



Family Engagement Guide

Revised: March 2024





INTRODUCTION

The purpose of 21st CCLC program is to provide federal funds to support the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during Out-of-School Time (OST) hours. The program helps students meet state and local academic standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and offer families of students served by 21st CCLC opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children’s education, including opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

[Michigan’s Family Engagement Framework](#) was developed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Family Engagement Committee and published in February 2020. This guide has been designed to further outline standards, expectations, strategies, and ideas to support family engagement. Program leaders and staff should use this guide to develop and maintain the essential collaboration that is necessary for positive partnerships with the families of students enrolled in the program.

This guide aligns to the [Weikart Center’s Pyramid of Program Quality](#), the [Michigan Out-of-School Time Standards of Quality](#), and other state and national publications. It may be customized for use in a variety of Michigan 21st CCLC programs. Program staff are encouraged to critique, evaluate, and expand on any of the content provided. Please share lessons learned with [Michigan 21st CCLC staff](#).

What is family engagement?

Michigan defines family engagement as, “A collaborative relationship between families, educators, providers, and partners to support and improve the learning, development, and health of every learner.” ([Michigan’s Family Engagement Framework](#)).

What do we mean by “family”?

Traditionally, “family” has referred to parent involvement. Yet, it is increasingly common for other adults (step parents, partners of parents, grandparents, extended family members, and foster parents) to play a significant role in the lives of children. In order to reflect these changes in our society, we are using the term “family” to recognize **all** adults who share a large portion of the responsibility for a child’s well-being.

Where does family engagement begin?

Family engagement begins with the planning, development and staffing of the out-of-school-time program. It is one of the philosophical underpinnings of a 21st CCLC program. “We need to believe that all families sincerely care about their children and will do everything they can to support them. If we reach out with respect, family members will get involved,” [writes educator Ilene Carver](#).



What's the difference between family involvement and engagement?

An involved family member takes part in the activities already determined by the program. An engaged family member takes a step further, often becoming part of the program's decision-making process. Think of the two as complimentary actions, a kind of yin and yang that together produce better outcomes for students. ([The Anne E. Casey Foundation Blog, February 2023](#))

Family Involvement	vs	Family Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ One-way communication initiated by the program staff.▪ A series of events planned by program staff such as Family Nights, Talent Shows, Open Houses, etc.▪ Informing family about what the children are doing in the OST/after-school program.▪ Goals are to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ inform families of child's and/or program's needs.○ "fix" problems and "sell" families on our ideas.○ meet program requirements.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Two-way communication initiated equally by program staff and families.▪ A set of daily practices and interactions with families and community partners.▪ Eliciting energy, ideas, and strategies to address family and community needs and priorities.▪ Goals are to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Create genuine partnerships.○ Empower families to support well-being of the family and the community.○ Promote advocacy.

We need to change the preposition. We need to start doing "with" families, not "to" families.

