

# Pennsylvania's Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework: A Companion Guide for Families



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## Introduction

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Families are at the heart of children’s growth, deeply affecting everything from physical health to school success to social skills and emotional well-being. When families and schools work together to support children’s development, children’s potential in school and in life can be realized.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) believes family engagement in education promotes academic success, and improves children’s health, emotional well-being, and social skills. In fact, it strengthens the entire community. Leaders recognize past practices do not always work best. The world is changing; schools and families can use both tried and true ways and new ways of collaborating to support children.

Pennsylvania’s leaders have two core assumptions that create the foundation of support for children and families:

1. All families care deeply about their children and are committed to supporting their children’s learning and development.
2. There are factors that make each family unique and these factors must be considered to truly allow families to feel welcomed, respected, and valued in each learning community.

These factors may include race, ethnicity, income, level of education, how gender roles shape family life, religion, what languages are spoken at home, and if there is a person with a disability in the family. These factors impact how family members participate in children’s educational journeys. PDE believes it is important not to ignore these factors but instead, address them.

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To describe the variety of programs, schools, teachers, administrators and support staff that families rely on to build partnerships throughout their child’s development, we use the term ***Learning Communities***.

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## Background on Pennsylvania’s Family Engagement Framework

This document is a companion piece to *The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework*. The original Framework was created for principals, teachers and other educators. This companion document is written for you—a family member. These two documents together were developed by PDE to explain the standards for creating strong, equal partnerships for family engagement in children’s development and education to educators and families.

The process began in June 2017, when PDE and partner organizations created a Family Engagement Coalition. The Coalition includes more than 100 people from across the Commonwealth, including family members, early childhood education providers, school personnel and community members. The result of their work was the *Pennsylvania Family Engagement Framework*, which provides guidance for Learning Communities to develop partnerships for supporting children from birth until they are college, career, and community ready. The term *Learning Communities* is used to describe the variety of programs, schools, teachers, administrators and support staff to which families build partnerships and relationships throughout their child’s development.

## Empowering Families through this Document

This companion to the Family Engagement Framework is written for you—the parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, foster parent, aunt, uncle, or other invested adult who loves and cares for a young person. Knowing the family is not only about biological relations but also emotional ones, Pennsylvania has an inclusive definition of the term *family*:

*Families are those people who have intimate, caring bonds with each other over time and who take care of a child physically and emotionally.*

## What is Family Engagement?

Family engagement refers to a Learning Community – family partnership in which educators, including early childhood education professionals, teachers and other education professionals, and family members have a shared goal of positive learning and development for the child in their joint care, whether a child is an infant, elementary school student, or teenager getting ready for college, a career, or participation in the community. Effective partnerships are intentional, impactful and meaningful. Learning Communities value and support you in your role as your child’s first teacher. It is essential that Learning Communities recognize and rely on the leadership of families and community partners to shape the educational environment at the program, classroom, and school level, as well as at the broader state and national levels.

These partnerships are effective when Learning Communities respect the strengths of each family, respond positively to the cultural and language background of each family, and encourage positive, two-way communication.

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“Family is a strong word. For me, it means to have someone there for you, who you can count on and talk to them to solve your problems. Family consists of people who support and love you unconditionally. Family is not always defined in bloodline but is defined in how we love and care for everyone in the family.”

Ethan, age 14

*The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework, page 17*

<https://bit.ly/PFEngagement> <sup>(1)</sup>

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# Learning Communities and Family Engagement

The partnership between schools, early learning programs, families and community partners

**Effective family engagement is intentional, meaningful, and impactful.**

Learning Communities value and support families in their role as a child's first teacher, and leverage the expertise, knowledge, and leadership of families and community partners to shape the educational environment at the program, classroom, school, state and national level.

These partnerships are strengths-based, culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, and rely on two-way communications. They focus on the shared goal of positive learning and developmental outcomes for children.



