

# Family Engagement

One of the most important connections in a child's life is the relationship between the child's home and learning environment. Children thrive when there is a reciprocal relationship between parents (or guardians) and educators/caregivers. Like any relationship, this partnership takes effort from both parties, and some relationships will be easier to foster than others.



So how do we fit this crucial piece into the already complicated puzzle that is caring for young children? The family child care TA team (including myself) recently met with family providers on this topic. Here are some of the ideas that we discussed.

**1. Written Communication Options-** Daily/weekly written communication about the child's day is an important way to stay connected with the families in your program. Be sure to explore all of your options and choose a method of communication that will be most efficient for you. In addition to paper daily/weekly forms, there are now many apps available. Some of the most popular are Brightwheel, Precious Status, Tadpoles, Kinderlime, and Preschool2Me. Many of these offer limited versions for free! You can also utilize other technology options such as email, text messages, or Facebook.

**2. Increase Interest in Family Events-** One of the biggest challenges can be attendance at family events. Putting together a family event requires much time and effort, and it can be disheartening when attendance is low. Involving the children is a great way to get parent participation. If the children are performing a song or displaying some of their recent artwork, they will likely tell their parents and encourage them to attend. Another idea is to document the event. Take lots of pictures and display them after the event. The families that attended will enjoy looking at them, and the families that were unable to attend will see what they missed and hopefully make it to the next event. Lastly, think about doing a make-and-take activity. This could be an activity for the family member and child to complete together. This helps to make the event more interactive, and you can send home the activity with any families that were unable to attend.

**3. Plan Ahead-** Try to plan out the year's family events, conferences, assessments, screenings, surveys, etc at the beginning of the school year. Plan to have some standing engagements from year to year. Try handing out a calendar to families at the beginning of the year. This helps them to know what to expect and when to expect it. Planning ahead also gives families more time to make adjustments in their schedules.

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**4. Family Feedback-** One of our standards in Delaware Stars asks for programs to give families a chance to give feedback annually. Many times programs will send out a general survey asking questions about the level of satisfaction that families feel with the center or FCC. Another idea is to send out a survey about family engagement. Here are some examples of survey questions.

- What types of family events would you like to see in our program?
- What early childhood topics would you like to know more about?
- What days/times work best for family events?

These types of survey questions can help you to increase interest and attendance at your family events.

**5. Opportunities for Families-** Do you have families in your program that have special cultures or traditions that they celebrate in their home? Invite them to come in and share with the children! This is a fantastic way to foster the connection between home and child care. Keep in mind that this doesn't have to just be around the holidays. Invite them throughout the year to share food, activities, stories, or language. The children will be excited to learn more about each other!

**6. Creating a Policy-** Think about what family engagement means to you and your program. Create policies around these philosophies. This helps families to know your expectations around communication, conferences, assessments, screenings, feedback, and events. By detailing these things ahead of time you are setting your program up for successful partnerships with the families you serve.

These are just a few ways to increase family engagement in your programs. Please remember to make accommodations if needed for children with disabilities and dual language families. Also, let us know what is working for you!

**Apps mentioned:**

Brightwheel	Kinderlime
Precious Status	Preschool2Me
Tadpoles	

**Find Delaware Stars on Facebook and Instagram to tell us about a successful family event or connection!**

