

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

Parent Involvement

Children who are successful in school have many healthy interconnections between family, school, and community. Parent involvement in the learning process strengthens learning at home and is directly linked back to positive child outcomes at school. Programs can demonstrate that they value parent involvement in a variety of ways - from partnering with parents to establish child development goals to sharing anecdotes of children's learning.

Communication and strong relationships are the keys to successful parent involvement. The purpose of frequent and informal interactions is to strengthen the connections between home and school. Staff should use an interested and unhurried manner when talking with parents. Staff and parents should update one another about children's recent home experiences and preschool activities through:

- Conversations during drop-off and pick-up times;
- Notes;
- Telephone conversations; and
- Electronic communications.

Ideas for parent involvement activities include:

- Sharing special interests with children, such as fishing, photography, or sewing;
- Providing recyclables and helping to make play materials;
- Logging books taken/returned from a lending library;
- Creating displays of child-initiated works;
- Attending parent meetings, workshops, and serving on the local and/or the Great Start Collaborative school readiness committee representing Strong Beginnings;
- Serving on the local or ISD team to analyze program quality and child outcome data;
- Meeting with teachers to set developmental goals and discuss children's progress;
- Supporting children's learning at home; and
- Reading or contributing to a parent newsletter.

Teaching and/or Family Partnership staff support parent involvement at group or parent meetings by:

- Providing child care;
- Arranging transportation;
- Scheduling events at times convenient for parents;

- Orienting parents to the depth and breadth of the role of parents at meetings;
- Making reminder phone calls;
- Distributing agendas or other materials ahead of time;
- Supporting parent-to-parent communication;
- Addressing needs of non-custodial parents;
- Addressing language, culture, and work barriers; and
- Demonstrating that parents' contributions are valued by following up appropriately.

Staff members support parent involvement in the classroom through:

- A plan that outlines the roles of classroom volunteers is included in the Strong Beginnings Parent Handbook. The plan identifies the leader (e.g., teacher, Family Liaison, ECS) who will provide ongoing support to volunteers and reinforce how they help advance children's learning;
- A parent's presence (mother, father, or guardian) is invited and welcomed by staff;
- Worthy classroom experiences are offered to parents, for example, assisting in the implementation of the daily routine with children versus assigning parents' minor roles such as wiping tables or cutting out shapes. For example, volunteers might support children at a learning area during choice time or by reading aloud to children;
- Volunteer opportunities are announced to parents ahead of time;
- Responsibilities are offered that match volunteer's interests, skills, schedules and facilitate children's development; and
- Parents are invited to participate in special events such as field trips or program evaluation efforts.

Program Requirements

Family Participation Groups

Strong Beginnings sites must provide for active and continuous participation of parents of enrolled children. A high-quality Strong Beginnings program supports parents as active decision makers by developing and implementing training to instill confidence in parents as active members of local Family Participation and/or Data Analysis Groups.

Each Intermediate School District (ISD) is also required to have Strong Beginnings parent representation on the regional Great Start Collaborative (GSC) Parent Coalition; working with other committed parents to support early childhood practices in the community. These Strong Beginnings parents, in turn, act as liaisons to local Parent Facilitation Groups, sharing ideas and activities in person, virtually (e.g., Zoom/Skype/Google Meets) or through emailed reports. A proportional representation of parents from Strong Beginnings and GSRP should be included in these activities. Refer to the Intermediate School District Administration

of Strong Beginnings section of this manual for more information on local Family Participation and Data Analysis Groups.

Another opportunity involves participation in a school readiness advisory committee convened as a workgroup of the GSC that provides for the involvement of classroom teachers, Parent Liaisons, parents or guardians of three- and four-year-old program participants, and community, volunteer, and social service agencies and organizations. The advisory committee annually reviews and makes recommendations regarding the Strong Beginnings and GSRP components. The advisory committee also makes recommendations to the GSC regarding other community services designed to improve all children's school readiness.

