KANSAS
Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood
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Seward County Coalition

Finney County LICC  
Shawnee County Early Childhood Coalition

Labette County Family Coalition  
Southwest KS Interagency Coordinating Council (Ford County)

Montgomery County LICC  
Woodson County Coalition

Neosho County Agency Resource Team  
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This initiative is supported by a grant from the:

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Funding provided by the:

Kansas State Department of Education
Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund

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Introduction

Family engagement is a critical component of high-quality early care and education. Engaging families in their children’s growth and learning can support the healthy social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of young children. These affirmative relationships also support positive life long outcomes for children.

Given the importance of family engagement in promoting positive outcomes for children the Kansas State Agency Early Childhood Leadership Team developed a grant proposal and submitted it to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Members of this group represented various early childhood agencies, including: Kansas Head Start Association, Kansas Parents as Teachers, the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Kansas Children’s Service League, Child Care Aware® of Kansas, public school districts, local Infant and Toddler Programs (tiny-k) and the University of Kansas. Many of these stakeholders participated in creating the Kansas School Readiness Framework and the Kansas Early Learning Standards.

The stakeholders reviewed information from the Harvard Family Research Project, the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Head Start Association among others. The stakeholders reviewed other state standards including those in Massachusetts, Maryland and Hawaii. The Kansas State Board of Education endorsed the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) National Standards for Family School Partnerships as the state K-12 Kansas family engagement standards. After much examination, discussion and review, the Kansas Early Childhood Family Engagement Standards Development Team developed the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood.

The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood is a resource that provides information and guidance for early childhood providers and educators, including individuals working with children from birth through age five on the engagement of families. It can be used by the early childhood workforce to examine current family engagement practices and plan future strategies to engage families in their children’s development and learning.

“Ready families, in a variety of forms, serve as the primary foundation for their children. Ready families provide safe, stable and nurturing environments that promote healthy development and learning.”

— Kansas School Readiness Framework, 2012
Purpose

The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood are designed to promote the implementation of family engagement policies and practices both at the state level and local levels. These standards are built on the belief that developing meaningful relationships with families is the cornerstone to engaging all families. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC, (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark and Moodie, 2009, p. 3) highlights six key factors in their comprehensive definition of family engagement:

1. Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision-making related to their children’s education. Families act as advocates for their children by actively participating in decision-making opportunities.

2. Consistent, two-way communication is facilitated through multiple forms and is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family. Communication is both program and family initiated, timely and continuous, and is about both the child’s educational experience as well as the larger program.

3. Families and early childhood programs collaborate and exchange knowledge. Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through volunteering and actively engaging in events and activities. Teachers seek out information about their students’ lives, families and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices.

4. Early childhood programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community to enhance each child’s early learning.

5. Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs. Programs and families collaborate in establishing goals for children both at home and at their early childhood program.

6. Early childhood programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers and educators are dedicated, trained and receive the supports they need to fully engage families.

These factors support the tenant that true family engagement is more than holding meetings or special events and that the Standards should be used to assess current family engagement strategies. More specifically, the purpose of this resource is to:

- Recognize the importance of family engagement as an essential component of early child care and education;
- Provide common language for family engagement across the early childhood service systems and among individual early child care and education professionals; and
- Offer family engagement practices and identify resources to support the implementation of those practices.

The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood

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<th>Are designed to:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Recognize the importance of the families in the early learning years.</td>
<td>1. Serve as a curriculum creating additional responsibilities for families.</td>
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<td>2. Serve as a guide for appropriate family engagement and partnership practices.</td>
<td>2. Exclude families from a service program, school or activity.</td>
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<td>3. Serve as a guide for creating quality interactions and partnerships with families.</td>
<td>3. Place all responsibility on an individual family, early childhood educator or service programs.</td>
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Guiding Principles for Unifying Concepts Across All Kansas Early Learning State Documents

1. From birth, children are ready to learn. Parents, families and caregivers are children’s first teachers.

2. Learning is a lifelong activity and every environment is a learning environment.

3. Children’s success in school and in life is everyone’s responsibility. Communities, educational environments, families and children are ready to support success.

4. School readiness involves the whole child in the context of the family and the community. This includes the child’s health and development in the following areas: physical, social, emotional, cognitive and general knowledge, communication and literacy.

5. Integrated services are available to children, appropriate to the age, abilities, language and culture of each child.

6. Schools are ready to support the success of each child, recognizing their wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, learning experiences and differences in abilities.

7. A strong, direct connection exists in the early years between the quality of children’s health and experiences and their later success in school and in life. School readiness in Kansas depends on involvement from public policy, funding and system supports.

— Kansas School Readiness Data Task Force Final Report (Goofin, 2012, p. 12)
The School Readiness Framework and Family Engagement

The four components of school readiness; the community, educational environment, family and the individual child all function as interdependent systems that have multi-directional influences.

