



THE ARKANSAS GUIDE FOR Promoting Family Engagement

Supporting infants, toddlers, and pre-school children and their families during transitions to achieve school readiness and to sustain learning gains through third grade.

A Resource for Early Childhood Professionals



Division of Child Care and
Early Childhood Education



Arkansas Head Start
Collaboration Office



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Developing The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement

Family engagement is critical for healthy child development. Research tells us that quality family engagement can have a lasting effect on a child's health, school readiness and later success in life. How do we define family engagement? When does it begin and what does it look like? How do we know what will work with today's families? What can we offer programs working with young children, including children with disabilities, that will help them be more effective in engaging and empowering parents?

The Arkansas State Parent Advisory Council (ASPC) asked these questions and many more as they developed the Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement. The guide focuses on school readiness and transitions across learning environments. It suggests that school readiness is a continuous process, beginning at birth, continuing through elementary school and at its best, lays the foundation for ongoing success in school. Likewise, engaging families during transitions can ensure a positive experience that has the potential to help children throughout their school years.

The Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and the Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office recognized the need to include many voices to develop this guide and convened the Arkansas State Parent Advisory Council. Council membership includes parents and professionals from the wide range of programs, schools and systems working with young children. In seeking funding to support this work, Arkansas found a generous partner in the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This project aligns seamlessly with the W. K. Kellogg's mission of helping vulnerable children and their families succeed in school, work and life.

Arkansans appreciate that each family's needs are different and each community has unique characteristics and constraints. This guide was designed to offer a range of ways in which to engage families. The suggested strategies can be tailored to the operations of different programs serving children, including children with disabilities.

This guide defines strategies to support successful transitions as children move from one learning setting to another. Whether moving into child care, from Head Start to a Pre-K classroom or from one grade to another, transitions can be challenging to navigate for everyone involved — children, parents, and the provider or teacher. Providers and teachers can offer critical supports during these times of transition and communication is critical. A strong system of family engagement will include multiple ways of communication. Today's young families use different ways of getting information — email, text and other web-based programs. A huge opportunity lies ahead in working with parents to find ways to connect more effectively.

This guide also focuses on respectful and two-way communication that seeks to welcome parents and honor their participation. It underscores the commitment of the state of Arkansas to support its youngest learners and their families. Arkansans hold families to be the most important link between the early childhood and K–12 systems. When children and their families experience success in the earliest years, they will have a stronger foundation for continued success in school and later, in becoming productive citizens. This guide is offered with the intended goal of supporting families' active engagement in their children's development and education.

In developing the Arkansas Guide, the State Parent Advisory Council engaged in deliberate,



Guiding Principles

thoughtful and candid conversation about the importance of family engagement, racial equity, communication and respect. The Council developed the following principles to guide their work:

1. Family engagement practices respect parents as their child's first teacher and recognize their importance in school readiness and later success in life.
2. Families are unique. We appreciate and celebrate all differences. Family engagement activities will demonstrate regard for different ways of knowing, doing or being, and will build on family strengths.

3. Positive two-way communication must be modeled in order to build trust and relationships with all partners, including encouraging family-to-family interaction. Family engagement should create a safe environment where all questions are welcomed and ideas embraced.
4. The practice of engaging families must be achievable and sustainable. In order to support early childhood programs, current and proposed state-level early childhood and school age policies should be reviewed for their potential impact on the family engagement goals articulated in this guide.
5. Family engagement practices should create meaningful and ongoing opportunities for families to serve in leadership roles.

Purpose

The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement is designed to encourage intentional thinking and action related to family engagement. The guide is offered to serve all early childhood programs in Arkansas. In developing the guide, the Council recognized that the implementation of family engagement varies widely across early childhood programs, with some programs participating in well-designed and appropriately resourced systems while other programs have little to no specific plan in place and are without any resources to implement a family engagement plan. It is the hope of the State Parent Advisory Council that this guide will strengthen those early childhood programs that have systems in place to engage parents and will offer a path forward for those programs that are in the initial stages of beginning family engagement practices.

The specific purposes of this guide are to:

1. Ensure that family engagement is recognized as a core component of quality early care and education, especially as it relates to school readiness and transitions across varied learning settings,
2. Identify a set of common goals for family engagement that will promote policies and practices both at the state and local levels for agencies that provide care and education for young children, including children with disabilities, and
3. Recommend strategies that can be used to guide family engagement activities from birth through third grade and support transition planning in local settings.



Brain Development in Young Children



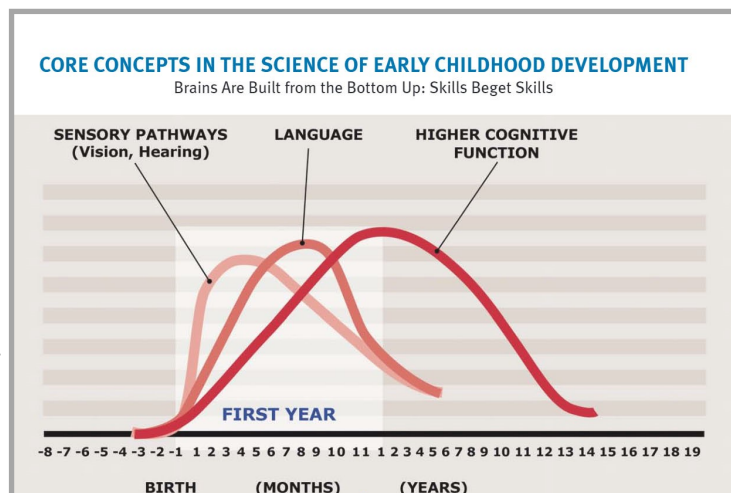
Child development is a critical foundation for community development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. When we fail to provide children including children with disabilities with what they need, we put future prosperity and security at risk.

A rapidly growing body of knowledge from neuroscience, molecular biology and child development research can help to inform how we as a community use our collective resources most effectively and efficiently to build that strong foundation.