Family Contacts by Early Childhood Teaching Staff

The purpose of home visits and parent/teacher conferences are to involve families in the children's education at school and to help them provide educational experiences for the children at home. Center-Based programs require a minimum of four family contacts per year by early childhood teaching staff, preferably two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences. When the 2+2 pattern is impossible for a particular family, other arrangements should be made to complete the four required contacts. If a parent prefers the visit not take place in the home, a mutual location may be chosen such as a park, restaurant, or a parent's workplace. During home visits and parent/teacher conferences, staff:

- Seek input from parents about the program and its relationship to the child's development;
- Seek input from parents about how they are supporting the child's development at home;
- Partner with parents in setting appropriate child development goals;
- Assist parents to implement child development strategies for home which fit into normal family routines. For example, color naming or classification while sorting freshly laundered socks, practicing counting with meaning when children serve themselves food (e.g., carrots/crackers/raisins), talking about shapes of different foods children are eating (e.g. some cookies, crackers), etc. (sending home worksheets is not appropriate);
- Work together with parents and Family Liaisons as appropriate to write referrals for suspected or diagnosed disabilities or other developmental needs of the child. After the visit, staff members follow up by working with the Early Childhood Specialist, district, and parents to locate and access special education services needed by the child;
- Assist as appropriate Family Liaisons in working together with parents to write and follow up on referrals for needed family services. For example, staff can provide documentation for parents to share with providers, staff can make an initial phone call to help arrange an appointment, staff can help families find child care or transportation so they can use community resources (When these activities are undertaken primarily by the Family

Liaison there should be appropriate communication with and support from the classroom teacher); and

- Document each home visit and parent/teacher conference.

Home Visit General Guidelines

Home visits are planned to last at least 60 minutes, exclusive of travel time, and include both the child and parent(s). Many programs determine that credentialed Associate Teachers may complete home visits. Where Lead Teachers and Associate Teachers complete individual home visits, each adult often makes home visits with the children that they consistently work with in the classroom, e.g., children in their small group/child planning group/recall group. One member of the teaching staff may be accompanied on the home visit by the Family Liaison when the circumstances make this advisable. Where staff safety is a concern, teaching teams often complete home visits in pairs. Itineraries should be distributed to pertinent staff who should know of the home visitor's location(s). A cell phone should be carried and valuables should be locked in the trunk before arriving at the destination.

It is strongly recommended that the **initial home visit** occur after the child is enrolled but before the child begins the classroom program. The main purpose of the initial visit is to create a foundation for the beginning of a positive partnership between home and school. It is designed to ease the transition into Strong Beginnings for the child and family. Activities might include:

- Taking photos of parent and child, family pet(s), home, etc.;
- Leaving photos of staff and classroom;
- Discussing transportation to and from the program;
- Discussing parents' interests and hobbies;
- Discussing the importance of parent involvement and the various opportunities;
- Sharing program philosophy and curriculum information;
- Reviewing results of developmental screening;
- Discussing goals the parents have for their child for the year;
- Generating a list of possible activities/discussion topics for the next home visit;
- Sharing the role of the Family Liaison with families;
- Setting a date for the next meeting of the parent(s) and Family Liaison; and
- Discussing the required enrollment paperwork.

Upon arrival, appropriate introductions are made, and other family members are included in conversation. The parent is asked for suggestions for an appropriate area within the home to meet. Staff members partner with the parent(s) to modify the environment as necessary (e.g., distractions such as a baby crying, television, pets, etc.)

Second and subsequent visits are designed around the individual child and parent needs. Staff should prepare by scheduling visits one week to ten days in advance,

at convenient times for families, and allow for travel time between appointments. The staff member and parent should agree upon beginning and ending times for the visit and discuss what to expect during the visit. The purpose of the visit should be reviewed. It may be useful to include the Family Liaison in some of these visits. Throughout the visit, staff looks for opportunities to encourage parents to share their perspective and ideas. The home visit should be personalized to meet the individual needs of each child and family by:

- Eliciting feedback from parents regarding the child's interests, concerns, and progress, both at home and in the program;
- Sharing information about community resources;
- Completing any necessary referral forms together during the visit;
- Reinforcing positive parenting;
- Exchanging information about the curriculum and its relationship to the child's development;
- Updating each other about the child's recent experiences;
- Exchanging ideas and materials to support the child's learning and social development at home;
- Engaging the parent and child to model a teaching activity (utilizing home materials whenever possible) and sharing learning goals and outcomes of the activity; and

Allowing time throughout the visit for the parent to ask questions and/or voice concerns.