— Northern Michigan School Administrator

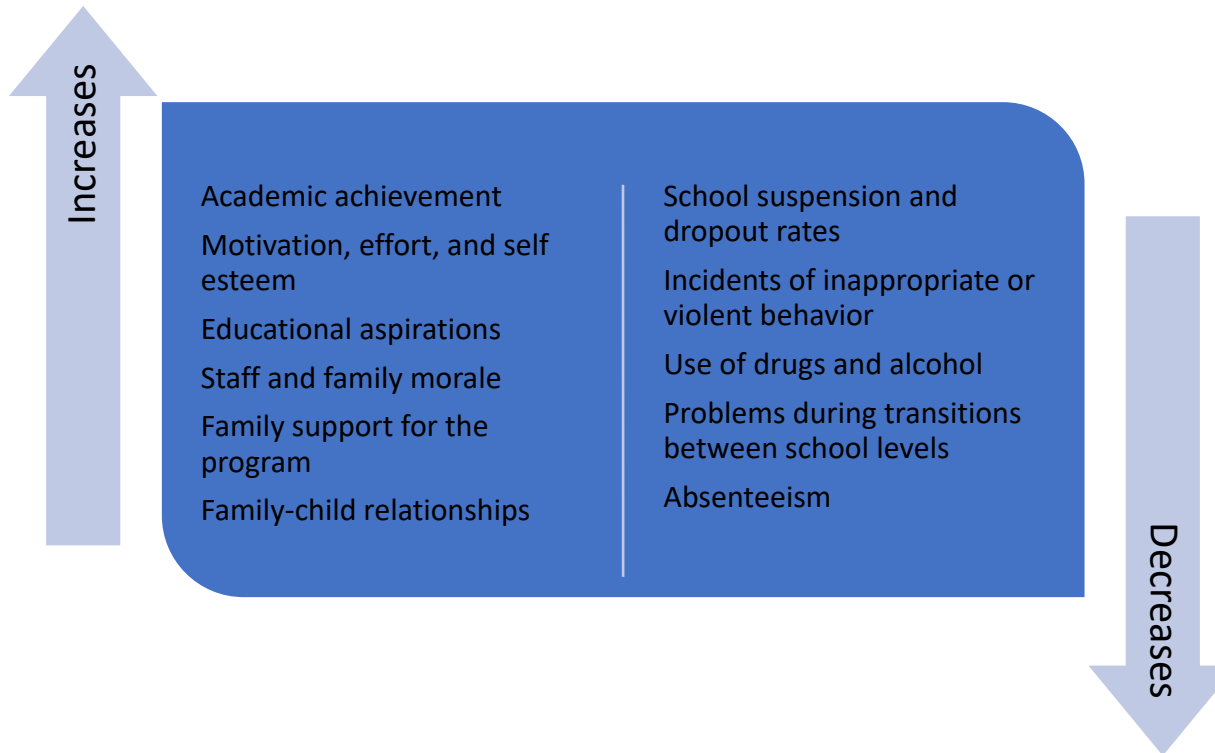
Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools are committed to reach out to families in meaningful ways and families are committed to actively supporting their children. Authentic family engagement fosters personal relationships, respect, and mutual understanding with families. Authentic family engagement also includes sharing data with families about their learner, supporting home cultures, and aligning family engagement activities with program or school improvement goals. ([Michigan's Family Engagement Framework](#)).



Why is family engagement important?

Family engagement is increasingly emerging as a primary predictor for children’s academic success. Family experiences are significant predictors of cognitive skills and social-emotional skills, such as motivation, attention, impulse control, and self-confidence. Studies of family engagement in education reveal large associations between family engagement and success for students. Child outcomes improve considerably when schools and families collaborate on individual children’s needs, goals, programs, and progress. ([Michigan’s Family Engagement Framework](#)). *These benefits remain true for children and families regardless of household income, race, or ethnicity* ([Henderson & Mapp, 2002](#)).

