

### **How is family communication and involvement defined in school-age care?**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children, defines family involvement as a program's effort to establish and maintain "collaborative relationships with each child's family and to foster children's development in all settings".

BrightStars defines family communication and involvement as ways that "the program communicates regularly and effectively with families, encourages active two-way communication, offers regular opportunities for family involvement, and works to build partnerships with families".

Other terms used to describe family communication and involvement include: parent/family engagement, family relationships, and home-school connections.

### **What does family involvement in school-age settings look like?**

Programs can choose to offer opportunities for family communication and involvement in a variety of ways. Many times, the methods selected for including families depend on individual characteristics of a school-age program, such as size and type of program, characteristics of families in the program, and the program's philosophy. Programs can include families by creating systems and policies that promote the distribution of relevant information or regular communication, ease transitions, welcome families into the environment, or create relationships. Examples of family involvement include: social events that include families, distributing tips for learning at home, daily communication procedures, family conferences or home visits.

The RI Department of Youth, Children and Families (DCYF) expects that, at a minimum, school-age programs: allow parents/guardians to visit the program at any time ("open door policy"), offer a pre-admission conference and visit, provide on-going communication opportunities between family and care provider, and provide a directory of community resources.

### **What are important features of meaningful, positive and reciprocal family involvement in school-age settings?**

High-quality family communication and involvement:

- Is sensitive to family composition and unique family goals and values, including those related to child rearing
- Incorporates a family's language, culture and traditions
- Ensures that information shared with families is based in observation and research
- Ensures that families feel welcome at all times
- Includes family input into program decisions, child assessment, curriculum and policy
- Includes regular communication with caregivers and other program staff
- Ensures that information about families is protected and kept confidential

### **How does BrightStars assess family communication and involvement?**

BrightStars assesses a program's family communication and involvement through document review. BrightStars begins to assess family communication and involvement at Level 2. To meet this criterion at Level 2 and Level 3, programs must demonstrate that they offer one of the following: monthly newsletters, family meetings, social

## (How does BrightStars assess continued...)

events, or workshops four times per year, ideas and suggestions to support learning at home four times per year, an annual family survey, parent/staff conferences twice per year or an advisory board that includes families and meets four times per year.

To meet this criterion at Level 4, programs must demonstrate that they offer two opportunities for family communication and involvement from the above list. At Level 5, programs must offer three items from the above list.



### **Why is family involvement considered an important component of quality school-age programs?**

Below is a summary of some of the research that supports family communication and involvement as an important indicator of high quality care:

- Parent involvement in afterschool programs provides the same benefits to children, families and programs as parent involvement in the regular school day.
- When secure, warm and nurturing relationships are fostered with the adults in a child's life, a child can more readily develop the foundations for empathy, cooperation, language and communication, cultural socialization and identity formation.
- The quality of the relationship between child care providers, parents and children influences every aspect of young children's development, including intelligence, language, emotions and social competence<sup>1</sup>.
- Afterschool programs are also an important forum for identifying and providing resources and services that strengthen families.
- Programs also benefit from family involvement. Programs that work well with families experience higher rates of teacher satisfaction and morale, more family support and greater reputations within their communities.
- Creating a program that reflects the ideas and desires of the parents involved leads to program improvements, increased attendance, and greater parental investment.
- Programs that support parents in their own learning increase the likelihood that children will achieve in academic environments.

#### **Resources:**

NAEYC Accreditation Performance Criteria (2008). "Standard 7: Families".

Caspe, M. & Lopez, E. 2006. Lessons From Family-Strengthening Interventions: Learning From Evidence-Based Practice. Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources>

Perkins, D. F., et al. (2004). *After-school programs parent involvement plan*. University Park, PA: Department of Agriculture and Extension Education, The Pennsylvania State University.