To conclude, the visit is summarized with the parent, with information provided about future parent activities and staff availability for phone calls and questions. Completed documentation of the visit includes a narrative description of the visit, the date, and the signatures of both the visiting staff member(s) and the parent.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences should be held in the fall and spring, and when requested by parents. Conferences are scheduled to meet the mutual needs of parents and staff and planned to last a minimum of 45 minutes. This may result in some conferences being held outside of regular work hours.

Staff members use a parent report from the approved child assessment tool and discuss the progress of the child across domains, goals for continuous progress, and any additional support which may be necessary. Developmental information should be exchanged in depth and in a relaxed, positive manner. Anecdotal observations and samples of child-initiated work strengthen parents' understanding of their child's development. Staff share curriculum strategies for supporting children's development and discuss with parents ways that they can support learning at home using household materials and within ordinary household routines. Staff invite observations and answer questions from parents about the program. The conference concludes with ways the family can participate in the program. Staff availability for phone calls is reinforced.

While it is not possible for the Family Liaison to participate in every parent/teacher conference, they may stop in briefly to greet the parent or stay longer when they have worked jointly with the teaching team with a family.

Family Partnership Process

Current family support frameworks utilize a dynamic approach for engaging families that prioritizes relationships building, coaching, two-way communication, and partnerships to improve child and family outcomes. Differentiated and individualized services are based on identifying the types of family needs and interests. A model of support where families who need and desire the most services receive the highest level of supports strengthens all families. As strong relationships are built, Family Liaisons can strategize with families, who then take the lead in setting and accomplishing their own goals. Family Liaisons can facilitate the connection to community resources and can help families advance goals that are important to them such as: improving family health; stabilizing housing situations; strengthening parenting skills, and improving parents' education, employment and financial stability. The Family Liaisons use this process to empower families to acquire the resources, skills, and sustained behavior changes necessary to attain their goals.

Strong Beginnings Family Partnership Process Plan

Each ISD must develop and implement a written, ISD-wide plan for the Family Partnership Process that includes the development of a Family Partnership Agreement, signed by the parent and the family advocate. There is no required process Strong Beginnings programs must use to reach the outcomes specified below. They should be able to be accomplished in partnership with a Head Start Agency, Infant Mental Health organization or any other community agency or organization focused on strengthening families' well-being. This flexibility allows Strong Beginnings to build upon and utilize programs that already exist and are accepted and successful in their communities, rather than imposing a new model, framework or process.

The written plan for the Family Partnership Process must detail the means through which it offers individualized family partnership services that meet the following goals:

- 1) Building strong, mutually respectful relationships with all families that serve as the foundation of trust for all other services:
- 2) Collaborating with families to identify interests, needs, and aspirations related to the family engagement outcomes described in the paragraph above;
- 3) Helping families achieve identified desired individualized family engagement outcomes;
- 4) Establishing and implementing a Family Partnership Agreement process that is jointly developed and shared with parents in which staff and families review individual progress, revise goals, evaluate and track whether

identified needs and goals are met, and adjust strategies on an ongoing basis, a minimum of three times per year.

The written plan will detail the processes for assessing family needs, and how necessary activities, such as referrals, and provision of direct services to support family well-being in areas including family safety, health, and economic stability will be completed. The ISD plan will also include the process the Family Liaison will use to coach families as appropriate in each of the following areas: supporting child learning and development; providing (when applicable) services and supports for children with disabilities, and fostering parental confidence and skills that positively impact the early learning and development of their children.

The plan should include a means of differentiating families into levels based on interest and need, and include guidance on factors to consider in differentiating the levels and types of support provided for each level. For example, families who need the least support might benefit from participation in group parenting session(s) on general or focused topics while those needing more assistance might be best supported through co-enrollment in an evidenced based home visiting program operating in the community. At a minimum each program should offer all parents the opportunity (1) to participate in group parenting session(s) that are based on research and (2) to meet in a group session with representatives of local agencies that support families in improving their well-being. As an alternative, a booklet with information on local resources may be given to all parents.

Since the level of support a family needs might change quickly, with one difference in employment, health status or the like, plans for this should be included and described in the process. While there is one full-time Family Liaison required for every three Strong Beginnings classrooms, staff and resources should be assigned based on the urgency and intensity of identified individual family needs and goals.

The Family Partnership Process must be initiated as early in the program year as possible and continue for as long as the family participates in Strong Beginnings, based on parent interest and need. Family Liaisons should generally meet individually with each family three times yearly, at their home or in a mutually agreeable location, to develop and review goals and implementation steps, modifying them as necessary based on progress and/or change in family circumstances. In addition to these more formal contacts, regular informal contacts to build relationships and check on progress should be made with families.