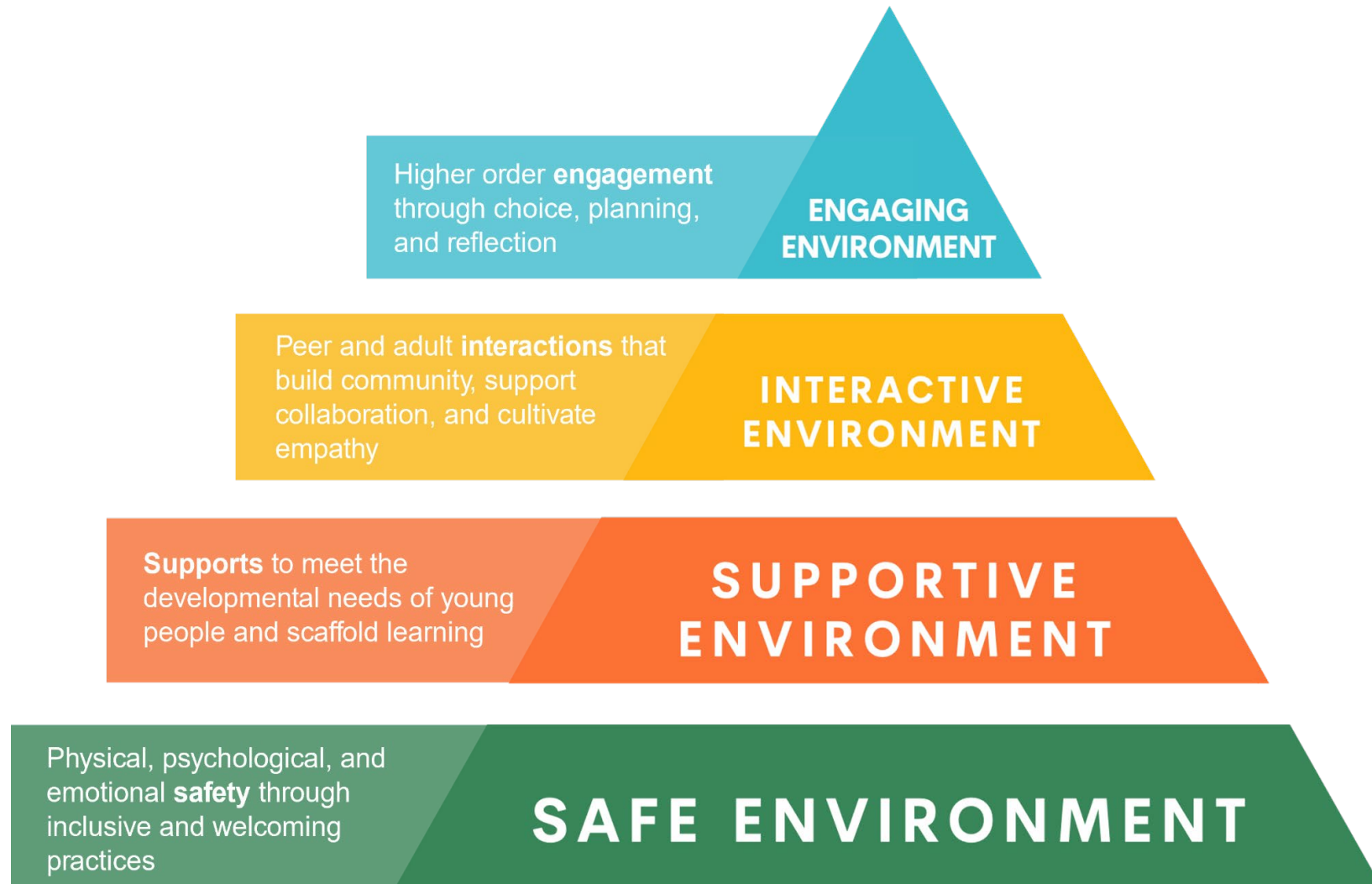
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:





Pyramid of Program Quality

Developed by David P. Weikart's Center for Youth Program Quality





Aligned to Pyramid of Quality

This guide aligns to the [Weikart Center's Pyramid of Program Quality](#), the [Michigan Out-of-School Time Standards of Quality](#), and other state and national publications.



Families will be more likely to become full participants in programs that can establish and maintain environments that are safe, supportive, interactive and engaging.



SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Definition: OST programs create and ensure a welcoming culture and safe environment for all families and youth. Families and staff engage in regular, meaningful dialogue about OST program goals, expectations, and student success.

Expectation	Strategies and Ideas	Staff
Orient each family to the goals and vision of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As students enroll, meet with all families face-to-face for an orientation and follow up with those not able to come: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide handbooks, policies, procedures. ○ Communicate expectations for family engagement. 	<p>Site Coordinator (SC) & Project Director (PD)</p>
Promote a family-friendly environment where all parents and family members feel welcomed, included, supported, and valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge, greet, and assist ALL visitors with a smile. • Make your site physically say “Welcome”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “You only get one chance to make a great first impression.” ○ Communicate location changes. ○ Ensure space is clean and accessible. ○ Showcase children’s work. ○ Place a greeter by the entrance during events. 	<p>All</p>
Recognize and accept difference and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Programs & Activities to honor all cultures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn how to pronounce families’ names correctly. ○ Include diverse representation in communications/media. ○ Provide materials in all relevant languages. 	<p>All</p>



Michigan 21st CCLC Family Engagement Guide

<p>Demonstrate to all children that both staff and families care about their well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Use multiple ways to communicate with families, keeping in mind the multiple ways people prefer to communicate:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Phone calls, texts, emails.○ Social media.○ Handwritten thank you notes.○ Invitations made by the children.● Communicate news and events.● Create a family space where you keep family information and resources:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Flyers, newsletters.○ Signs to promote upcoming activities and events.○ Bulletin board (physical and/or virtual).○ Scrapbook, video, or other artifacts of program activities.○ Recognize volunteers.○ Celebrate successes such as the birth of a new child or a new job.	<p>All</p>
--	---	-------------------

Additional Program Ideas and Notes:



SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Definition: A program that offers a supportive environment promotes opportunities for families to participate with the program and utilize resources provided. Within a supportive environment, OST programs provide avenues for staff and families to share information, opportunities to observe the program, and access to community resources and services.

