the ECE program a 2016 Award of Excellence for its family and community engagement.

But, as the old saying goes, they didn't want to rest on their laurels. So, the ECE program took stock of its outreach efforts using a forerunner to the IAFC family and community engagement toolkit.

FCNS Child Development Lab Northern Illinois University is a teaching and research facility for child development and early childhood professionals sponsored by the university's School of Family, Consumer and Nutrition Sciences. The ECE program has National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, accreditation.

Because they had already been tracking their family and community engagement activities to meet their NAEYC goals, NIU's child development lab had done a lot of analytical heavy lifting. But the NAEYC process did not pinpoint one key area of focus that the IAFC family and community engagement toolkit covers: father participation. This difference yielded ideas for NIU's child development lab to take new actions on that front.

"I liked the idea of celebrating and making sure that dads felt welcome here, that they were just as much a part of the center and the community and the culture as any other family member," Schmidt said.

Some specific actions that the center took to that end included adding more images around the facilities of fathers with their children and more books featuring fathers.

They also made updates at the policy level, for example, officially extending the use of an area designated previously for nursing mothers to include fathers who also need to feed their children. "I was thinking if there are dads on campus and they want to have some special feeding time with their child, then they can do that," Schmidt said. "Why not make that policy in the handbook specific in saying, 'If you're a father, you're welcome to come in and use the same space and come and feed your child as well.'?"

Other notable family and community engagement areas of strength at NIU's child development lab encompass Standards 3, 5, 6 and 7. Here are examples from their program:

Standard 3 – Goal-oriented approach to working with families
Schmidt indicated that the NIU child care lab emphasizes interconnectivity of ideas between parents and staff. "We provide parents opportunities for evaluating our programs," she said. "We also give them opportunities for evaluating our practicum students and they give lots of feedback regarding that. … We're always seeking advice."

Standard 5 - Systematic collection of data to improve program practices

Along the lines of constantly seeking parent input, the NIU child care lab uses various forms, including, for example, surveys and an Ages and Stages Questionnaire as screening a tool for new children and their parents. The staff also conducts Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats – or SWOT – analyses to process data and regularly distributes a newsletter to parents.

An example of how they've effectively collected and used feedback solicited from parents: "One person questioned the handling of emergency procedures," Schmidt said. "So, I responded that we were going to be formulating a sheltering in place protocol, and I was going to be working with our emergency management coordinator through the NIU police department. I let them know, 'This is feedback that I got from you as a parent and now here is what I'm going to do about it.'"

Standard 6 – Staff knowledge and training to build strong family program relationships

As a teaching facility, the NIU child development lab trains new generations of ECE providers as students. But it also ensures ongoing training at the professional level for nonstudent personnel. "We provide conference opportunities," for one, Schmidt said. Also, "Three days out of the year, I close the center and we do professional development days where I have guest speakers coming in talking about everything from the NAEYC code of ethics to reflective supervision."

Standard 7 – Transitions

Making sure parents and children experience smooth intake into the NIU child development lab program is paramount to the program's success, Schmidt indicated. Their process includes the use of intake forms to gather information on incoming families, tours of facilities and explanations of daily routines.

"We schedule an individual orientation with each family," she said. "We talk about a lot of things that relate to practices and policies to help them understand what life is like at the [child development lab]. I also educate them a lot on being in a program that is a lab school and how different that might be from typical child care."

Overall advice that Schmidt would offer to other programs using the IAFC family and community engagement toolkit to get a true measure on where they stand in the area: start with your own handbooks for parents and staff to begin thinking through evidence collection.

"You might have something in place where you can say, 'I can just tweak that,'" she said. "'That's something that I can just adjust. That's simple. That's easy.' I think that people need to kind of think outside the box with what they're doing and look at all of their protocol and their forms. It kind of seems like a lot of work, but once you start discovering, 'Oh, I already do this' or 'I have this,' it's not going to be unattainable.'

Adrianne Gonzalez
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Concordia Place, located in Chicago's North Center neighborhood, is a nonprofit child care program that has an award-winning child care center — having earned a 2016 Award of Excellence from the state of Illinois's governor's office for its family and community engagement.

The center, which provides education, enrichment and wellness services to 750 children, teens and seniors at two Chicago locations, is more than 30 years old.

Site director Adrianne Gonzalez spearheaded the center's self-assessment of and reflection on its family and community engagement as measured against the seven standards of quality described in this toolkit.

In taking a microscope to its family and community engagement efforts, Concordia Place confirmed ways to fortify its already strong outreach to parents, families and the community. They determined that they needed to be "specific about how we're involving the families and targeting different parts of our families, different aspects of families and acknowledging that," Gonzalez said.

For instance, they were doing a great job involving fathers, "But then there were different categories about involving dads — more specific things," Gonzalez said. "We felt we were involving everyone, but then when they broke it down into categories … we were thinking, 'Well, maybe we do need to do more.'"

