

The Framework in Action series expands on the *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches*<sup>1</sup> and provides brief research reviews, practical strategies, and guidance for creating meaningful and tangible change in communities. Structural inequities, and disparities in both opportunities and outcomes, permeate early care and education (ECE) and K-12 systems. Each *Framework in Action* includes strategies that address equity and correspond with one of the eight buckets of alignment effort identified as essential to high-quality and comprehensive P-3 approaches.

## The ISSUE

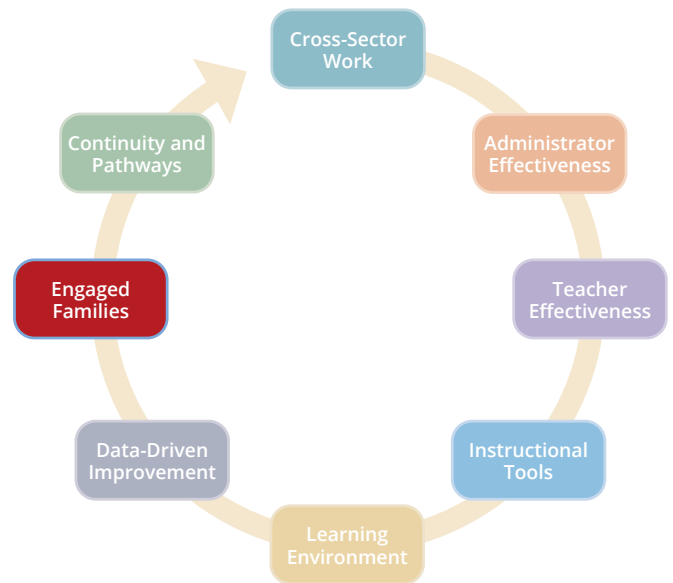


Pre-school through 3rd grade is the timeframe when children and families become oriented to and immersed in formal education. A welcoming and trusting family-school relationship that begins during children’s early learning experiences and extends through the early grades paves the way for families’ lifelong engagement in their children’s academic success.

It is well-documented that families have the greatest influence on children’s learning and development; therefore, **a robust P-3 approach engages all families by making this work the priority of everyone throughout the school or early care and education (ECE)\* program, embracing two-way communication, and ensuring families have an active and prominent role in making decisions that affect their child’s education.**

P-3 approaches prioritize all families, particularly those who have been marginalized from schools and programs, including families who experience racial discrimination, who speak a language other than English in the home, who struggle to make ends meet, who are experiencing homelessness or other forms of trauma, and who

*Continued on page 2*



\*Early care and education (ECE) refers to all programs that support the development of young children prior to kindergarten entry including Head Start, child care (family child care and center-based child care), preschool, and prekindergarten.

The Issue	The Goal	The Strategies	What Does the Research Say?	Where to Start in Your Community	Common Pitfalls that Impede Implementation	Indicators of Progress	Spotlight: Promising Efforts and Success Stories	References
PG. 1	PG. 2	PG. 2	PG. 3	PG. 3	PG. 4	PG. 5	PG. 5	PG. 6

*Continued from page 1*

have non-traditional work schedules. Historically, many schools' interactions with minoritized families aimed to socialize families into public school norms and expectations that diminished families' strengths.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

In contrast, P-3 approaches engage families in ways that intentionally affirm families' cultural and linguistic assets and ensure they are reflected in the school's or program's practices.

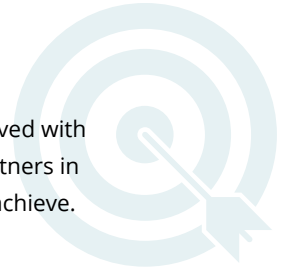
A P-3 approach to engaging families can leverage the strengths of common practices in ECE programs and those in K-12 school systems. ECE programs that serve children from birth to kindergarten entry tend to be more skilled at developing positive relationships with families both by design, as ECE teachers usually see families every day at pick up and drop off, and through program philosophy that often emphasizes partnership with families. Elementary schools tend to be more systematic in their family involvement approaches, having regular communication channels to share information about children's academic progress (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, report cards) and volunteer opportunities in which families can support school activities (e.g., chaperoning events, parent-teacher association-sponsored events).<sup>5,6</sup> In both ECE and in K-12, teachers, administrators, and staff who move beyond simply involving parents to genuinely engaging families establish relationships that help children learn and develop.

