



Family Engagement Guiding Principles

The **Wisconsin Family Engagement Guiding Principles** were developed by professionals around the state and are based on evidence-based practices supported by research to provide a framework, common language and guidance for families, professionals, and policy makers to reflect our commitment to young children and families.

Definition of Family Engagement (Wisconsin Family & Community Partnership Survey)

Family engagement refers to the support for family members from agency and community stakeholders to ensure that families are given the opportunity to engage at four critical levels.

Level 1: *Building strong relationships with children. Families are supported in their role as their child's first and best teacher.*

Level 2: *Service planning for their children. Families participate in decisions about the services that their child receives.*

Level 3: *Agency-level decision making. Families participate in program decisions that affect their child.*

Level 4: *Community advocacy and peer-led support. Families serve as advocates for early childhood programs within their community. Families are given opportunities to support and socialize with other families with young children in their communities.*

Examples of Family Support Organization (Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards)

This is a representation and includes, but is not limited to: family support organizations, Family Resources Centers, Child Care Resource and Referral, libraries, faith-based organizations, etc.

Definition of Family (California Network of Family Strengthening)

Our focus is on families who are responsible for raising children. These families consist of at least one adult and one child who are related biologically, emotionally, or legally. Families may consist of one parent, two parents, grandparents, foster parents, legal guardians, or they may arise from a need for mutual support. If there is more than one adult caregiver, programs should encourage participation from all adult caregivers.

Core Competencies

The Wisconsin Core Competencies create a common language for the Birth to First Grade workforce. They also link to other systems, and provide general guidance for best practices when working with young children and families in a variety of programs, services and settings. For more information on Wisconsin's Core Competencies please visit

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/>.

Guiding Principles for Family Engagement:

- 1) Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision-making related to their children's education. Families should be empowered to invite and act as advocates for their children and early childhood education program by actively taking part in decision-making opportunities.
- 2) There is consistent, two-way communication that is facilitated through multiple forms and is responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of the family. Communication can be program- or family-initiated and should be timely and continuous, inviting conversations about both the child's educational experience as well as the larger program.
- 3) Programs should promote home language in early care and education environments. By supporting home language of each child while scaffolding their English Learning, educators reinforce social connection, reduce the risk of bullying, increase child-teacher connection, and respect and strengthen a child's bond with their family (Chang 2007, Wong and Fillmore 1991).
- 4) The program supports that families' basic needs of health and safety are met by encouraging staff to provide intervention strategies and access to materials and resources that support the development in all domains: health and physical, social and emotional, language and communication, approaches to learning, and cognition and general knowledge.
- 5) Families and early childhood education programs collaborate and exchange knowledge. Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through volunteering and actively engaging in events and activities in the community. Teachers seek out information about their students' lives, families, and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices.
- 6) The program helps parents develop appropriate expectations of their children's social-emotional development and abilities, and increases the parent's ability to be more aware of their children's needs. This will strengthen their understanding of and ability to respond to their children's social-emotional needs. This helps promote the cycle of healthy parent-child interactions.
- 7) Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs. Programs and families collaborate in establishing goals for children across settings.
- 8) Early childhood education programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community that extend the teachings of the program so as to enhance each child's early learning, and development in all

domains: health and physical, social and emotional, language and communication, approaches to learning, and cognition and general knowledge.

- 9) Early childhood education programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers are dedicated, trained and receive the supports they need to fully engage families.
- 10) Early Childhood education programs will have working partnerships with family support organizations to help meet families' goals or needs.
- 11) Program has a plan in place to help families and children that are transitioning, whether it be entering or exiting into a new setting.
- 12) Programs respect, embrace, and actively seek to respond to the unique needs and strengths of culturally diverse children, families, and communities.
- 13) Programs understand the prevalence and impact of trauma so they can provide services that support participant needs and strengths without judgment or prejudice.

Reference List

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