The relationship among these four components in achieving school readiness is shown below in the Kansas School Readiness Framework graphic.

The family component in the School Readiness Framework is the cornerstone of the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood. The first part of the Family definition in this framework links to our first standard, Family as Foundation.
Making the Connection

The connection between the Kansas School Readiness Framework, the Kansas Early Learning Standards, the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood, PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and Kansas College and Career Ready Standards is shown below. These standards provide the foundation for continued family engagement in the K-12 educational system.
Structure of the Resource

The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood are structured to align with the Kansas Early Learning Standards and the Kansas School Readiness Framework. The five standards provide a framework for achieving a high level of engagement for families, early childhood educators, community partners and educational systems. Each standard includes a definition, a list of responsible stakeholders, strategies for implementation and the results of engaging families. The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood are also linked with indicators from the Kansas Early Learning Standards.

Following the Standards is a set of grids to aid community stakeholders in assessing their current strengths and opportunities for growth within each of the five standards. In this work, “community” is defined locally and can include a geographic area such as a county, city or neighborhood, or a subset within a community such as an early childhood interagency council or other community groups. By individually completing a self-assessment of strengths and opportunities for growth, each stakeholder can review the strengths and opportunities for growth, allowing the group to collectively identify areas in common across all the programs. For example, a community child care program might identify a strength as communication with families and an opportunity for growth in helping families advocate for themselves. The next step would include building a plan to address common opportunities for growth. Stakeholders can also use this collective data to lift up and celebrate areas of strength. Collectively agreeing on a common plan can help community stakeholders move toward strengthening systemic family engagement and partnership.

Embedding policies and practices in all aspects of program and community work helps ensure families are fully involved in strengthening services, and that programs are meaningfully and intentionally supporting families and children.
The Standards

The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood include:

Families as...
- Foundation
- Communicators
- Advocates
- Partners
- Community Members
Families as FOUNDATION

All families are recognized and promoted as their child’s first and most influential teacher.

- Families provide stability in daily experiences for their children.
- Families provide nurturing environments for their children.
- Families promote learning for their children.
- Children have good physical health as appropriate for their development.
- Children demonstrate developmentally appropriate growth and learning skills.
Who is Responsible?

Families

Early Childhood Professionals

Community Partners

Educational systems

What Can/Should We Do?

Children live with consistent primary caregivers.
Families provide basic necessities in a consistent home.
Children’s health care needs are met.
Families read, talk and play with their children daily.
Families practice effective, positive parenting behaviors.
Families make child-rearing decisions based on knowledge of child development.
Families access learning opportunities with their children such as going to the library, park, museum, etc.
Children’s nutritional needs are met.
Children demonstrate age appropriate skills including:

- communication
- cognition
- social emotional
- fine motor
- gross motor
- self-care

How Will This Help My Child?

Strengthened families and communities
Optimal child development
Reduced child abuse and neglect
Promotes school readiness
Families as COMMUNICATORS

Early childhood providers and families have effective and ongoing communication.

- Program and family consistently initiate communication and share knowledge that is timely and continuously facilitated through multiple methods.

- Practices, supports and resources are responsive to the cultural, ethnic, racial, language and socioeconomic characteristics and preference of families and their communities.
STAKEHOLDERS

Who is Responsible?

Families
Early Childhood Professionals
Community Partners
Educational systems

STRATEGIES

What Can/Should We Do?

Early childhood professionals offer formal and informal opportunities for families and educators to build an interactive relationship.

Early childhood professionals provide families with written policies and procedures.

Early childhood professionals engage in ongoing collaboration with families to plan and monitor children’s learning goals and progress towards meeting goals.

Early childhood professionals seek to understand families and their children in the context of their language and culture.

Early childhood professionals integrate families’ traditions and culture into instructional practices, events and activities.

Community decision-making groups respond to the cultural and linguistic make-up of their community.

Families know their child’s strengths and interests and shares them.

RESULTS

How Will This Help My Child?

Strengthened families and communities
Optimal child development
Reduced child abuse and neglect
Promotes school readiness
Families as ADVOCATES

Families actively engage as an advocate and decision-maker for their child.

- Families have opportunities that promote informed options and decision-making.

- Programs and communities engage families by providing opportunities to be involved in program leadership and decision-making.

- Programs and communities empower families to be advocates.

- Families are aware of resources for selecting and accessing needed services.
Who is Responsible?

- Families
- Early Childhood Professionals
- Community Partners
- Educational systems

What Can/Should We Do?

Families form connections with peers and mentors.
Families participate and are engaged in decision-making opportunities.
Families have opportunities to work with their child’s community partners and educators.
Families gather and organize important documents (health, education, etc.)