## Leverage Expertise, Knowledge & Leadership

Learning Communities

Families

Community Partners

## Key Components

Two-Way Communications



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## Key Components of Effective Family Engagement

As the Family Engagement Coalition members articulated their definition of family engagement, they realized some aspects of partnerships need ongoing attention and support to be effective. Effective family engagement practices are characterized by six components. Effective family engagement in children's/youth's growth and learning is:

1. **Strengths-based.** To achieve strengths-based practices, Learning Communities must recognize, respect, and rely on what you and each family contributes to children's well-being and learning experiences, including culture, home languages, and personal experiences.
2. **Culturally and linguistically responsive.** To express appreciation for these critical parts of a family's and child's identity, Learning Communities must provide instruction and assessment that addresses the cultures and the languages of your child and family.
3. **Bi-directional and built on two-way communication.** Learning Communities not only share information on a regular basis, but seek information from you about your child, creating environments and relationships in which you can feel comfortable and will be empowered to contact teachers with questions, updates and concerns.
4. **Trust centered.** Relationships flourish when trust exists between your family and Learning Community partners. Learning Communities work to establish relationships with you that show trustworthiness and convey trust with your family.
5. **Family centered.** When educators seek, listen to, and incorporate the voices of your family and others, in their classrooms and programs, children experience the kind of continuity and predictability that allows them to grow in confidence and success.
6. **Equitable.** Educators create dynamics in which all families are understood to have value and power equal to educators in terms of children's development and learning. Resources are provided according to what you need to support your child to thrive.



The responsibility to create an environment that welcomes family engagement starts with Learning Communities. When it is clearly conveyed you are your child’s first and life-long teacher, true partnerships can emerge.

## Why Does Family Engagement Matter?

Many studies have found children experiencing effective family engagement practices, regardless of their income levels or family backgrounds, are more likely than other children to have positive outcomes. For example, these children are more likely to:

- Attend school regularly;
- Adapt well to school and show good social skills and good behavior;
- Earn high grades and achieve high test scores;
- Pass their classes, earn class credits, and enroll in high-level classes;
- Move to the next grade level; and
- Graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary school (for example, vocational school, credentialing programs, or college).<sup>(3)</sup>

## Foundational Practices: Conditions that Set the Stage for Success

To fully engage families and community members in children’s learning, Learning Communities intentionally develop the attitudes, knowledge and actions that lead to positive family partnerships. The Foundational Practices are the conditions which need to be implemented when developing an effective Family Engagement strategy within a Learning Community.

## Learning Communities rely on families’ knowledge and leadership

Learning Communities do the following things:

### Listen to families

Learning Communities who foster family engagement ask for your ideas and work together with you and other families to move your ideas forward. Learning Communities need families’ expertise to put family engagement activities into practice. They include families when they plan, make decisions, carry out activities, and evaluate progress. In short, Learning Communities

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### What are funds of knowledge?

Funds of knowledge develop from personal and life experiences, skills in managing everyday social environments, and cultural views shaped by historical, social, and political experiences. These funds of knowledge represent information which may not have been taught in school but are deeply valuable and relevant to learning and thriving in school and community.

For example, a student who sells vegetables at a farmers’ market has knowledge of finances and mathematics a teacher can use to extend learning about economics. Or, a child who knows how to perform a complex dance from their family’s country of origin already has knowledge about music and movement that can inform how the child—and classroom—can benefit from a child’s knowledge and skill.

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develop goals together with families and share responsibility for the child’s development and learning.

### **Value diversity in the learning community**

Learning Communities value all families and seek the voices of families from various cultural, linguistic, racial, and economic backgrounds when planning. They appreciate *funds of knowledge*—those areas of expertise, families’ values, and cultural knowledge families have—and use families’ knowledge and skills to improve the Learning Community.

### **Empower families to lead and advocate**

You make decisions, and advocate for your children every day; Learning Communities know this. Learning Communities empower you to advocate or ask for the policies to best support children, Learning Communities and the broader community.

### **Cultivate community partnerships**

In addition to asking families for help, Learning Communities reach out to community members and organizations such as libraries and faith-based organizations. They build partnerships with businesses, before and after school programs, summer camps, and other programs. They reach out to neighborhood organizations to learn from their expertise and build on their strengths to deepen connections and improve families’ experiences.

### **Provide resources for families to be able to participate**

Effective administrators ensure there is money in the budget to encourage families and community members to participate in activities and on governing boards. Administrators set aside money to help pay for meals, transportation, and child care to allow for participation and provide stipends when appropriate.

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Culture includes aspects of family and community life that shape identity and behaviors, such as the way people think, how people communicate, what language(s) is spoken at home, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions, and family roles. Culture affects relationships and expectations and the social and political groups in which people participate. Culture is influenced by race, ethnicity, and religion.

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## **Educators build culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive partnerships with families.**

Learning Communities seeking effective family engagement focus on children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds and home life as strengths. Families’ cultural lives are dynamic and changing, but they are also passed down through generations.<sup>(2)</sup> Language is just as important as culture. It affects how people think and communicate and it can be an important part of the pride one feels in their identity. Language

also has important practical and educational aspects. Effective Learning Communities demonstrate they value having diverse cultures and languages represented.