In P-3 approaches, schools develop deeper relationships with families to advance student learning. The COVID-19 pandemic demanded new forms of family-school partnerships.<sup>7</sup> As evidenced by mounting attention to Community Schools and two-generation strategies, many districts have rethought traditional, less interactive approaches and are proactively and positively engaging families.<sup>8,9</sup> Positive home-school partnerships are also pivotal in mitigating chronic absenteeism and promoting everyday school attendance.<sup>10</sup>

Innovative approaches to engaging families are important across all grade levels but central to P-3 reform, given the interdependence among children, families, and educators when children are young (pre-school through 3rd grade) and navigating increased engagement in formal learning settings.

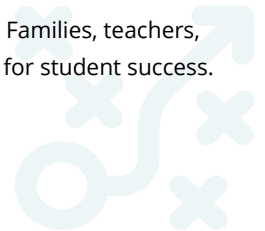
## The **GOAL**

Families are actively and systemically involved with P-3 teachers and administrators as full partners in helping their children develop, learn, and achieve.



## The **STRATEGIES**

- **CORE PRIORITY:** Teachers, administrators, and all staff in schools and programs understand the importance of, and employ strategies for, engaging families.
- **TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION:** Schools and programs establish regular two-way communication approaches to share data with, and to learn from, families.
- **SHARED LEADERSHIP/DECISION-MAKING:** Families, teachers, and administrators share decision-making for student success.



# What Does THE RESEARCH SAY?

This section provides an abbreviated literature review that substantiates both the importance of *Engaged Families* and the promise of the strategies described below.

*Engaging families cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach.*

- Because families are diverse, so, too, must be family engagement strategies. Effective approaches include engaging families in learning and community-building activities at school and at home.<sup>11</sup>
- Families' demographic differences and variability of resources may influence the type of home-school activities that can best support children's learning and development.<sup>12</sup>

*Engaging families has long-term effects.*

- Robust and comprehensive family engagement in preschool is associated with more positive parent involvement in 2nd grade.<sup>18, 19</sup>
- In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools with robust family engagement practices had better attendance, achievement, and better school climate ratings than schools that had weak family engagement practices.<sup>10</sup>

*Engaging families improves student outcomes.*

- Engaging families in dynamic, productive, two-way partnerships positively impacts student achievement and success in school.<sup>9, 13, 14, 15</sup> For example, research on school success in Chicago found that elementary schools with strong parental involvement were ten times more likely to improve math achievement and four times more likely to improve in reading than schools that lacked robust parent engagement practices.<sup>16</sup>
- Strong parent-teacher and student-teacher relationships that are sustained over time contribute to children's social skills and behavior across the preschool to 1st grade transition.<sup>17</sup>



## WHERE TO START in Your Community

The following list provides several ways to extend and deepen strategies for engaging families and to ensure that they are aligned and shared across the P-3 continuum.



- **Make engaging families an explicit priority.** Promoting examples of family engagement on websites, materials sent home, postings around the building, strategic plans, and more can help establish family engagement as a core priority for the school or program. Highlight circumstances in which families are engaged as classroom volunteers, peer mentors, advocates, and key sources of information regarding their children's strengths, needs, and culture.
- **Engage families to provide feedback about their experiences and perceptions.** Schools and programs cannot assume to know what all families value, want, or need. Families' own voices are the most important data source. Conducting surveys or focus groups, provided in accessible formats and at accessible times, that gauge families' satisfaction with, as well as hopes and dreams, for their child's learning can be valuable information to improve engagement strategies.
- **Assess current family engagement strategies.** Reviewing current strategies can help assess their effectiveness on several dimensions: are strategies multi-faceted, providing engagement opportunities that can be accessed by all families? In what ways do strategies offer meaningful opportunities for families to express and share their own priorities and expectations with administrators, teachers, and one another? Are strategies culturally affirming and relevant to historically marginalized families? By asking these questions, schools and programs can identify strengths and gaps where new strategies are needed.
- **Engage teachers, school principals, and other administrators to co-design a systemic approach to engaging families.** High-quality family engagement stems from a system-wide effort practiced by all members of a P-3 setting, not just one staff liaison, social worker, administrator, or teacher.<sup>11, 13, 14</sup>

# COMMON PITFALLS that Impede Implementation

P-3 approaches are simple in theory and complex in practice. The following are pitfalls to avoid when seeking to fully engage families:

