

PRINCIPLE 5: Sharing decision-making.

Families and staff are partners in decisions that affect children and families. Together, they inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs that benefit children and result in improved child health and learning outcomes.

Rationale

Partnerships must be designed to share decision-making appropriately, reflecting all stakeholder groups, so that all partners are accountable. Partnerships must be open to all who are willing to contribute their talents. Leadership must include representatives from all groups, with clear roles and functions, and all participants must share in the workload. Studies show that distributed leadership of this kind fosters greater involvement of all stakeholders, thereby lessening the burden on educators.

Indicators

- 5.1 Families and staff discuss the program's/school's philosophy regarding child development and education, as well as long-term goals and objectives, during orientation. Every effort is made to use interpreters and/or translators as needed.
- 5.2 Program/school makes leadership development opportunities available during the year and encourages families to become involved.
- 5.3 Families and staff work together to identify and implement curriculum and family engagement strategies that are responsive to the values, cultures, and home languages of enrolled children and families.
- 5.4 Staff encourages families to participate in the evaluation of activities and events sponsored by the program/school. Program/school uses this feedback for continuous improvement.

“When we first asked the group who wanted to be the representative to the Parent Policy Council, no one wanted to do it. Then when we explained all that they would be able to contribute (make decisions about budget, who to hire, program goals, etc.), there were parents who wanted to join in.”

~Head Start staff

PRINCIPLE 6: Partnering with community.

Families and staff partner with community members and organizations to increase understanding of, and access to, resources, services, and programs.

Rationale

As evidence of the power of partnership mounts, interests among Hawaii's programs, schools, and community linkages has expanded substantially. Interest in working together is bolstered by concern about widespread fragmentation of school, program, and community interventions, as well as issues of access. By integrating available resources, a significant impact can be made on “risk” factors. In particular, appropriate and effective partnering between families and early childhood programs/schools is seen as a key facet of understanding and addressing barriers to development, learning, and family self-sufficiency.

While informal program/school/family/community linkages are relatively simple, establishing long-term connections remains complicated. It requires vision, cohesive policy, and basic systemic reform. It involves more than school-linked, integrated services and activities. It requires the weaving of school and community resources together in ways that can only be achieved through connections that are formalized and institutionalized, with the sharing of major responsibilities. In the end, schools and programs are more effective and nurturing when they are an integral and positive part of the community. This integration means enhanced child outcomes, fewer discipline problems, higher staff morale, and improved use of resources. Enhanced parenting and social networking, and the strengthening of the fabric of family and community life also result from working in partnership.

Indicators

- 6.1 Staff provide information, both verbally and through written materials, regarding community programs and services that may benefit their families. Every effort is made to use interpreters and/or translators as needed.
- 6.2 Program/school and community programs/agencies collaborate through cross-referrals of families for increased access to services and programs.
- 6.3 Program/school provides (or assists in locating) a physical space for families to meet with community programs and agencies to discuss how to improve access to more family-responsive services and programs.



Family Partnership Guidelines

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS



INTRODUCTION

Education policy makers and other stakeholders are raising expectations that young children be school ready, and that all students be prepared for careers, college and lifelong learning. Meeting such expectations is a collective effort. At a local level, it involves a shared responsibility in which early childhood programs, schools, and community organizations are committed to engaging families in meaningful ways, and where families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development. Research shows that families play a significant role in supporting their children's early learning, not only in the home, but also by guiding their children successfully through a complex school system, as well as advocating on behalf of their children for effective and high quality early learning experiences. A recent study of the capacity and effectiveness of higher education institutions in Hawaii in meeting the workforce professional development of early childhood practitioners reaffirms that more efforts should be directed to strengthen practitioners' confidence and capacity to work effectively with families. These “Family Partnership Guidelines” are a beginning attempt to do this. The 6 Key Principles described below are aligned with new Family/School Partnership Standards being proposed for implementation by the Hawaii Department of Education and will hopefully result in shared expectations for families and staff across the P-3 continuum.



PRINCIPLE 1: Welcoming all families.

Families are active participants in the life of the program and/or school. They are welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to staff, and to what children are learning and doing throughout the day.

Rationale

When families feel welcomed and supported, they will be more engaged in the lives of their children and will have a vested interest in their children's developmental success in school, family, career and community. Additionally, when families are more engaged in their children's learning, the work of program staff and educators is supported and reinforced at home. Current research demonstrates conclusively that when early childhood programs and schools establish positive partnerships with families for school readiness and developmental progress, young children exhibit positive impacts related to academic and non-academic success in school including, but not limited to, attendance, behavior, and skills and knowledge in all developmental domains/areas.