The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an on-going process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. During the first few years of life, new synapses (neural connections) are formed every second. After a period of rapid proliferation or growth, these connections are reduced through a process called pruning so that brain circuits can become more efficient. Early experiences affect the nature and quality of the brain's developing architecture by determining which circuits are reinforced and which are pruned through lack of use.

Brains are built in a hierarchical fashion, starting with the simplest circuits and then moving up to more complex circuits. Sensory pathways like those for basic vision and hearing are the first to develop, followed by early language skills and higher cognitive functions. Connections proliferate and prune in a prescribed order: the timing is determined genetically but experiences affect whether the circuit is strong or weak. The brain is never a blank slate --- every competency is built upon competencies that came before.

The interactive influence of genes and experiences shape the developing brain. Scientists now see a major element in this developmental process is the "serve and return" relationship between children and their parents or other caregivers in the family or community. Young children, including children with disabilities, naturally initiate interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and gestures. In the absence of caregiver responses --- or if the responses are unreliable or inappropriate --- the brain's architecture does not form as expected, which can lead to disparities in learning and behavior.



Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University (CA Nelson, 2000)

Benefits of Family Engagement

Building strong positive relationships with families is clearly recognized as beneficial for children's successful development, school readiness and later academic success. Research also shows that families and teachers benefit when they regularly communicate and work together to support children's development.

Parental engagement has been mandated by Head Start since its beginning in 1964. A study released in December 2011 by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) examined ways in which family activities supported children's development while attending Head Start. The studies found that families who began home activities that supported their children in early childhood programs continued this practice after their child transitioned to kindergarten. (<http://www.nber.org/papers/w17704.pdf>).

The book, An Educator's Guide to Family Involvement in Early Literacy (Prior, 2011) discusses ways in which early education teachers benefit from successful family engagement activities. Teachers report that they have a better understanding of the family culture of their students, enabling them to work more effectively with parents. When parents have greater understanding of their child's activities in the classroom, they are more likely to help their child with home projects. Other benefits show that families have greater confidence in teachers and rate teachers as more effective when they work closely with teachers. Children, including children with disabilities, whose parents are more engaged, are shown to benefit in critical subjects such as reading and math. Studies showed that helping parents understand reading assignments resulted in children showing significant gains in reading and math scores. When parents read to their child, as little as five minutes a day for three days per week, reading achievement increases.



Arkansas' Definition of Family Engagement

To better understand the term “family engagement”, the State Parent Advisory Council reviewed definitions from the leading child development and education organizations including the Office of Head Start; the National Association for the Education of Young Children; The National Family; School and Community Engagement Workgroups; and the Harvard Family Research Project. The Council studied the U.S. Department of Education’s Family and Community Engagement Framework; the W. K. Kellogg Racial Equity Framework; and the manual, *Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Linking Children, Families, & Schools*, developed by the National Center for Early Development & Learning and the University of Virginia. The Council compared documents from other states, including the *Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework* and the *Kansas Early Childhood Family Engagement Standards*. From this strong knowledge base, the State Parent Advisory Council crafted a definition that used language from the above experts and represents the Arkansas vision for family engagement, as follows:

Family engagement refers to the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and activities of families that support their children’s, including children with disabilities, positive development from birth through age eight (8). Family engagement builds relationships that promote family well-being, strong parent-child relationships and ongoing learning. Family engagement happens in many places, the home, early childhood program, school and community, and it is a shared responsibility with all those who support children’s learning.

Although not included in the definition, the State Parent Advisory Council strongly emphasized that successful family engagement activities can only begin with and be sustained through adequate resources. These resources could include a range of funding streams, including public-private partnerships. It is important to recognize that early care and education programs, particularly, are funded at significantly varying levels and that this impacts the range of activities programs can be implemented.

Organization of the Guide

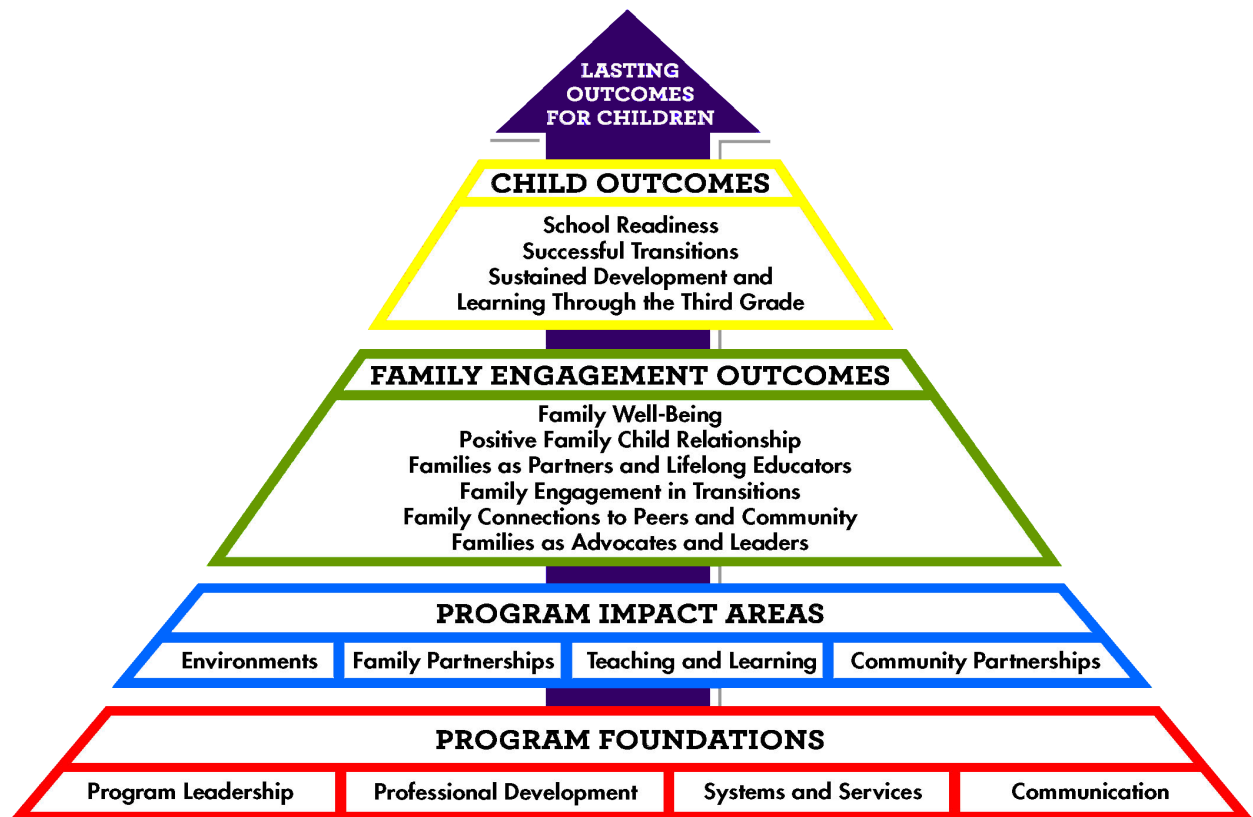
The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement is designed to be user-friendly and intended to help plan family engagement activities, both strategically and for daily use. The guide begins by defining family engagement, as approved by the State Parent Advisory Council. Family engagement outcomes include: family well-being, positive family child relationship, families as partners and lifelong educators, family engagement in transition, family connections to peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders.