They also critiqued their family and community engagement collaterals, such as fliers and other written materials, and realized some could use a polish. "There were a couple of things [where] we saw, 'Oh, we do have this in place, but maybe it needs to be worded differently so that people understand exactly how we do this or how often we do it or why we do it.'"

Ultimately, Gonzalez advises that ECE programs build a strong team to apply the toolkit; establish a strong overarching plan at the outset for handling each component of the toolkit; and maintain top-notch organization of collected materials to build a portfolio of evidence for assessment/reflection.

"It seemed in our process that documentation was key to everything — just taking the time to sort through all of the evidence and keeping it organized," she said.

Eldora Davis
The Ezzard Charles Montessori School
7946 S. Ashland Avenue and
7949 S. Ashland Avenue
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The Ezzard Charles Montessori School took an analytical and in-depth look at its ECE program in 2016 through the lens of the seven standards of quality for family and community engagement.

The school, comprising the Ezzard Charles Day Care Center at 7946 S. Ashland Avenue and the Ezzard Charles Nursery Center at 7949 S. Ashland Avenue on Chicago's South Side, was interested in assessing its outreach efforts and stoking parental participation levels.

Although Executive Director Eldora Davis has a staffer who "goes over and above" in outreach to parents and family, challenges remained, Davis said. "You can dialogue with parents when they're bringing in their children and dropping them off and they are very cooperative," she said. "But to try to get them back to a meeting? It's always the faithful few."

Davis and her team assessed their family and community engagement, collecting and reflecting on evidence, and determined that their efforts are strong overall, but that there was room for improvement. The self-assessment helped them to identify one key area where they could improve.

"That was a community service agreement with another day care center," Davis said. "We do now partner with another day care center. They don't have infant and toddler and we do."

The two centers now refer parents to the other for ECE services, thanks to their agreement. "We didn't have it when we first started the process," Davis said.

When she took her facilities through the assessment process, Davis was among an early cohort to do so using a looser format that did not have a cohesive and published IAFC family and community engagement toolkit. "I think that if we had had that toolkit to begin with, it would have probably made everything a little bit more [clearer]," she said, as in: "This is what I've got to do based on this book and this is how we're going to go by it, piece by piece."

Ayana Banks
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Ayana Banks, a family support specialist at Jeanne Kenney YMCA Day Care in Chicago, headed up her site's family and community engagement self-assessment and reflection, building in the process a portfolio of evidence that demonstrated the ECE program's strengths and weaknesses within the seven standards of quality.

The process illuminated areas that needed adjustments. "One thing I noticed is that we really didn't have anything that was for parent support— as far as like a parent support group," Banks said. "So, I facilitated 'The Chat & Chew' before our parents and teachers' meetings. We wanted to work on it, so it could be for everybody because 'parents and teachers' is just for ages 0 to 3."

Banks said the ECE program now aims to develop the parent support group further. The expansion is "something that's a goal for next year — to have a parent support group where the parents are facilitated and they're more of the ones who fundraise and head everything, instead of it being just like the regular parent meetings."

Upon evaluation of the evidence that she collected to bind in a family and community engagement portfolio, Banks also noted some other family and community engagement deficiencies and made moves to correct them.

"We didn't really think about places for parents to breastfeed," Banks said. "We kind of assumed, without having it in writing or not having a designated space, that the parents would just automatically do it in the early infant classrooms that we have, if they really needed to. But we didn't have a policy on it, or something in writing, saying that this is the area that you can go to [breastfeed]. We added my office because I have a door, if they want to have some privacy and didn't want to be in a classroom."

Banks has advice for programs using the IAFC family and community engagement toolkit to assess and reflect on their own efforts.

"Use it as a means for coming together collaboratively within a site," she said. "It should be something that you talk about before the schoolyear starts, like over the summer maybe, to prepare you to think about what [role] everyone plays in order to work together to build your site and make it better and to basically enhance what you're already doing."

She also suggests that the toolkit can be used annually once an evidence portfolio has been completed for reflection and assessment in a year-over-year assessment.

Definitions

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT: A written document describing how an ECE program will work together with community organizations on common goals and related activities

DATA: Any information that is systematically gathered from families, staff or other individuals or organizations

ECE PROGRAM: Any early care and education center-based program, including Head Start, Early Head Start, Pre-K, preschool or child care

FAMILY: Any adult member of a child's family, including parents, grandparents, other relatives or legal guardians

GOALS-ORIENTED APPROACH: An approach that entails activities and interactions with families and communities and stresses collaborative decision-making on program goals

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Professional development includes any training, workshops, coursework, coaching, consultation or individual self-study that have a clearly written syllabus, plan or agenda outlining specific content covered.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED APPROACH: A relationship-based approach entails responsive, reciprocal and respectful interactions between program staff and individual families to build trust and collaborative partnerships on behalf of children.

STAFF: Refers to any ECE program employee who interacts directly with children or families.

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THE
Seven Standards
OF Quality FOR
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A TOOLKIT

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