Indicators

- 1.1 Staff greet families daily. Families' strengths are identified, recognized, and valued through program/school policies and practices.
- 1.2 Program/school encourages families to participate in activities and events with children, staff, and other families.
- 1.3 Program/school recognizes the different needs and circumstances that families have and incorporates this understanding in their communication to engage them.
- 1.4 Program/school implements strategies, using input from families, for appropriate outreach and engagement efforts.



PRINCIPLE 2: Communicating effectively.

Families and staff engage in effective reciprocal and ongoing communication to support the success of the children in their care.

Rationale

Robust communication between families and staff is essential for successful partnerships. Conversations characterized by respect, trust, and a genuine desire to work together reduce misunderstandings and conflict and contribute to alignment and the reinforcement of learning in the home and program/school. Good communication among families, educators, and program staff provides opportunities for feedback and continuous improvement. This, in turn, results in enhanced child development, an increase in successful learning experiences, reduced absenteeism and fewer behavioral management issues.



Indicators

- 2.1 Families and staff understand program/school communication policies. Information is shared both in writing and verbally in a style that reflects the diversity, culture, and preferred language of families. Every effort is made to accommodate special communication needs, including the use of interpreters and/or translators as needed.
- 2.2 Program/school has written policies that are provided to families during orientation and revisited several times during the year to support families' understanding of them. Every effort is made to use interpreters and/or translators as needed.
- 2.3 Program/school engages with families in active, 2-way communication on an ongoing basis, using a variety of methods to accommodate individual families' preferred means of communication.

“A school newsletter (e-bulletin) was helpful as a resource and made me feel connected. Parents could email input and/or resources they wanted to share. When my daughter went to Kindergarten, we didn't have these newsletters and I felt lost, not as connected. As a Kindergarten teacher I do these now.”

~Kindergarten Teacher

PRINCIPLE 3: Supporting success.

Families and staff continuously partner to support learning and healthy development, both in the home and in the program and/or school. Families and staff create or find opportunities on an ongoing basis to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Rationale

Child success is optimized by partnerships among families, educators, and staff, as learning is promoted and reinforced consistently by everyone in all environments: home, program, school, and community. High quality and high performing programs and schools have strong partnerships with children, families, and communities.

Indicators

- 3.1 Program/school creates opportunities for staff to participate in professional development activities (some of which are led by families themselves) to help them increase their knowledge and skill in working effectively with all families.



- 3.2 Program/school provides learning opportunities for families to enhance their parenting skills and knowledge of child development and encourages families to share their experiences with their peers. Staff encourages families to participate in the ongoing assessment of their children's growth, development, and learning by sharing their observations.

- 3.3 Staff invite families to share activities with children, families, and/or staff based on their special interests, talents, and/or cultural backgrounds.

- 3.4 Staff update families on a weekly basis as to the kinds of learning experiences children are having, and the kinds of things families can do to support learning at home to reinforce concepts and skills.

- 3.5 Families and staff acknowledge the families' role as the child's first and primary teacher and work collaboratively to develop desired learning outcomes for children.

“We had a Friday folder – the principal made videotapes, u-tube messages of the week's activities, including photographs.”

~DOE Staff

PRINCIPLE 4: Speaking up for every child.

Staff support families in being advocates for their own and other's children to ensure that all children are treated fairly and have access to lifelong learning opportunities that support their success.

Rationale

Families are the best advocates for children because they know their history, culture, and unique strengths and needs. While individual families' support of their own children is essential, when families advocate collectively, they help improve the system for all children. Program leadership plays a vital role in establishing an environment conducive to this collective advocacy.

Indicators

- 4.1 Program/school provides opportunities, encouragement, and support for families to voice their concerns about issues relevant to their child or family and to take specific action to address those concerns.

- 4.2 Families and staff work together to share their experiences in early care and education settings with policy-makers to promote the importance of prioritizing needed funding and resources.

- 4.3 Families and staff work together to support successful child/family transitions into and out of programs/schools by advocating for children's needs. Staff encourage families to assist other families through transitions.

- 4.4 Program/school surveys families, at a minimum once a year, to determine their satisfaction level regarding how well family voices are being heard. Program/school uses survey feedback to make necessary improvements to policies and practices.



“Families of 7-10 kids went to a DOE school and asked for a transition meeting. DOE teachers came on a Saturday and did a “play date” lunch. Most of the preschool families came. It really helped establish a relationship early. Five years later, they all had an evening dinner together. It can happen.”

~Preschool Administrator