Next, the guide outlines child and family outcomes based on the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework. Similar to Head Start PFCE, the outcomes are arranged by program foundation areas that include program leadership, professional development, communications and systems and services. The program impact areas include environment, family partnerships, teaching and learning, and community partnerships. The

guide outlines a set of strategies, mostly similar to the Head Start PFCE Framework, which programs and schools can use to reach the family engagement outcomes. The last section of the guide shares information on ways in which the document can be used, including a toolkit specifically designed for early learning professionals and a continuous improvement model to support ongoing assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation (APIE).

The Family Engagement Framework

The Arkansas Family Engagement Framework is designed to support early childhood programs in building or enhancing program areas into a positive system for change in delivering services to children and families. The pyramid framework, shown below, provides a layered structure, beginning with areas that build a strong foundation for improving family engagement. The internal components of the framework show the inter-relatedness of concepts, values, and practices for having a great family engagement system. Research suggests that engaging in these areas and components can move early childhood programs towards an ongoing system of continuous improvement, leading to the ultimate goal that every parent, staff, and administrator seeks — positive and lasting outcomes for children, including children with disabilities.



The Family Engagement Framework Components



Strong foundations are critical to support lasting change. Program foundational areas are envisioned as the over-arching fundamental activities necessary for programs in order to achieve success in family engagement activities.

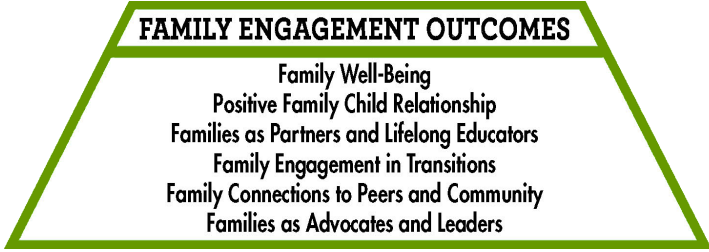
- **Program Leadership** ensures that programs operate from a clear vision and with strategic plans that empower staff, parents and communities to work together on behalf of children, including children with disabilities.
- **Professional Development** refers to the ongoing and comprehensive training, development, and recognition of staff that promotes continued career development and opportunities for gaining new insights.
- **Systems and services** recognize the broad interrelated structure of supports needed to assist families rather than the delivery of a single service. It includes ongoing planning and encourages thoughtful questioning about the way in which a program conducts its work.
- **Communication** can take many forms, including written, face-to-face and online. It includes two-way conversations initiated by both parents and staff. At the center of effective communication is a welcoming and respectful atmosphere. When families feel accepted, they are likely to be more engaged.



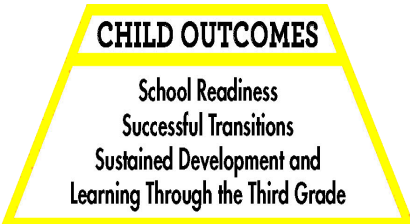
Once a solid foundation is in place, programs can focus on more specific family engagement activities based on existing opportunities and/or identified needs.

- **Environments** ensure that staff and families build relationships and work together on family goals for children's learning and development.
- **Family Partnerships** provide opportunities for staff and families to work together to identify and plan ways in which to achieve their goals.
- **Teaching and Learning** engages families in activities that focus on child development and learning. Programs ensure that families have access to and understand information about their child's progress.
- **Community Partnerships** encourage linkages with other networks, such as health, social services, businesses and higher education, in order to afford greater opportunities for children and their families.

The Arkansas Guide for Promoting Family Engagement identifies six outcomes that are consistent with Arkansas’ definition of family engagement. These outcomes are derived from the Head Start PFCE Framework and defined as follows:



- **Family Well-Being** – Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.
- **Positive Family Child Relationship** – Beginning with the transition to parenthood, parents and family members develop warm relationships that nurture their child’s learning and development.
- **Families as Partners and Lifelong Educators** - Families participate as critical partners in their child’s education while advancing their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences to support their parenting, careers, and life goals.
- **Family Engagement in Transitions** – Parents and families support and advocate for their child’s learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including from prekindergarten to other early learning environment and from kindergarten through elementary school.
- **Family Connections to Peers and Community** - Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.
- **Families as Advocates and Leaders** – Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, or in community and state organizing activities to improve children’s development learning experiences, including children with disabilities.



Child outcomes — school readiness, successful transitions, and sustained development and learning through the third grade — form the basis for the family engagement framework.