- **Relying on outdated research and knowledge about family engagement:** Many principal preparation programs rely on outdated literature and standards or lack authentic skill development experiences to prepare school leaders for collaboration with family and community members.<sup>21</sup> The field of family engagement has grown and deepened over the past decade. Before designing strategies, educators will benefit from refreshing their own knowledge and ideas by reviewing current research and promising practices.
- **Narrow and negative involvement:** A “no news is good news approach” to connecting with families limits the potential for positive and mutually respectful relationships to be formed among schools and families. When schools and programs only communicate with families to address behavioral or academic challenges, relationships have a negative tone that limits meaningful partnerships in support of children’s well-being and learning. It is important for families to connect with their children’s educators about student learning in relaxed and positive settings.
- **Limiting family involvement to social activities.** Social events, like ice cream parties or pizza nights, can be opportunities for families to spend time in school settings and build a positive sense of community. These events, however, have limitations: they are often disconnected from teaching and learning, and they may not be accessible to all families if they are held at times and locations that do not work for all families’ schedules.
- **Expecting one person to do the job.** Engaging families should not be designated as one person’s job responsibility. Instead, it should be embedded in all job descriptions – including the principal’s or site director’s – and be a stated responsibility for all staff in a school or program.
- **Limited professional learning on how to best engage families.** Professional learning on how to best engage families should be required for all staff who engage with students. While teachers are often prioritized for professional learning opportunities, it is important that all adults who regularly interact with families receive professional development, including front office staff, teacher aides, administrators, lunchroom staff, and bus drivers.
- **Token family participation.** Often a particular parent (or small group of parents) is always ready and willing to engage, whether it be serving on a committee or volunteering in the classroom. By only engaging a small number of families, schools and programs may neglect others, such as those who speak a different language, have lower literacy levels, or work non-traditional hours. Token participation is a missed opportunity to engage families who may contribute to the community and benefit from strong home-school connections.



# INDICATORS of PROGRESS

The following are sample indicators that signal schools are actively engaging families through multiple, intentional approaches.

- **Family engagement itself becomes a data marker.** Schools and programs consistently use data on family engagement to improve their efforts. Data are regularly collected from families, improvements are made based on the data, and there is ongoing communication with families about improvement efforts. Families report that they experience family engagement as a priority and have opportunities for two-way communication and shared decision making.
- **Family engagement policies and expectations are regularly updated and no more than three years old.** As families' needs change, schools and programs adapt accordingly, and engage in ongoing processes to improve, add, or eliminate policies and expectations. Families, teachers, and administrators partner in the development and implementation of changes.
- **Staff have clear plans for how they engage families.** Professional learning provided to educators and administrators reflects up-to-date knowledge about effective family engagement strategies. Staff have clear protocols for how to engage families in meaningful ways that fit their context and role within the school or program.
- **Family leadership programs nurture leadership and advocacy.** Schools and programs support effective, meaningful family leadership development programs, academies, or courses where families can acquire tools for engaging more deeply in their own children's learning. Families may take a role in leading professional learning, working in collaboration with educators and staff.
- **Engagement is sustained over time.** ECE programs and elementary schools work together to align, extend, and deepen engagement strategies. Existing family leaders can mentor incoming families, and parents in both ECE and K-3 are aware of current opportunities for engagement and feel confident and welcome to initiate new opportunities.

## Spotlight: PROMISING EFFORTS and SUCCESS STORIES

The following examples reveal ways in which practitioners are taking up P-3 approaches in their communities.

### Chicago Child-Parent P-3 Centers<sup>22</sup>

Parental Involvement and Engagement is one of the six core pillars of the Child-Parent Center Preschool to 3rd Grade (CPC P-3) Program, a school reform model that integrates early education with the elementary school to form a supportive continuum of learning and development. The CPC P-3's approach emphasizes family engagement that is reciprocal, collaborative, and comprehensive. The CPC P-3 program mobilizes community resources and engages families through a variety of activities that include, for example, support for parent and family members' educational attainment and career advancement.

CPC P-3's parent involvement approach includes several resources: (1) parent involvement calendar; (2) school-home agreement; (3) family needs assessment; (4) parent involvement log; (5) parent home involvement checklist; and (6) parent involvement plan. These

concrete tools ensure CPC P-3 programs are equipped to engage families proactively and comprehensively.

CPC P-3 is well known for its success in boosting student achievement. Research on CPC P-3 has found that parents of CPC students also have high rates of participation in school events and workshops.