### **Encourage children’s and families’ pride**

Learning Communities promote a child’s positive identity development, including pride in race, ethnicity, home language, and culture; encouraging family to promote positivity, too. Educators display positive images of diverse families, including families with young parents and grandparents, LGBTQ+ families, fathers and youth-friendly messages within Learning Communities. They create spaces to nurture culturally responsive attitudes and values. They use language in the classroom which is inclusive and promotes diversity—while avoiding language that stereotypes people by race, culture, language or gender roles.

### **Know about children’s home language**

Although everyone within a Learning Community, may not speak the home language of each child in the Learning Community, they find out which language the family prefers to use. They know about the adults’ literacy levels and how the adults usually want to communicate—by text, phone call, in person, or by email—so good communication can take place on a regular basis.

### **Seek translation, interpretation, or both**

Because Pennsylvania’s Learning Communities are becoming increasingly diverse, there is a need for written translation and spoken interpretation support so they can share information, resources, and support in a language that is understandable. They need help from adult interpreters (avoiding the use of sibling interpreters if possible), cultural brokers (people who can explain the meaning of various behaviors and approaches that differ based on cultural background)— and community members to support good communication.

### **Proactively engage fathers**

Effective Learning Communities recognize the critical importance of fathers in the family and educational journey. They partner with programs that are inclusive of fathers, and they look for activities to develop fathers as leaders.

### **Educate themselves about resources**

With help and information from families and community partners, Learning Communities seek information about specific cultural values and practices. They develop “cultural asset maps,” or

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### **What is equity?**

Equity means providing opportunities for every child to access the appropriate care and educational resources they need to thrive, regardless of race, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, or ability, family composition, education level, or income, and geographic location. Equity is like “equality” but focuses on providing according to need rather than in the same amounts or kinds of support.

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inventories of resources—cultural institutions, people, networks and organizations— to learn about the cultural resources in the community.

### **Work toward self-awareness**

Learning Communities support processes and activities which promote staff and families to understand their *own* beliefs, values, experiences and biases. They want to increase their self-



awareness to appreciate each child and family and improve their work and relationships. They use culturally and linguistically responsive teaching to make the most of children’s learning opportunities.

### **Work toward equity**

Providing opportunities within Learning Communities to promote conversations about race, culture, language, and equity can reduce prejudice. Learning Communities use measures

and analyze progress on academic achievement, graduation rates, and access to services to make sure children from all families have chances to succeed. They develop shared goals to address cultural responsiveness, equity and anti-bias within the Learning Community.

## **Educators build safe and inclusive environments.**

Inclusive learning environments are those which serve all children without leaving anyone out. Appropriate services and learning opportunities are provided to all students, including English Learners and students with disabilities. Learning Communities that create effective partnerships with families take the following steps to create environments that are inclusive and safe both physically and emotionally. (The word *inclusive* can mean welcoming to families of diverse backgrounds; it is also used to describe environments which are accessible and equitable to people with disabilities.)

### **Create socially and emotionally inclusive and safe environments**

Learning Communities create inclusive environments and ensure children and families can participate fully. They ensure programs are meaningful, engaging, and responsive to all, including children and family members with disabilities, English Learners, and others who need accommodations. In addition, educators establish environments which promote connections between children and adults, other children, and within families. They prioritize emotional safety and ensuring children feel safe, whether related to physical safety, bullying, or social media—and they support families so you can discuss these issues with your children too.

### **Promote inclusion as a value**

Learning Communities talk about the many benefits of inclusion. For example, they promote conversations between children, families, community partners and staff to improve practices related to inclusive learning environments.



### **Provide physically accessible and safe environments**

In addition to protecting children’s social and emotional needs, there are legal and practical considerations. Administrators ensure physical access and provide reasonable accommodations so children and families with disabilities can participate in activities, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They develop and review safety plans to ensure everyone in the Learning Community who has a disability, whether a child, an educator, or a family member, is considered when safety and evacuation plans are made.

### **Share protocols to address concerns**

Safety and security procedures in place within the Learning Community are explained and families are provided information and support to understand the requirements for participation (for example, in visiting a classroom or volunteering). Recognizing it can be difficult to raise concerns, they explain how to raise concerns about safety within the learning community and respond promptly and respectfully to concerns.