- **School Readiness** generally refers to a child’s preparation cognitively, socially and emotionally to succeed in school.
- Head Start defines school readiness as “children, including children with disabilities, possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life”. The Arkansas Department of Education identified a list of skills that will help a child be prepared to enter kindergarten, recognizing that children entering school with these skills are likely to be more successful.
- **Successful Transitions** focuses on ensuring positive experiences for children, families and teachers as children move across early learning environments.
 - **Sustained Development and Learning through Third Grade** is a recognized hallmark for success in school. Research shows that students who are unprepared to start school often fall behind, frequently leaving them unable to read by the end of third grade.



Strategies Supporting Program Success in Engaging Families

The State Parent Advisory Council adapted the strategies used in the Head Start PFCE Framework to address the family engagement outcomes. Additional strategies were added to reflect priorities specific to Arkansas including school readiness, successful transitions across learning environments and sustained learning gains through third grade. Using the design of the Head Start PFCE Framework, the strategies are first grouped by Family Engagement Outcomes. Within each of the Family Engagement Outcomes, strategies are listed that will support the Program Foundation and the Program Impact areas.

***When families
are engaged,
children succeed!***





Family Well-Being — Strategies

Outcome: Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

1. Ensure staff members have appropriate training and supervision and manageable caseloads.
2. Consider ways to hire staff who reflect the cultural and ethnic background of children and families served in the program.
3. Incorporate goals related to family well-being into work plans and strategic planning.
4. Develop relationships with community members and community organizations that support families' interests and needs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5. Develop knowledge of relationship building that is grounded in cross-cultural responsiveness and strengths-based perspectives.
6. Encourage staff to have a written plan for continued professional growth and development that includes family engagement.
7. Reflect on daily practice and personal experience to increase self-awareness and effective relationship building with families.
8. Develop knowledge of professional ethics around confidentiality, boundaries and self-determination.
9. Gain knowledge about mental health, child development and a variety of parenting practices, including unique ways to engage fathers.
10. Develop knowledge and skill in supporting families around financial literacy and financial stability.
11. Develop skill in coordination and collaboration with community partners.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

12. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to family well-being.
13. Link families with support systems and resources and conduct purposeful follow-up to determine their effectiveness.
14. Review individual and system-wide family successes, helpful referrals and effective staff practices to evaluate family services.
15. Collect and assemble data on individual families so that programs and schools can review the effectiveness of family services and determine needed services.
16. Consult a mental health professional or counselor with appropriate credentials and experience to be a resource for staff and program needs around family well-being.

COMMUNICATION

17. Promote two-way communications to ensure all ideas are heard and valued.
18. Engage in honest and transparent dialogue with families about their expectations and staff/program objectives.
19. Promote cross-service area teamwork.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

21. Welcome all families—and all family structures, sizes and arrangements.
22. Initiate relationships with families that are receptive, responsive and respectful.
23. Include family-friendly spaces with pictures and materials that affirm and welcome all families.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

24. Use family partnership assessments or checklists as a tool for relationship building and as a basis for ongoing individualized family services.
25. Help families identify their interests, articulate their strengths and needs and accomplish and/or develop goals.
26. Use informal home visits, as appropriate, to establish relationships with families and to identify and support their interests and needs through the family partnership process.
27. Assist families in using resources and systems of support regularly and continuously over a period of time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

28. Participate in regular program meetings, such as cross-service teams, to ensure that information about services related to family and child well-being can inform teaching.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

29. Participate in community meetings and initiatives that increase program capacity to respond to the needs and interests of families.
30. Identify ways to maintain a current list of resources that respond to families' needs.

**Positive Family Child Relationships — Strategies**

Outcome: Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

31. Ensure staff members have appropriate training, effective supervision, and manageable caseloads to support families and their relationships with their infants, toddlers, preschool and K-third grade age children.
32. Incorporate goals related to positive parent-child relationships into program, school work plans and strategic planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

33. Gain knowledge about:
 - the needs of parents who are parenting a child with a disability;
 - expectations for school readiness;
 - child development;
 - the potential effect of transitions on children and families;

- the effect of trauma on parent-child relationships; and
- a variety of parenting practices.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

34. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to supporting positive parent-child relationships

COMMUNICATION

35. Promote cross-service area teamwork.
36. Use surveys and ongoing conversations with families to reflect on staff relationships with families and identify areas for improvement.
37. Identify and use multiple ways to better understand participants' parenting practices, and use this information to improve parenting education and parenting supports.
38. Ensure that families understand the various aspects and importance of school readiness.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

39. Hold the child and family in high regard and partner effectively with different groups of parents.
40. Provide opportunities that support parents' needs to connect with other parents for reflection, information, ideas and support.
41. Support parent-child relationships in a way that values the culture and language of the family and recognizes how different cultural influences may affect family development.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

42. Provide opportunities for parents to learn the developing role of young parents and/or about their roles as new mothers and fathers.
43. Foster meaningful, reciprocal relationships between mother and child, and father and child in a manner that is both culturally receptive and responsive.
44. Help families identify appropriate practices that complement the stages of their developing child.
45. Support parents and families in ensuring the health and safety of their children.
46. Support a father's efforts to connect with and be responsible for his child at all ages and stages of development.
47. Support families in seeking support from mental health consultants or other community agencies when there are parent-child relationship challenges that require additional services.
48. Foster strong co-parenting relationships as appropriate.
 - unique ways to engage fathers;
 - how mental health and wellness affects families;
 - communication styles and relationship building.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

49. Engage with parents as equal partners in learning about their child while acknowledging parents' premier role as their child's first teacher.

50. Foster meaningful, reciprocal relationships between mother and child, and father and child in a manner that is both culturally receptive and responsive.
51. Talk together with families about the child's signals in ways that help families explore these signals and understand and respond to their child's behavior.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

52. Engage community partners to help support the needs and goals of new parents.
53. Engage community partners to better understand and help support the needs of families who are parenting during stressful and challenging times.