Expectation	Strategies & Ideas	Staff
<p>Ensure all interactions with families are warm, respectful, and trusting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff on the importance of positive communications such as language, tone, body language, and how to capitalize on each encounter with families. • Use positive communication strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hold sensitive conversations in private. ○ Request conferences at mutually convenient times. ○ Keep conversations factual and objective. ○ Look for areas of agreement. ○ Be mindful of language barriers. ○ Agree to keep suggestions in mind. ○ Follow up with next steps and communicate results to the family. 	<p style="text-align: center;">All</p>
<p>Provide a venue for families to connect with each other and community members to identify and coordinate resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary the times and places for program events and meetings so that all families have an opportunity to attend. • Hold an adult-only event or try splitting adults and children for a portion of your family event, so that adults have a chance to meet and speak with each other. 	<p style="text-align: center;">SC & PD</p>
<p>Help parents and families recognize and value what their children have achieved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share successes and make positive acknowledgements at every opportunity. 	<p style="text-align: center;">SC & Frontline Staff</p>



Michigan 21st CCLC Family Engagement Guide

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight each child. Ask family members to share pictures of their child at different ages. • Hold special visit days for specific family members. • Display student work in banks, libraries, senior centers, and art fairs. • Give public readings of children’s writing at local coffee houses. 	(FS)
Provide formal and informal opportunities to family members to engage with all staff members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask families what they want: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One question surveys posted by suggestion box. ○ Elicit feedback after events. 	SC
Welcome and encourage program observations by family members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to observe programs both formally and informally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formal invitation to student showcase. ○ Invite parents to hang out. ○ Invite family members to chaperone or join on trips and special events. 	All
Provide access to resources for families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect and partner with other community organizations that offer programs to support families such as libraries, school-based social workers, local non-profits, and/or health and wellness initiatives. • Put “Family Needs” on the program staff meeting agenda. • Use family nights as opportunities to share other programs & activities. • Community resources can range from recreation opportunities, local businesses, career development, and social services. 	PD & SC
Act as a liaison with school day staff to help navigate and address the needs of the student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate with or lead school or district-wide projects such as winter clothing or food drives. • Participate in school open houses with staff. • Program staff may advertise services offered by the school that is relevant at the time (e.g. test prep, sports tryouts, etc.). 	SC



Michigan 21st CCLC Family Engagement Guide

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources on student transitions from grade-to-grade, post-secondary, and career interests. 	
<p>Minimize communication barriers that might be a roadblock to participation by families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and honor the cultures of families served. • Provide all communications in various formats and all relevant languages. • Be mindful of family religious practices and dietary restrictions. 	<p>All</p>

Additional Program Ideas and Notes:



INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Definition: Families are included and encouraged to be active participants in the OST program by ongoing and reciprocal communication, education, and volunteering time and/or goods in both formal and informal settings. Families are invited to be vested stakeholders in the program and their student’s success. Families are encouraged to specify their needs and give feedback to the program.

Expectation	Strategies and Ideas	Staff
Provide families with clear and precise communication as to how to meaningfully interact and support your OST program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize various communication channels to clearly specify how families can interact and support the program. • Ask families to share their preferred method of communication. • Create a blog/social media space for two-way communication. • Use phone or texting apps such as “Remind.” 	SC
Create an environment where everyone’s voice is heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an environment where all families are given opportunities to provide feedback and suggestions. • Use incentives to recognize the participation of families; such as, certificates for participation or special opportunities like chaperoning field trips (avoid monetary or gift incentives). 	All
Maximize informal interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think thoughtfully about interactions during pick-up or drop-off, school or community events, casual occurrences where staff see families. • Sponsor family events that showcase students and encourage families to visit your program (drawings, potlucks, performances, etc.). • Book Group: hold an adult-only book night. • Invite families to host workshops to share their skills/talents. 	All



