

Engaging Families and Communities—Transcript

Engaging Families and Communities Honoring the Primary Role of Families

Child: This is you, Mom, and this is me, and this is my grandpa

Mom: Oh, grandpa

Little girl: He flattens it

Grand-Parent: All that asphalt goes down, and the paver goes over, and what does it do? It flattens it out?

Children: Cheese

Mom: Alright, you guys. Okay, so over to the posts

Teacher: What you gave us was perfect cause it sits

Dad: So that they can kind of flatten it out

Mom: Ok, bye, bye!

Louise Piper

Child Development Center Coordinator

Louise Piper: We really believe that children's extended family members are the most significant people in the lives of the children that we serve. Our families are the experts on their children, they are their child's first and most important teachers, and their input is invaluable to us.

Dad: How about his drawings? Is he getting stronger with holding a pen?

Teacher: He is starting to correct it a lot more quickly. He's still starting out fisting it, but then with working with other manipulatives I'm seeing him correct it in a shorter period of time.

Dad: 'Cause we've been working with him at home too, and he's getting a little stronger, I think.

Catherine Sandhofer, PhD
Associate Professor, Developmental Psychology
University of California, Los Angeles

Catherine Sandhofer: Families are the people who, throughout the child's life, are going to be there for the child, are going to help the child learn, are going to be the child's best supporters, so families are critical for the child's development.

Building Relationships with Families
Cheryl Williams-Jackson, MS
Professor, Child Development
Modesto Junior College

Cheryl Williams-Jackson: When we enroll children in our programs, we actually are enrolling families, which means we really must work on building the relationships with the parents or the grandparents. Whoever it is that has some meaning in the child's life to build relationships with them and bring them into the classroom to be a part of the classroom.

Mom: Are you ready to go to school?

Teacher: He did very good. He took a good nap yesterday. When he was at circle, he goes, "I'm still tired. "I said, "No, that's okay. Don't worry." That's why we do movement at circle in the afternoon to sort of get them up and rolling.

Minie Lopez
Director of Schools

Minie Lopez: In order to really build strong relationships with families, you have to do that when they start because that's the moment that you can assure them that you're the person that they can come to if they need support.

Ranae Amezquita

Principal

Ranae Amezquita: When a family comes to enroll, we have a new parent orientation where we're talking to them about what our program is and how our program works. We want families to know what we do here and how our program operates so we talk about our outdoor program. We talk about our indoor program. We talk about the fact that learning is done through play, and play is a child's work.

Louise Piper: The key for us to begin on that journey with our families is to get as much information as we can. Parents will often, schedule permitting, be able to visit the program several times before their child is enrolled. We use those visits as opportunities to really engage with families in discussions. We also have spent time and have carefully thought through what we include in the registration packet. What are the kinds of questions we ask families? Some of our families are more comfortable responding in writing as they're getting to know us. Other families would rather share that information in exchanges with us personally, so we need both vehicles to find out as much as possible upfront. What do families enjoy together? How do families engage in language experiences at home? Do they read? Do they sing? Do they tell stories? What do parents enjoy reading?

Teacher: Buenos días, Sebastian!

Louise Piper: We're also asking what are the languages spoken in the home? Who speaks those languages? How is language and literacy promoted at home? We use that information to be able to reflect families' home language and culture in the classroom.

Mom (in Spanish): That one is going to be for clean-up. And use this one as your plate. This one is to wipe your hands and your mouth. Do you want milk?

Teacher (in Spanish): No? Water? It's good? Water? Yes.

*Eugene Garcia, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Education
Arizona State University*

Eugene Garcia: If you include their families, if you understand the circumstances, including their immigrant circumstances in which they may live, if you understand how you can use the language and cultural attributes in which those children are reared in, then when you realize that we can actually take advantage of the opportunity for early learning for these children, particularly for kids who come to school not speaking English.