*Continued on page 6*

Continued from page 5

## Early Childhood Family Education in Minnesota<sup>23</sup>

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a parenting education program in Minnesota offered through school districts in partnership with communities or early learning programs. ECFE is available to all families in Minnesota with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance. School districts that have a PreK-3rd grade focus may also offer programming to parents with children up to 3rd grade. Several services are provided through ECFE including outreach and community events, home visits, child care provider visits, parent-only classes, and parent-child together classes. ECFE programming goals include: (1) enhancing parent-child relationships to support child development; (2) helping families experience a smooth transition from ECE programs into the school system; (3) encouraging parents to be engaged in their children's

learning and education from birth through the school-age years; and (4) helping families gain knowledge and utilize formal and informal social networks in their communities.



## REFERENCES



1. Kauerz, K., & Coffman, J. (2019). *Framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating P-3 approaches* (2nd ed.). National P-3 Center, University of Colorado Denver.
2. Day, C.G. (2016). *Authentically engaged families: A collaborative care framework for student success*. Corwin Press.
3. Ishimaru, A.M. (2014). Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district-community collaboration. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(2), 188-216.
4. Ishimaru, A. M., Torres, K. E., Salvador, J. E., Lott II, J., Williams, D. M. C., & Tran, C. (2016). Reinforcing deficit, journeying toward equity: Cultural brokering in family engagement initiatives. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 850-882.
5. Auerbach, S. (2012). *School leadership for authentic family and community partnership*. Routledge.
6. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Parenting matters: Supporting parents of children ages 0-8*. The National Academies Press.
7. Clifford, M.A, & Coggshall, J.G., (2021). *Evolution of the principalship: Leaders explain how the profession is changing through a most difficult year*. WestEd and AIR.
8. National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *School Pulse Panel: Responses to the pandemic and efforts toward recovery*. Author.
9. Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a new normal: Toward a more liberatory approach to family engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York.
10. Learning Heroes & TNTP (2023). *Investigating the relationship between pre-pandemic family engagement and student and school outcomes*. Author.
11. Puccioni, J., Froiland, J. M., & Moeyaert, M. (2020). Preschool teachers' transition practices and parents' perceptions as predictors of involvement and children's school readiness. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104742.
12. Slicker, G., Barbieri, C. A., Collier, Z. K., & Hustedt, J. T. (2021). Parental involvement during the kindergarten transition and children's early reading and mathematics skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 55, 363-376.

Continued from page 6

13. Henderson, A., Mapp, K., Johnson, V., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale*. The New Press.
14. Weiss, H., Lopez, M. E., & Rosenberg, H. (2010). *Beyond random acts: Family, school, and community engagement as an integral part of education reform*. Harvard Family Research Project.
15. The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2017). *Leading for equity: Opportunities for state education chiefs*. Authors.
16. Bryk, A. S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(7), 23–30.
17. Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Boise, C., Witte, A., Koziol, N., Prokasky, A., Schumacher, R., & Kerby, H. (2021). Relationships as malleable factors for children's social-behavioral skills from preschool to grade 1: A longitudinal analysis. *Early Education and Development*, 1-21.
18. Varshney, N., Lee, S., Temple, J.A., Reynolds, A.J., (2020). Does early childhood education enhance parental school involvement in second grade?: Evidence from Midwest Child-Parent Center Program, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 117.
19. Little, M., & Gragson, A. (2024). Nationally representative evidence on the association between preschool and school-based parental involvement in elementary school. *Educational Policy*, 38(4), 771-793.
20. Geiser, K. E., Rollins, S. K., Gerstein, A., & Blank, M. J. (2013). *Early childhood community school linkages: Advancing a theory of change*. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Institute for Educational Leadership, and Coalition for Community Schools.
21. Mayger, L. K. (2024). How are principal preparation programs preparing leaders for family and community engagement? *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 19(2), 196-220.
22. CPC P-3 Child Parent Centers (n.d.). Parent involvement. Retrieved from <https://cpcp3.org/parent-involvement/>
23. Minnesota Department of Education (n.d.). Early childhood family education. Retrieved from <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/ECFE/>



**For additional resources related to Engaged Families, and other buckets in the Framework, please visit [www.nationalp-3center.org](http://www.nationalp-3center.org).**

SUGGESTED CITATION:

National P-3 Center (2024). *Framework in action: Engaged families*. School of Education and Human Development, University of Colorado Denver.

The Framework in Action series is generously supported by funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation.

NATIONAL **P 3** CENTER

The National P-3 Center focuses on the learning opportunities that young children experience from birth through 3rd grade. Our work spans the traditional boundaries of early care and education (ECE) and K-12 education and is grounded in the intersection of research, practice, and policy.