Michigan 21st CCLC Family Engagement Guide

<p>Develop a formal plan for family interactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track the frequency and nature of interactions with family members using communication logs. • Conduct training on family engagement for frontline staff. • Ask family members about their skills and hobbies and when they are most likely to be available, so that you can harness their talents when you are doing activities and/or special events. 	<p>SC</p>
<p>Provide a variable schedule for programs and activities to maximize opportunities for family participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an annual timeline of opportunities for formal family communication that is shared with families. • Host a community service day where families give back to the community. • Create a Family Exchange Bank- for ideas, resources, and practical items such as food/clothing. 	<p>SC & FS</p>
<p>Capitalize on planned school events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in school district happenings such as conferences, open houses, family/sports events. • Set up a table or host a booth. • Have your classroom/space open during conferences. • Showcase student artwork/projects. 	<p>All</p>
<p>Utilize formal surveying approaches (surveys, focus groups) to solicit feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal opportunities to provide feedback can be coupled with activities, events, and meetings to ensure families feel heard. • Include family interests survey in the registration and orientation packet. • Conduct small group/focus group meeting with specific topics in mind to solicit feedback (in-person or virtually). 	<p>All</p>

Additional Program Ideas and Notes:



ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT

Definition: Families are actively involved with program planning, implementation, evaluation, and OST advocacy.

Expectation	Strategies & Ideas	Staff
<p>Families and staff engage as partners in program decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are included in program planning and design. • Families serve in advisory roles for both activities and the larger program decisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish an advisory board ensuring youth, family members and staff are represented at both site and grant level. ○ The advisory board addresses issues such as: program policies, content, partnerships, funding/sustainability, marketing, recruiting, activities, and other areas dependent on program needs. 	<p>PD & SC</p>
<p>Families implement and support program components.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged family members may plan and facilitate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family events/workshops. ○ Student showcase. ○ Cultural Experiences (cooking, dance, etc.). ○ Share talents and hobbies. ○ Academic support. ○ Career exploration. 	<p>SC & FS</p>
<p>Families participate in program evaluation at multiple levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members are actively involved in the evaluation of the program and the YPQI process. • Families assist in the design of program surveys. • Family members lead focus groups. • Family committees may initiate surveys using Facebook polls, Google forms, Etc. 	<p>SC</p>



Michigan 21st CCLC Family Engagement Guide

<p>Families are empowered to act as advocates for the OST program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members participate in OST/after-school advocacy activities. • Designate at least one staff member or parent to serve as a family liaison. • Letter writing campaigns. • Support strong relationships amongst school, OST, and partners. • Plan & attend “Lights-On” events. • Attend local school board meetings. • Keep abreast of local, state, and national policy that effect OST. 	<p>All</p>
<p>Provide opportunities for families to collaborate and partner with OST networks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members become active in local, state, and national OST networks and advocacy. • Michigan After School Partnership (MASP). • Afterschool Alliance. • Local OST/after-school networks. 	<p>PD & SC</p>

Additional Program Ideas and Notes:



RESOURCES

This list of resources may be useful as programs develop policies and procedures for Family Engagement. The title of each resource provides a link to the online resources. U.S. Department of Education resources are individually linked.

[Afterschool Alliance](#)

Afterschool Research: Parents and Families; Encouraging parent engagement, supporting working families.

[Global Family Research Project](#)

Many research-based articles and tools to support family engagement and OST/after-school programs.

[Google Translate](#)

Allows you to translate written communication. Best for translating single words and phrases, not entire written communication.

[Michigan's Family Engagement Framework](#)

Developed by the Michigan Department of Education (now Michigan Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential) staff and Family Engagement Stakeholder's Committee, February 2020.

[MiRegistry](#)

You for Youth three-part training series developed by the U.S. Department of Education for 21st Century Community Learning Centers program staff (also applicable to any OST staff):

- Family Engagement - Introduction (ID: 94470).
- Family Engagement - Implementation Strategies (ID:94471).
- Family Engagement - Coaching My Staff (ID:94478).

[National Center for Families Learning](#)

Sustain and Gaon: Blueprint for a long-term thriving family literacy/parent engagement Program.

[National Parent Teacher Association](#)

Family engagement resources, national standards, resources for parents, advocacy information, and more.

[U.S. Department of Education Resources:](#)

[Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement.](#)

[Family Literacy.](#)