Families as Partners and Lifelong Educators — Strategies

Outcome: Families participate as critical partners in their child's education while advancing their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences to support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

54. Collaborate with programs and school systems to support and empower families in their continued role as their child's lifelong educators.
55. Incorporate goals related to families as lifelong educators into program and school-work plans and strategic planning.
56. Form agreements with education entities and organizations that support staff and families' education and training goals.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

57. Prepare staff to engage parents in meaningful and creative ways in parent meetings and trainings.
58. Include teachers/teachers' assistants in parenting education sessions so parents and teachers can share information about child learning and development, and program curriculum.
59. Create "learning communities" for staff.
60. Develop knowledge about different kinds of education and training opportunities available to families.
61. Develop staff skills to support families in meeting their learning goals.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

62. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to families learning goals for themselves and their children.
63. Maintain information about educational resources (GED, adult education, ESL, employment opportunities, workplace literacy, parenting skills, job training, job preparation skills, etc.).

COMMUNICATION

64. Promote cross-service area teamwork.
65. Identify ways to obtain and use information to improve family-staff relationships, strengthen family oral language and literacy practices, and better understand the impact of family-staff relationships with respect to teaching and learning.
66. Ensure that parent meetings and trainings are announced routinely, that announcements are inviting, and that language is not a barrier to parent participation.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

67. Welcome and support families as learners and encourage their observation and participation in their child's classroom (or home-based) activities.
68. Support and encourage parents to share tips on everyday learning practices with staff and other families.
69. Provide opportunities for families to connect with other families in the program or community that are working to achieve similar learning/educational goals.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

70. Support relationships between parents and their children as part of the foundation for interactions around early learning.
71. Invite past program parents and community volunteers to share their educational and career experiences with families.
72. Encourage parents in working toward their own oral language and literacy goals and follow-up on referrals to ensure that families are enrolled and have the necessary supports to complete their education and/or training.
73. Invite families to volunteer or apply for jobs in the program in ways that support their parenting, career or life goals.
74. Make information available that supports parents' personal growth and career development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

75. Support parents as learners in parenting education programs that help parents learn more about their child's learning, development and behavior and encourage family literacy activities between parents and children.
76. Provide opportunities for families to observe and participate in child learning and development during home visits and in classrooms.
77. Consistently engage with families to gather child information and parent observations to inform teaching.
78. Share information about children's social, emotional, and cognitive development and the importance of the home language (with families of children who are dual language learners).
79. Share information about the Arkansas Child Development Early Learning Standards.
80. Engage parents in conversations to learn about children's progress and use a database/management information system that is accessible to families and that assists teachers in sharing children's progress in an understandable, family-friendly format.

Program Impact Areas

81. Engage with parents as equal partners in learning about their child while acknowledging parents' premier role as their child's first teacher.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

82. Support family experiences with community resources that support children's learning and development, such as libraries and museums.
83. Share information with families about resources and services for dual language learners, children with disabilities and other needs of vulnerable families.
84. Link families to community resources for internships, volunteer activities and other experiences that expand their knowledge and skills and build on their career interests.
85. Form partnerships with educational agencies/organizations in the community and beyond, including higher education institutions, to support families' learning interests and educational goals.
86. Form partnerships with adult educators who creatively enhance education and training opportunities for families.

**Family Engagement in Transitions — Strategies**

Outcome: Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including prekindergarten to other early learning environments, and from Kindergarten through Elementary School.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

87. Ensure that systems, supports and resources are in place to address professional development and partnerships related to child and family transitions.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

88. Conduct joint transition trainings across Pre-K, EHS/HS and local educational agencies.
89. Gain understanding about the realities early childhood programs and public schools face and acknowledge both barriers and opportunities in building local partnerships (differences in policy, regulations, budgets, organizational design, etc.).

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

90. Use surveys and K-12 data sources (where possible) to review transition activities and to better understand opportunities and challenges.
91. Use information from various data sources to improve transition practices with families and community partners.

COMMUNICATION

92. Establish and maintain ongoing communications and agreements between local educational agencies.
93. Support families in developing relationships with staff and other families with similar needs.
94. Create opportunities for families to ask questions and voice concerns about transitions.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

- 95. Welcome and engage families as partners in transition planning.
- 96. Create a culture of supporting families during transitions as they are the key to creating continuity for children.
- 97. Help families identify and understand quality criteria in early childhood settings as children make transitions to new service options, new classrooms, or new home visitors.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

- 98. Recognize family priorities and help families develop transition plans that reflect priorities for themselves and their children.
- 99. Provide families with information, training and connections to future early care and educational settings to help facilitate the transition process for parents and children (e.g., information about what families might expect of K-12 instruction and training about how to deal with disagreements between parent and teacher).
- 100. Ensure families know about their rights under federal and state laws, such as their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 101. Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss their observations and concerns about their child's strengths and challenges prior to transitions.
- 102. Share information about activities and everyday interactions with children that promote school readiness.
- 103. Ensure families have ongoing opportunities to discuss child development so that families are prepared to have similar discussions with teachers in Pre-K and K-12.
- 104. Provide families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- 105. Coordinate services for children and families leaving early childhood programs through program-school partnerships.
- 106. Provide advocacy training and opportunities for families to develop and use advocacy skills in the context of their child's lifelong learning.



Family Connections to Peers and Community — Strategies

Outcome: Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

- 107. Ensure that systems and staff development facilitate opportunities for parents to develop relationships with their peers through meetings, trainings, support groups, mentoring programs or community referrals.

Program Foundations

108. Incorporate goals related to family connections to peers and community into agency work plans and strategic planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

109. Conduct staff training on facilitating peer activities that help parents and families:

- enhance parent-child relationships;
- strengthen their role as educators;
- reflect and set learning goals;
- learn about transitions; and
- encourage parent leadership and advocacy.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

110. Ensure that systems and staff development recognize opportunities for parents to develop relationships with their peers through meetings, trainings, support groups, mentoring programs or community referrals.

111. Provide families with information about child development and the impact of transitions on children across early childhood and school settings.

COMMUNICATION

112. Use related surveys and ongoing relationships with families to understand the opportunities and challenges related to parent connections, peers, and community, and use the information to improve practices.

