

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Children who are successful in school have strong and positive interconnections between family, school, and community. Parent involvement in the learning process strengthens learning at home and is directly linked to positive child outcomes. Programs can demonstrate that they value parent involvement in a variety of ways from sharing anecdotes of children’s learning to partnering with parents to establish child development goals.

Communication is the key to successful parent involvement. The purpose of frequent and informal interactions is to strengthen the partnership between home and school. Staff should use an interested and unhurried manner when communicating with parents. Staff and parents should update one another about children’s recent experiences and program activities by:

- conversing during drop-off and pick-up times;
- writing notes;
- telephone conversations; and
- electronic communication.

Ideas for parent involvement activities include:

- sharing their special interests with children, such as fishing, photography, or sewing;
- providing recyclables and helping to make play materials;
- attending parent meetings, workshops, and serving on the local/area-wide GSRP Advisory Committees;
- serving on the team to analyze program quality and child outcome data;
- meeting with teachers to set developmental goals and discuss children’s progress;
- supporting children’s learning at home; and
- reading or contributing to a parent newsletter.

Staff support parent involvement at group or parent meetings by:

- providing child care;
- arranging transportation;
- scheduling events at times convenient for parents;
- orienting parents to the depth and breadth of the role of parents at meetings;
- making reminder phone calls;
- distributing agendas or other materials ahead of time;
- supporting parent-to-parent communication;
- addressing needs of non-custodial parents;
- addressing language, culture, and work barriers; and
- demonstrating that parents’ contributions are valued by following up appropriately.

Staff support parent involvement in the classroom when:

- a parent’s presence (mother, father, or guardian) is invited and welcomed by staff;
- worthy classroom experiences are offered to parents, for example, assisting in the implementation of the daily routine with children versus assigning parents minor roles such as wiping tables or cutting out shapes;
- volunteer opportunities are announced to parents ahead of time; and
- parents are invited to participate in special events such as field trips or program evaluation efforts.
PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Advisory Committees
GSRP grantees are required by legislation to provide for active and continuous participation of parents of enrolled children. A high-quality GSRP supports parents as active decision makers and develops and implements training to instill confidence in parents as active members.

All grantees are required to have a GSRP Advisory Committee with representation from parents, GSRP teaching staff, GSRP administrators, the Early Childhood Specialist, Head Start teachers, Title I Preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, school specialists, Department of Human Services, Community Health Services, Head Start, and local early childhood programs. The Advisory Committee must have one parent for every 18 children enrolled in the program, with a minimum of two parent or guardian representatives.

The committee meets on a regular basis, minimally twice each program year, and annually reviews:

- collaboration with and involvement of community volunteer and/or social service organizations in addressing all aspects of educational disadvantage;
- collaborative recruitment and enrollment processes;
- curriculum;
- nutritional services;
- health screening process;
- referrals;
- PQA and Child Outcome data; and
- transition into kindergarten.

The grantee may fulfill this requirement with a local advisory as defined above, or through a regional advisory committee established to assess and meet community need, align high-quality early childhood programming and minimize duplication of efforts in areas such as program options or professional development.

If no regional advisory exists, the work above is done at the local level along with decision making specific to the local program. When a regional group does exist, a local Parent Advisory Committee that includes parents, teaching staff, GSRP administrators, and the Early Childhood Specialist is also established. This committee must meet a minimum of twice a year and should focus on local program considerations.

Family Contacts

The purpose of home visits and parent/teacher conferences are to engage families in the child’s education and to help them provide educational experiences for the children. This process requires staff and parents to interact frequently to update each other about a child’s experiences at home and at school.

Center-Based programs require a minimum of four family contacts, preferably two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences. When the 2+2 pattern is impossible for a particular family, other arrangements should be made to complete the four required contacts. If a parent prefers the visit not take place in the home, a mutual location may be chosen such as a park, restaurant, or a parent’s workplace.
During home visits and parent/teacher conferences, staff:

- seek input from parents about the program and its relationship to their child’s development;
- seek input from parents about how they are supporting children’s development at home;
- partner with parents in appropriate child development goals;
- assist parents to implement child development strategies for home which fit into normal family routines. This can be accomplished by addressing color naming or classification while sorting freshly laundered socks, practicing counting with meaning when children serve themselves (e.g., carrots/crackers/raisins), practicing letter writing and letter identification when children sign their names on a birthday card, etc. (use of worksheets is not appropriate); and
- document each home visit and parent/teacher conference.

Home Visit General Guidelines

It is recommended the first visit occur once the child is enrolled and before the school year begins. The main purpose of the initial visit is to create a foundation for the beginning of a positive partnership between home and school. It is designed to ease the transition into GSRP for the child and family. Activities might include:

- taking photos of parent and child, family pet(s), home, etc.;
- leaving photos of staff and classroom;
- discussing transportation to and from the program;
- discussing parents’ interests and hobbies;
- discussing the importance of parent involvement and the various opportunities;
- sharing program philosophy and curriculum information;
- reviewing results of developmental screening;
- discussing goals the parents have for their child for the year;
- generating a list of possible activities/discussion topics for the next home visit; and
- discussing the required enrollment paperwork.

Second and subsequent visits are designed around the individual child and parent needs. Staff should prepare by scheduling visits one week to ten days in advance, at convenient times for families, and allow for travel time between appointments. Agree upon beginning and ending times for the visit and discuss what to expect during the visit.

When staff safety may be a concern, visit in pairs and carry a cell phone. Always distribute itineraries to pertinent staff and others who should know of the home visitor’s location(s). Lock valuables in the trunk before arriving to the destination.

Upon arrival, make appropriate introductions, include other family members in conversation, ask for suggestions for an appropriate area within the home to meet, and partner with the parent to modify the environment as necessary (e.g., distractions such as a baby crying, television, pets, etc.).

The visit should last at least 60 minutes and include both the child and parent(s). Review the purpose of the visit, ensuring the reciprocal exchange of information and ideas. The home visit should be personalized to meet the individual needs of each child and family by:

- eliciting feedback from parents regarding the child’s interests, concerns, and progress, both at home and in the program;
- sharing information about community resources;
- completing any necessary referral forms together during the visit;
• reinforcing positive parenting;
• exchanging information about the curriculum and its relationship to the child’s development;
• updating each other about the child’s recent experiences;
• exchanging ideas and materials to support the child’s learning and social development at home;
• engaging the parent/guardian and child to model a teaching activity (utilizing home materials whenever possible) and sharing learning goals and outcomes of the activity; and
• allowing time throughout the visit for the parent to ask questions and/or voice concerns.

To conclude, summarize the visit with the parent, provide information about future parent activities, reinforce staff availability for phone calls and questions, and complete documentation of the visit.

**Parent/Teacher Conferences**

Parent/teacher conferences should be held in the fall and spring, and when requested by parents. Conferences should be scheduled to meet the mutual needs of parents and staff and should last a minimum of 45 minutes. This may result in some conferences being held outside of regular work hours.

Conferences should be designed to provide reciprocal information concerning the progress of the child across domains, goals for continuous progress, and any additional support which may be necessary. Developmental information should be exchanged in depth and in a relaxed, positive manner. The conference should be documented for parents in narrative format versus report card format. Anecdotal observations and samples of child-initiated work strengthen parents’ understanding of their child’s development. Staff share curriculum strategies for supporting children’s development and discuss with parents ways that they can support learning at home using household materials and within ordinary household routines. The visit should conclude with ways the family can participate in the program.