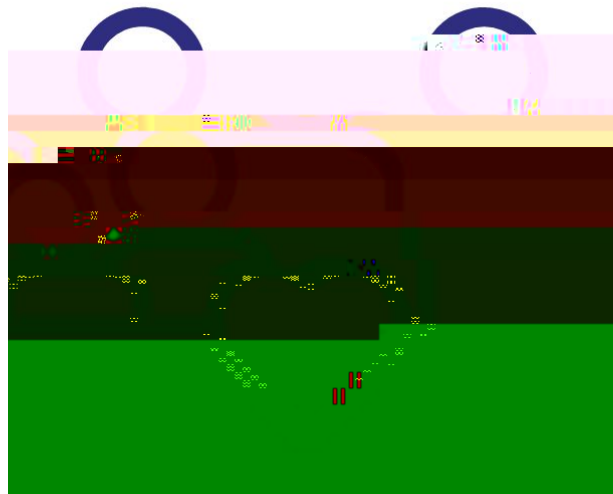




Meaningful Family Engagement Strategies for Expanded Learning Programs



January 2023

Overview

21st Century Community Learning Centers provide opportunities for children to thrive through expanded learning programs (academic and recreational enrichment taking place outside of school hours). These programs prioritize the whole child, offering various support services, community connections, and referrals, and can spark social, emotional, and academic growth in participants.

A cornerstone of success in expanded learning programs is a strong sense of partnership with families. Programs operating before and after school, on weekends, and during the summer, have a unique platform to connect with families. These programs also have the unique challenge of helping parents see the importance and benefits of their offerings.

This toolkit provides insights, examples, and resources to support family engagement efforts within expanded learning programs. Program staff can use these tools to foster meaningful relationships and build inclusive offerings for families.

Note: This document references family engagement requirements as described in the [21st CCLC Site Monitoring Visit \(SMV\) Tool](#), and will be noted as "SMV" with the applicable indicator reference.

"family engagement is about reaching families where they live, especially those who might be most underserved, creating meaningful and trusted relationships with families, raising up their concerns and strengths, and expanding opportunities and resources for how families love and learn with their children.."

- [Family Engagement Core Competencies](#), *National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement*

What is family engagement?

“Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development,” and continues across a child’s life and learning settings (Reference: [National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, NAFSCE](#)).

This definition implies a collaborative relationship between schools, expanded learning programs, and families that empower families to actively support children’s social, emotional, and academic success. Family engagement differs from family involvement, which focuses on the activities at home or school that families partake (Reference: [An Investigation of Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Parental Involvement](#)). Instead, family engagement involves shared responsibility and leadership which appreciates and leverages the important role of a family in their child’s life.

Why is family engagement important in expanded learning programs?

Expanded learning programs and families share mutual benefits from family engagement practices. Through these programs, families have an additional opportunity to engage in their child’s education outside of the regular school day, which acts as a bridge between families and schools. This is particularly important in under-resourced populations, where programs can leverage their relationships with families to communicate about how their child is doing in school, and how they benefit from attending the program (such as receiving meals and academic support).

These programs also provide wraparound services to families, such as counseling, adult education classes, and connecting them to social services, giving parents the tools they need to support their child’s success. In turn, family engagement is likely to improve program attendance and engagement, and supports overall quality of the program (Reference: [Afterschool Alliance](#)).

Tip # 1: Establish trust and build authentic relationships

Parents and families need to feel valued, included, and connected within a program culture through authentic relationships. Consider ways to promote a sense of inclusion and belonging:

Strategy:	Action Item:
Establish a solid foundation - indicate program values and the importance of a successful parent partnership	*Share your program's family engagement values in the Student and Family Handbook (SMV, E-5)
Recognize the apprehension some families may have with school systems or establishments - acknowledge their experiences and approach interactions with sensitivity	*Ask families what supports they need to be successful (SMV, E-6, G-2, G-4) *Share positive news – send home “Keep it Positive” postcards to highlighting something positive their student achieved
Demonstrate consistency and transparency around programming, policies, and communication	*Create ongoing check-ins for family input, share staffing or program updates
Devote resources to coordinate with family members and facilitate community connections	

Promising Practice: ***Designate a Family Liaison***

Designate a Family Liaison to build authentic relationships with families. The presence of a consistent and positive face will help to establish trust of the program and school. The Family Liaison may be responsible for communicating with families to define needs, overcome barriers, share announcements and achievements, and promote engagement in program and school efforts. As trust is built, families will be more likely to engage in program offerings.



Tip # 3: Provide opportunities for empowerment and leadership

Recognizing and empowering families as leaders in the program is a critical component of family engagement. The methods below can support purposeful collaboration:

Strategy:	Action Item:
Include family members in the planning and decision-making process - sharing power and ownership in the development of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Organize a community service initiative or program-wide art project *Establish families as critical members of the Advisory Board (SMV, G-3), offering valuable insight regarding student needs
Provide opportunities for in-person conversation - limit mailings and sending documents home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Leverage student pick-up times, phone calls, home visits, and events
Invite family members to share their skills, interests, and talents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Incorporate family skills into program activities: reading to students, showcasing a cultural recipe, presenting about career pathways *Offer family volunteer opportunities
Connect families to each other - building connections within the community can enhance the parent/guardian network and generate ideas for program improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Utilize open houses, family events, and social media to promote interaction
Recognize and thank families for their input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Create certificates of appreciation, volunteer spotlights, or a year-end celebration event



Promising Practice: **Family participation in the Advisory Board**

Family members are critical to your program's Advisory Board (SMV, G-3). Families' knowledge about the

Featured Resource:

Youth.gov describes strategies for [Engaging Families as Partners in Decision-Making](#).

Tip # 4: Develop meaningful and equitable opportunities for engagement



Tip # 5: Provide relevant adult learning opportunities



Tools and Resources