113. Use information from community assessment, self assessments and related surveys to improve practices related to parent connections, peers and community.

114. Engage in honest dialogue with families about expectations for their child's learning and development during times of transition.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

115. Create safe and respectful environments where parents can lead and learn from each other and ask for the kinds of information that they find helpful as individuals and members of a group.

116. Provide space and resources, if necessary, for monthly events chaired by parents, for parents.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

117. Facilitate (or refer parents to) parental support and/or educational groups where families can share their concerns (e.g. children's special needs, dual language learner) for their children.

118. Talk with parents about the formal and informal social networks (support, amusement, help, education, etc.) they have and explore interests or needs in forming new (or renewed) social connections.

119. Individualize opportunities for peer-to-peer connections for different groups of parents (e.g., fathers or grandparents).

120. Support parents' interests and goals with skill-building volunteer opportunities in the program and community.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

121. Encourage parent-to-parent support when participating in parent meetings about children's learning and development.

Program Impact Areas

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- 122. Collaborate with community organizations that share parents’ concerns and interests.
- 123. Link families with meaningful support networks, peer-to-peer groups, and volunteer opportunities in the community.



Families as Advocates and Leaders — Strategies

Outcome: Families participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, or community and state organizing activities to improve children’s development and learning experiences.

Program Foundations

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

- 124. Ensure that families’ opinions are heard and included in the program planning processes, such as participation on an advisory committee.
- 125. Incorporate goals related to family advocacy and leadership into agency work plans and strategic planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 126. Provide training on the multicultural principles, leadership development, racial equity, and advocacy for staff and families.

SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

- 127. Ensure that systems and supports are in place to address professional development, program environment and partnerships related to engaging families as advocates and leaders.

COMMUNICATION

- 128. Share information with families about existing parent-to-parent organizations, family peer networks and/or parent-initiated school-community efforts in order to foster continuity in leadership and advocacy roles

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

- 129. Create an environment that welcomes parent leadership and advocacy in the program.
- 130. Work with parents to arrive at agreed upon understandings of how to partner and how to collaborate with each other within the program.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

- 131. Provide opportunities for parents to identify their strengths as leaders/advocates and to use them in the program and community.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- 132. Provide parent mentoring opportunities that could include staff, alumni parents/families, elders, and professionals in the community to serve as a resource and support for parent leadership development.
- 133. Partner with parents to engage advocacy groups that work on issues related to child, family and community needs.
- 134. Form partnerships with parent-to-parent organizations or other K-12 parent groups to facilitate connections for families.

Program Impact Areas

Continuous Improvement System

Moving Early Childhood Programs to a System of Continuous Improvement



Own a piece of “APIE” (Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation) in your program by assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the success of your family engagement system. This section will explore ways for you to review your existing family engagement process using strategies for each of the six family engagement outcomes. If you do not have a family engagement system, this guide will help you to create one. The family engagement self-assessment strategies outline specific things that you should be doing in your program to enhance services for children and families.

In using the self-assessment strategies to create a system of continuous improvement, the first step is to assess your program. You can assess your program by asking yourself two questions: (1) Is the strategy currently being utilized in your program? (Yes or No) If yes, the second (2) question would be: Is the strategy effective or does it need improvement? You will be able to check one of these areas (effective or needs improvement).

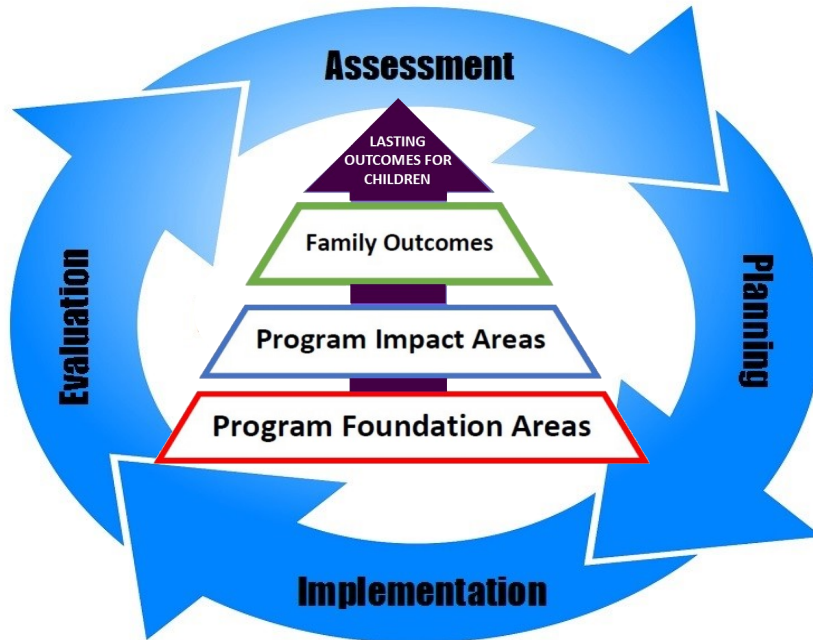
The next step would be to use the answer from question one and the areas that needs improvement from question number two. Programs should create an action plan to address all areas that need improvements. Please note that planning also includes the creation of a family engagement team to create a family engagement system of continuous improvement, set goals, and to plan appropriate activities for staff, families, and children.

Use the action plan to implement goals for completing your family engagement strategies. These strategies are integrated within each component of the family engagement framework.

At the end of your program year, you will be able to evaluate the success of your plan by identifying:

- What worked,
- What did not work, and
- Challenges, and Barriers (if any).

Ongoing Continuous Improvement



This is an ongoing continuous improvement model. It allows opportunities for programs and schools to measure the success of the family engagement strategies completed in each of the three areas to promote lasting outcomes for all children, including children with disabilities. It also creates a visual for moving forward in establishing next steps for all programs and/or schools. The end result will be for programs/schools to have a quality annual family engagement plan that will lead to positive outcomes for children and families.