Early Childhood Professionals, Community Partners and Educational systems ensure families are engaged in the decision-making process.

How Will This Help My Child?

- Strengthened families and communities
- Optimal child development
- Reduced child abuse and neglect
- Promotes school readiness
Families as **PARTNERS**

Successful partnerships exist between families and professionals based upon mutual trust and respect.

- Educational environments *actively engage families* in their children’s education.

- Early childhood professionals use *child and family strengths* as a basis for engaging families.

- *Families promote learning* for their children.
Who is Responsible?

- Families
- Early Childhood Professionals
- Community Partners
- Educational systems

What Can/Should We Do?

- Early childhood professionals provide resources and supports flexible, individualized and tailored to the child and family's preferences and styles.
- Early childhood professionals partner with families to build on existing abilities and strengthen family's competence.
- Early childhood professionals and families consistently communicate and share knowledge.
- Early childhood professionals and families use mutually agreed upon communication methods.
- Early childhood professionals work together to develop goals that are important to the child and family and promote learning.
- Early childhood professionals and families partner in transition planning.

How Will This Help My Child?

- Strengthened families and communities
- Optimal child development
- Reduced child abuse and neglect
- Promotes school readiness
Families as **COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Families are *active participants in their communities and connect to resources and services.*

- Comprehensive services are *available, affordable* and *accessible*.
- Communities *provide broad supports for families*.
- Families live in *safe and stable environments*. 
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Who is Responsible?

- Families
- Early Childhood Professionals
- Community Partners
- Educational systems

What Can/Should We Do?

Communities utilize a needs assessment to **identify supports and resources to better support families** (What do you have? What is needed?). Stakeholders are responsible for **cross communication in order to ensure a successful referral system**.

**Collaboration exists among community organizations.**

Stakeholders **build upon existing services**.

**Communities provide tools and supports** to help families navigate available services.

**Communities provide networks of support.**

Resources and supports are provided in ways that are flexible.

Families are **aware of resources** through a variety of sources, e.g. social media.

How Will This Help My Child?

- Strengthened families and communities
- Optimal child development
- Reduced child abuse and neglect
- Promotes school readiness
Resources:


Harvard Family Research Project, Early Childhood Education
http://www.hfrp.org/early-childhood-education

Kansas State Department of Education, Early Childhood

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care

Hawaii Department of Education, Early Childhood
http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/SpecializedPrograms/EarlyChildhood/Pages/home.aspx

Maryland Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Development
http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/

National Association for the Education of Young Children
http://www.naeyc.org/

PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
http://www.pta.org/nationalstandards

The Office of Head Start National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs
Use of Grids

The following is a set of grids to aid community stakeholders in assessing their current strengths and opportunities for growth within each of the five standards. In this work, “community” is defined locally and can include a geographic area such as a county, city or neighborhood, or a subset within a community such as an early childhood interagency council or other community groups. By individually completing a self-assessment of strengths and opportunities for growth, each stakeholder can review the strengths and opportunities for growth, allowing the group to collectively identify areas in common across all the programs. For example, a community child care program might identify a strength as communication with families and an opportunity for growth in helping families advocate for themselves. The next step would include building a plan to address common opportunities for growth. Stakeholders can also use this collective data to lift up and celebrate areas of strength. Collectively agreeing on a common plan can help community stakeholders move toward strengthening systemic family engagement and partnership.
Families as **FOUNDATION**

All families are recognized and promoted as their child’s first and most influential teacher.

- Families provide stability in daily experiences for their children.
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- Families promote learning for their children.
- Children have **good physical health as appropriate for their development.**
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Families as **COMMUNICATORS**
Early childhood providers and families have **effective and ongoing communication**.

- Program and family **consistently initiate communication** and **share knowledge** that is timely and continuously facilitated through multiple methods.
- Practices, supports and resources are **responsive to the cultural, ethnic, racial, language and socioeconomic characteristics and preference of families** and their communities.

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Families actively engage as an **advocate** and **decision-maker** for their child.

- Families have opportunities that **promote informed options** and **decision-making**.
- Programs and communities engage families by **providing opportunities to be involved in program leadership and decision-making**.
- Programs and communities empower families to be **advocates**.
- Families are aware of resources for selecting and accessing needed services.

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Families as **PARTNERS**

Successful partnerships exist between families and professionals based upon mutual trust and respect.

- Educational environments **actively engage families** in their children’s education.
- Early childhood professionals use **child and family strengths** as a **basis for engaging families**.
- Families **promote learning** for their children.

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Families as **COMMUNITY MEMBERS**
Families actively engage as an **advocate** and **decision-maker** for their child.

- Comprehensive services are **available, affordable and accessible**.
- Communities **provide broad supports for families**.
- Families live in safe and stable environments.

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