Efforts should be made to ensure the Family Liaison's completed documentation of the initial planning conference includes a narrative description of the meeting, the date, and the signatures of the staff member(s) and the parent. This initial planning conference should also provide an opening for parents to receive support in the use of a parent-led individualized goal setting process that explores their hopes for the future and increases their skills and confidence. Strong Beginnings can be an important link between child and adult services, helping to support two generations learning and thriving together. The two-generation framework should bridge the

efforts of early childhood with other systems, such as adult education and workforce development that focus on parents in their role as breadwinners and heads of households as well as caregivers. This is critical as children's academic achievement is positively influenced by factors such as family stability, mother's education level, and family income as well as by high quality early childhood education. Families who do not currently need or desire assistance with goals setting in areas like jobs, housing or food security may be more interested in developing goals based on supporting their child's development/behavior in areas like bedtime routines or learning to use the toilet.

Awardees are required to consistently use one Family Partnership Process throughout the ISD region. Head Start or other programs that already utilize Family Partnership Processes that include goal setting may be exempted by the ISD from using the ISD selected model if it is different. ISDs are strongly encouraged to consider adoption of processes that are already being widely used in the region.

See the Implementation Manual Resource that is titled *Elements to Look for in Family Partnership Process Plan* for more detailed information on the plan.

Parent Involvement in the Family Partnership Process

The Family Partnership Process is to be implemented on an individualized basis depending on family need and desire. While it is expected that families will meet with Family Liaisons at least three times per year, that frequency might be too high for some families and too low for others, especially those facing challenging or emergency situations. Families in crisis may even require daily support for some period of time, either in person or by phone or text. Family partnership meetings may occur at any location, home, Strong Beginnings center, or community-based location that is mutually agreed upon by the parent and liaison. Settings selected should, however, allow for confidential discussion of personal family information. Efforts should also be made to allow for the sessions to be held outside traditional working hours to better accommodate family needs. While every effort should be made to establish partnerships with all parents, families may not be required to participate as a condition of enrollment.

Coordination of Family Systems of Support

Families whose children may be at risk for school failure often have complex needs that cannot be met by one service agency. They are often best assisted by receiving multiple services. When there are multiple sources providing family support, thought needs to be given as to how this impacts the family. There should be strong coordination between any family support program (voluntary home visiting, court-ordered family support programs or preschool initiated service) and the Strong Beginnings Family Liaison including coordination of goals, dosage and duration of similar services and expected outcomes. In implementing the Family Partnership Process, any existing plans for the family made with other community agencies and availability of other community resources to address family needs,

strengths, and goals, can and should be taken into consideration in order to avoid duplication.

Each ISD's written plan for the Family Partnership Process should detail the process for service coordination. The plan should be respectful of the needs and desires of the family as well as the other programs that are supporting them.

Collaboration Between the Family Liaison and the Strong Beginnings Classroom Program Staff

Collaboration between each Family Liaison and the Strong Beginnings Classroom Program Staff will differ depending on several factors:

- If many families have high levels of need, most of the Family Liaison's time will be utilized in supporting individual families to meet these needs. If most families have few areas in which they'd like/need support, the Family Liaison will have more time available to collaborate with the classroom program staff.
- Each Family Liaison and teacher has unique areas of interest and expertise. These should be considered and respected when determining how teachers and Family Liaisons will best work together and what functions each will lead and support.
- Classroom programs differ in the number and type of support personnel already available to the teaching staff. Some programs may have Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation available while others may have staff dedicated to planning family activities and events. In planning for collaboration between the Family Liaison and classroom program staff, the type of support already available at the site should be considered. If there are staff with responsibilities in some area(s), they should be involved in the planning for collaboration as appropriate.

Regardless of the type and level of collaboration between the Family Liaison and Strong Beginnings classroom staff, it is imperative that Strong Beginnings families see the Family Liaison as a seamless partner in the provision of Strong Beginnings services. Teachers, the Family Liaison, site program administrators and everyone else who is an integral part of the Strong Beginnings program at each site should be presented to families as part of the same team, all working together to improve child and family outcomes for those in Strong Beginnings. It is essential for the smooth working of the Family Partnership Process that families understand who the Family Liaison is, their role in Strong Beginnings and view them as an integral part of the team. The following methods should be incorporated to do this:

- The Family Liaison should be mentioned, introduced and their role summarized in any welcome letter sent to families about the Strong Beginnings program.
- The Family Handbook should also mention and introduce the Family Liaison and explain their role.