***Enhance your program
or school by owning
pieces of APIE for
continuous program
improvement!***



Family Engagement Toolkit Within a Toolbox

The Family Engagement Toolkit Within a Toolbox will be available to support each of the six family engagement outcomes. The Toolkit will consist of resources, materials, activity kits, online data and information, stories, and so much more. Copies of the Family Engagement Assessment and the Parent Survey will be located in the Toolkit. These materials will offer suggestions and activities that staff and parents can use in their program. The Toolbox will be available for staff and families to check out and use as they create and implement their family engagement plan. They will be housed in the Child Care Aware Resource and Referral sites that are currently in place across the state of Arkansas. An online list of resources will be available for review at the Head Start State Collaboration Office website (www.arheadstart.org).

Statewide Professional Development

The professional development system will include the following five strategies:

1. Using the guide, framework, and the toolbox, specific training will be developed to address all aspects of the Guide for Promoting Family Engagement.
2. Train-the-trainers sessions will be held in order to identify and train qualified early education professionals to conduct the family engagement training statewide.
3. Trainers will conduct the training to all early childhood programs in five locations multiple times across the state. All programs, centers, and schools will be encouraged to attend.
4. The training for family engagement will be offered at no cost to the participants in the initial year. In subsequent years, the training will be available through the state's early childhood education professional development registry. The training for the Arkansas Family Engagement Guide will also be recorded by the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) and placed on the Arkansas Ideas website as a course on Family Engagement. Participants will be assessed and awarded a certificate documenting the number of training hours, once training has been completed.
5. The Head Start State Collaboration Office in collaboration with the AETN will produce family engagement training DVDs to use in areas across the state in order for programs, especially in rural areas, to access the training. A specific code will be assigned upon completion of the training. The code will be used for the participant to be assessed, whereby, once mastered, a certificate will be awarded documenting participation and training hours.

The Arkansas Guide For Promoting Family Engagement will be posted on the websites with the DHS/Division of Childcare Early Childhood Education, Department of Education, and the Head Start State Collaboration Office/AHSA. The professional development competencies that are currently in place in Arkansas will remain the same.

Family Engagement Resources

- **Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships**, a publication of SEDL funded by the U. S. Department of Education, suggests ways to design family engagement initiatives supporting educators and families in working together focused on student achievement and school improvement. The paper describes three case studies and offers recommendations for improving family school partnerships. The framework can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>.
- **Harvard Family Research Project** (www.hfrp.org), established in 1983, is a premier national resource focused on family and community engagement research, practices, policies and strategies. The website contains the most current research on family engagement, including the quarterly publication of the FINE (Family Involvement Network of Educators) newsletter. Numerous materials are available to support early childhood professionals in building family engagement practices including the Case Toolkit (<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/professional-development/create-your-own-case-toolkit-building-your-family-engagement-skills-and-knowledge>). The Harvard Family Research Project partners with state and national agencies on family engagement. Latest information from these partnerships is available at <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/informing-family-engagement-policy2/partnerships>.
- **Kansas Coalition for Effective Family Engagement**, a project of Kansas Families and Schools Together, developed the *Kansas Early Childhood Family Engagement Standards*. More information about the project and the standards can be found at <http://www.kcefe.net/home.html>.
- **Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework**, developed by the Maryland State Department of Education, offers an early adaptation of the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. The Maryland Framework is available at http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/docs/MD_Fam_Engage.pdf.
- **National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds** (www.ctfalliance.org/) provides training, technical assistance and peer consulting opportunities to state Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds to strengthen their efforts in preventing child abuse. The National Alliance website offers a wealth of resources and training tools on strengthening families, protective factors and other materials focused on preventing child abuse and neglect.
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**, is recognized as the foremost professional membership organization for early childhood professionals. NAEYC’s Engaging Diverse Families Project (<http://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement>) identifies family engagement principles, exemplary programs and numerous resources that are adaptable for early childhood programs.



- **National Center for Early Development and Learning Kindergarten Transition Project** at the University of Virginia (<https://www.pakeys.org/uploadedcontent/docs/Transition%20into%20Formal%20Schooling/Enhancing%20the%20transition%20to%20kindergarten%20Linking%20children%20families%20and%20schools.PDF>) suggests an approach to promote successful transitions for children, their families and schools. The manual includes guiding principles and offers concrete strategies, activities and timelines for use by early childhood educators.
- **National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement** (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>) offers a wealth of information including the Head Start Family Engagement Framework, helpful tools to support parent engagement including award certificates, research, webinars and videos, and program assessment. A special section for parents offers many resources including guidance for parents of children with special needs. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, frequently referred to as the PFCE, can be found at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/framework>.
- **RAND Corporation** released *Families, Powered On*, a publication that identifies barriers to family engagement in early childhood programs and offers ways to use technology to keep families connected to programs. The policy brief is available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR673z5/RAND_RR673z5.pdf.
- **TEC Center (Technology in Early Childhood)** at Erikson Institute studies the appropriate use of technology with children from birth to age 8, including ways in which to use technology for parent engagement. Research and useful materials can be found at <http://teccenter.erikson.edu/about-the-tec-center/>.
- **W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF)**, founded in 1930, supported the development of the Arkansas Guide for Family Engagement. WKKF focuses on community and civic engagement as well as racial equity, recognizing that both are critical in establishing conditions in which all children, especially vulnerable children, can realize their full potential. The website (<https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/racial-equity>) provides information on WKKF funded projects and a Racial Equity Resource Guide (<http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/index.cfm>) that can be customized for personal use or for sharing with colleagues.
- **ZERO TO THREE** (www.zerotothree.org) provides parents, professionals and policymakers information on nurturing early development. ZERO TO THREE, founded in 1977 by top experts in child development, health and mental health and today, plays a critical leadership role in promoting understanding of issues affecting young children ages birth to three, and their families. Their website includes current research on brain development, child care, infant mental health, early language and literacy development, early intervention and the impact of culture on early childhood development.