Renaé Amezquita: We wanna know if there's any special things going on in their family. Is grandma raising the child? Are mom and Dad together? Do multiple families live in the same household? Who is the child interacting with?

Principal, Parent, Special Ed Teacher, Teacher

Parent: That's my main concern, is for him to just calm himself down and be able to express his needs to me and to his peers and to the adults around him, like his teachers, during that time.

Principal: How does he currently communicate at home with his sister?

Parent: He's verbal for the most part, but he tends to be a little aggressive at times. If she has a toy that he wants, if he wants it at that moment, he'll just go and push her or take it away instead of using his words. So, I want improvement in that as well because he's capable. He's very verbal so he's capable of doing it.

Renaé Amezquita: So, we're looking at that information because that all impacts children. Many times, families will tell you right away, "This is what's happening." And sometimes it comes a little bit later as they get to know the staff a little bit better.

Parent: As far as them including me in the SST and the process of the SST, they were great. I was asked to be there during every SST. We had approximately three of them. The principal and his teacher were there, and that's where we brought up all the concerns that the teacher and I had about Justin's behavior and his social interaction. I think Justin is coming a long way in this program. I feel he has potential to really develop good social skills in this program because I feel that they've been doing a really good job

with him and letting me know what they're doing and involving me in it and just communicating to me what they are doing with him on a day-to-day basis. So, I have a really good feeling that he's going to do very well in this program.

Deborah Chen, PhD

Professor, Department of Special Education

Cal State University, Northridge

Deborah Chen: So it's building relationship with the family, listening to the family, finding out what the family's goals and expectations are for the child, and then figuring out with the family what's the best way to address that, and how can we work together for the benefit of that child's development?

Creating a Welcoming Environment and Communicating with Families

Mom: You scared me.

[speaking foreign language]

Deborah Chen: Programs can do many things to welcome families to their program. One of the most important things is just to look at the physical environment. Where are we welcoming the families? What does the classroom say when you walk in? Does it reflect the family and the child's language, culture? Is it warm and interesting? And then, of course, making sure that I can communicate with the family.

Executive Director: She's doing very well with eating now, very well. And on Friday you it's our summer Olympics? And hopefully she'll participate. You can always log in to my website also and find out all the different things that are going on. We do a bunch of different games, and then after the games we do a little mini ceremony, and then families have a family picnic.

Dad: This Friday?

Executive Director: Yeah.

Dad: Okay, does Julie know about that?

Executive Director: She should know, yeah, we gave her the newsletter. She should know. If you guys need another newsletter, shoot me an e-mail, okay? Bye, Luna, bye.

Deborah Chen: And nowadays families have many different ways of establishing communication. Some parents prefer e-mail or a telephone call, so finding out what is the best way for us to keep in contact, I think, is an important strategy. If I don't speak the family's language, I need to have a qualified interpreter and ahead of time discuss what we're going to talk about to make sure that those words can be translated in a way that the family will understand in terms of the meaning that is intended. And then, of course, ongoing face-to-face contact is really important.

Teacher: Good job, buddy. Nice. He's doing so well. He really is.

Dad: It was a lot easier this morning to get out the door.

Teacher: Nice, that's good. That's really good. Yeah, he had a great day on Tuesday, and he napped. I think he really likes using the Mr. Potato Heads, and I think that was a good ice breaker.

Dad: He mentioned when you guys went outside you took him outside again.

Dad: Bennett has been at the school for about 2 to 3 weeks now, and of course, every day is really hard. And so in the morning if the drop off is hard, they'll call later in the day when things have settled down to make sure that things have settled down, so you don't worry, "Oh, he's been crying for 3 hours straight," or something like that. The other thing that they've done that was really helpful is since there's not a lot of chance to talk during the drop off and pick up because it can be traumatizing for Bennett, they'll send long e-mails describing the day, describing how he transitioned. And they kind of put their heads together and figured out, what is he really engaged in, so that when we do drop off that they can engage him in that right away. So, all those things have been really helpful for us.