- The Family Liaison should be present and introduced during Back-to-School night, Curriculum night, welcome picnic or other events that might be held to welcome and acquaint families with the Strong Beginnings Program.
- The Family Liaison and their role should be mentioned at home visits.
- Classroom newsletters and other such materials should include some information from/about the Family Liaison.
- Bulletin Boards with staff pictures, etc. should include the Family Liaison.

In addition to their main function working with families to set and reach goals that improve family well-being, the Family Liaison should use any additional time (about 13 hours per week for each Strong Beginnings classroom are allocated for each Family Liaison) to work collaboratively with the Strong Beginnings Classroom program staff. This collaboration can occur in one or more areas depending on the amount of time available, the needs and interests of the teachers and Family Liaison and the additional supports for children and families that are available to the program. Many of these additional roles will assist the Family Liaison in developing relationships with families and/or provide additional support for the classroom teachers in their work with children and families experiencing challenges. For each Strong Beginnings site, the Family Liaison, classroom teachers and any other appropriate staff should complete the *Division of Shared Roles and Responsibilities of Strong Beginnings Classroom Teachers and Family Liaisons* that is a resource for this section of the Implementation Manual before the school year begins. Roles and responsibilities that might be shared include the following:

- Participating in the application and enrollment of families interested in Strong Beginnings.
- Following up with families, whether offered enrollment in Strong Beginnings or not, who indicate unmet basic needs on their Strong Beginnings applications.
- Participating in welcoming families to the program.
- Attending selected Home Visits and/or Parent Teacher Conferences where their support or input would be valuable.
- Greeting families at drop off/pick up time or riding the bus to say hello to families as children board and depart.
- Plan content, invite families and otherwise support family engagement activities and events.
- Initiate or support communication between the program and families on child related issues such as absenteeism.
- Support the teacher and family by providing information and perspectives to both for children with challenging behaviors.
- Dealing with suddenly emerging needs that impact the well-being of Strong Beginnings families.
- Other roles seen as mutually helpful by the classroom staff and Family Liaison.

Staffing for the Family Partnership Process

Family Liaisons will implement the Family Partnership Process developed/selected by the ISD and document family contacts, goals, referrals and progress according to that process.

Staff must have a B.A. or B.S. degree in social work, child and family studies or a related field involving practicum experience with families. Individuals with an Early Childhood Family Specialist (ECFS) Endorsement® from the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health may also serve as Family Liaisons. Education and/or experience working with young children is strongly preferred. Each Family Liaison may work with no more than three classrooms totaling 42 families. All Family Liaisons using the ISD selected process should be hired, supervised, and provided with reflective supervision and professional development by one agency within the region. It may be the ISD, a community family services agency, Head Start, Home Visiting or similar agency already providing family partnership or similar services or any other appropriate agency.

The agency supporting Family Liaisons must maintain a proportionate ratio of at least one Family Liaison Supervisor for every 15 Family Liaisons. The Family Liaison Supervisor must possess an MSW or strongly related degree and should have knowledge of and/or experience with young children and frameworks of family support. They should have training in reflective supervision, be familiar with family-centered, strength-based models of family support and possess expertise in accessing resources for families. The Family Liaison Supervisor will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the work of the Family Liaisons, including assuring data collection and aggregation, providing reflective supervision and professional development and meeting regularly with advocates to provide direction and support. In addition, the Family Liaison Supervisor will meet with the operator of each Strong Beginnings classroom prior to the beginning of each school year, and as needed during the school year, to develop a common understanding of the role of the Family Liaison in each program and a strong working relationship between the program provider and agency supporting the Family Partnership Process. The Family Liaison Supervisor will also be a member of the Great Start Collaborative, School Readiness Advisory Group and ISD level Data Analysis Team.

The Early Childhood Contact or their designee will be responsible for bringing Family Liaison Supervisor(s), including those supporting Head Start and other community family partnership initiatives implementing other processes, together for regular meetings to insure implementation of high quality and consistent practice and plan for program improvement.