Resources offered by the State of Arkansas include the following:

- **Arkansas Department of Education** provides information for parents on enrolling children in school, kindergarten readiness and suggestions to ensure smooth transitions into kindergarten. For more information, visit <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/public-school-accountability/federal-programs/enrollment>.
- **Arkansas Department of Health** offers wonderful information for new parents and information about child health, safety and development. <http://www.adhhomecare.org/index.htm>
- **Arkansas Department of Higher Education** provides information on scholarships and other programs to support enrollment in advanced education programs. <http://www.adhe.edu/Pages/home.aspx>.

- **Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE)** offers a wealth of information on topics for parents, child care providers and others interested in early care and education. For more information, visit <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/Pages/default.aspx>.
- **Arkansas Early Childhood Asset Map**, <http://argis.ualr.edu/aecamrg/>, provides a variety of information on early childhood services, including mapping services, a resource guide, and data from the *Getting Ready for School* publication.
- **Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO)** provides the most current information on Head Start and Early Head Start programs in the state. For more information, visit <http://www.arheadstart.org>.
- **Arkansas Safe Babies Court Teen Project**, a pilot project with Zero to Three, <http://www.zerotothree.org/maltreatment/safe-babies-court-team/arkansas-safe-babies-court.html>, is studying innovative ways to provide services to families in crisis and stem the tide of children entering the child welfare system.
- **Child Care Aware** programs operate across the state of Arkansas to provide training for early care professionals and referrals for parents seeking quality child care. This informational brochure includes information about the services and a map showing the service area of each agency. http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/dccece_documents/ccrbrochure.pdf.
- **Developmental Disability Services (DDS)** offers resources as well as statewide support and services for families of children with disabilities. <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/ddds/Pages/>

Terms and Definitions

Advocacy refers to activities undertaken to support a cause, proposal, policy or other course of action. Early childhood advocacy efforts frequently focus on educating policymakers, parents and others about the needs of children and their families and ways in which to address these needs.

Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABC) programs are high quality programs that serve children, ages birth to five, with a variety of risk factors. The majority of availability is for three and four year old children. Providers are selected for their ability to offer a high-quality program. ABC is funded through an appropriation in the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Public School Fund budget and contracts with the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education to administer the program. The State Board of Education is the final authority for approval of rules and grants.

Arkansas Child Development Early Learning Standards (CDELS) –Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards provide a set of common expectations for what children should know, understand, and be able to do at different ages in early childhood (birth through age five). The standards are research-based, culturally and linguistically appropriate, comprehensive, and are written with the understanding that children do not reach developmental milestones at the same time. The standards are to be used to support developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment in the classroom, to assist in developing age-appropriate learning goals for children, and to outline a progression of development and learning that leads to school readiness.



Continuous Improvement refers to ongoing efforts to improve a service, system or process. Such efforts typically follow specific planning, such as the APIE model described on page 24.

Cross-Cultural refers to different backgrounds, values, viewpoints or practices. Early childhood program training focuses on appreciation of differences.

Cross-Service refers to groups comprised of professionals from different functional areas, (e.g., early care, health, education, higher education) that are specifically formed to ensure a broad focus in achieving outcomes.

Early Head Start (EHS) programs serve low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women, promoting health prenatal outcomes and the development of young children from birth through age two. There are 10 Early Head Start grantees in Arkansas.

Family Engagement (FE) refers to the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and activities of families that support their children's positive development from birth through age eight (8). (See page 10 for the Arkansas State Parent Advisory Council definition.)

Family Partnerships refer to ways in which early childhood programs and families work together in setting and achieving goals such as school readiness, communication and optimal well-being.

Head Start (HS) programs serve low-income three and four year old children and their families, promoting school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children. There are 20 Head Start grantees in Arkansas.

Head Start Parent Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, developed by the Office of Head Start, is a comprehensive document focused on parent and family engagement. The PFCE is research-based and offers a guide for Head Start programs to identify and meet desired child outcomes.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIE) partners with parents to help them prepare their children for success in school and in life. HIPPIE uses home visitors to provide parents with an educationally sound and user-friendly curriculum using activities, books and objects found in daily life and structured in three-year stages geared to three, four and five year olds. HIPPIE recruits and employs specially trained peers of the parents to deliver the curriculum and instruct parents in their homes on a weekly basis for 30 weeks per year. The program originated in 1969 in Israel and began operations in the US in the early 1980's. The national headquarters are now in Little Rock. HIPPIE Arkansas currently consists of 31 sites that serve approximately 5,300 children annually.

Learning Environment includes all settings in which young children receive care and education, including home, licensed child care facilities, Early Head Start and Head Start, pre-kindergarten and school classrooms.

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) supports pregnant women and families and helps at-risk parents of children from birth to kindergarten entry tap the resources and hone the skills they need to raise children who are physically, socially and emotionally healthy and ready to learn.

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a proven home visiting model designed to meet the needs of young families and focused on helping young children grow up healthy, safe and ready to learn.

Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) is typically defined as programs serving four year old children in care settings including schools, licensed child care centers or Head Start. For purposes of this document, Pre-K is defined as any program serving children four or younger, including infants and toddlers.

Racial Equity is defined as ensuring that systems (e.g. early care and education, health care, financial markets), act evenly and fairly for different racial and ethnic groups. (The online Free Dictionary defines equality as simply “the state or quality of being equal” while equity is defined as the “state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.”)

School Readiness is defined in Arkansas as: “School ready children have the social and academic knowledge, skills and behaviors for school success and lifelong learning. School readiness occurs when families, schools and communities support and serve ALL children, so they are successful in school and life.” More information, including a list of indicators for parents, can be found at www.ARBetterBeginnings.com.

Transition refers to movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another (Dictionary.com). In early childhood, transition can refer to multiple types of changes, including:

- movement between activities during the day (such as from outdoor recess to the classroom),
- transitions between multiple care settings within one day (such as child care to afterschool program or school to afterschool program),
- changes between programs at recognized times (home to a child care program, child care to preschool or Head Start to elementary school) or
- a formal plan required for children with disabilities, referred to as an Individualized Education Program (IEP).