## **Educators continue to learn and grow as professionals.**

PDE recognizes children are not the only ones learning and adults surrounding children also need to keep learning and growing in their professional roles. To this end, effective Learning Communities do the following.

### **Look to families as experts**

Although professionals are experts because of their training and experience, you are the expert when it comes to your children. Likewise, community partners can be experts when it comes to the cultural, spiritual, and social life of communities. Learning Communities seek to learn from family and community members. They view family members as leaders and try to learn from them. Administrators provide clear expectations—building good relationships with families is important to children’s learning.

### **Engage in professional development**

Learning Communities are always striving to become more skilled at working with all different types of families. They learn from your family and other families, communicate with you about

your children’s progress, help develop social connections and networks, and engage fathers in activities.

### **Learn about ethics and use best practices**

Learning Communities spend time learning about ethics—what is right when it comes to keeping information confidential or sharing information related to families. They understand program, school, district or statewide systems and services affecting their students and families.

Administrators allow time for staff to think about and plan activities for family engagement. They review policies and procedures, together with families and community partners, to determine changes which may be necessary.

### **Practice self-care**

Caring for children, teaching, and providing direct services are deeply rewarding. With the increased knowledge, skills and responsibilities within Learning Community staff, it is important the adults who surround a child, practice self-care. Administrators ensure all staff receive the support they need to maintain their own well-being and mental health. They support work-life balance and pay attention to guidelines, so work and practices are fair and equitable. When Learning Community staff are supported to take care of themselves, they are better able to teach and support children and families.



## Standards and Supportive Practices

Standards provide educators and family members with information about Learning Communities' goals. The standards presented in this section provide benchmarks to Pennsylvania's Learning Communities to build strong partnerships that support children from the time they are born until they are ready to enter college, career and/or the community.

### Standard 1

Connect families to community resources that support their goals, interests, and needs.

### Standard 2

Build partnerships with families that are strengths-based, authentic, reciprocal, and respectful.

### Standard 3

Partner with families to identify information, resources, and strategies to support them in their roles as teachers, models, encouragers, monitors, leaders and advocates as they support their child's learning and development.

### Standard 4

Provide intentional opportunities for families to connect and engage with each other.

### Standard 5

Support families as they develop their leadership and advocacy skills.

### Standard 6

Build partnerships with families during times of transition.

## Standard 1. Families Are Connected to Community Resources

Learning Communities connect families to community resources that support families' interests, goals and needs.

These are some ways families support partnerships with their Learning Communities to reach this standard.

### Recognize your family's knowledge and strengths

Families do a lot to maintain family well-being and cope with challenges by:

- Giving your child a deep sense of family identity, sharing stories, history, photos and information and connection about your extended family;
- Demonstrating unique skills, including your job, sharing stories, artistic gifts, leadership in your communities, or volunteering through your place of worship or in your neighborhood; and
- Teaching your children about your family's values, such as the importance of hard work, problem-solving, honesty, being open-minded, having a sense of humor, or showing compassion for others.

You are experts at being able to talk about your families' values, skills, and knowledge—especially knowledge about your children. Your expertise helps educators better understand all the assets of the child and the child's family life.

### Learn about and use available services

You want to learn about and use the resources and services available to you by:

- Reaching out to your Learning Community for information, guidance and resources; and
- Looking to your community, including your library, community center, health clinic, neighborhood listservs, and other places, to ask or read about services that might be helpful to your family.

### Stay in communication with professionals

Family members develop and maintain relationships with professional partners in ways which are comfortable and convenient for them. Here are some actions you can do to support your children:

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### What is a strengths-based approach?

A strengths-based approach focuses on the assets families have including language and culture. In a strength-based approach, these assets are celebrated. It also recognizes the resourcefulness that families living in adversity use to cope and succeed. In a strengths-based approach, family members in tough situations are recognized for the grit, resourcefulness, and resilience it takes to manage hardship, take steps to move forward, and care for yourself and your loved ones.

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- Collaborating with Learning Community staff to identify which local services and resources best match your family’s interests, culture, languages, values, needs, and goals;
- Connecting with professionals—whether to get guidance regarding a concern or be proactive in learning how to prevent problems from arising;
- Staying in touch with professionals about your child’s or family’s changing needs and problem solving together; and
- Even when issues are sensitive or frightening, such as in situations of domestic violence, co-parenting challenges, or health concerns, asking for help, knowing physical safety and psychological well-being at home and in the Learning Community are essential to children’s ability to feel safe and succeed in school.

## **Standard 2. Families and Learning Communities Build Reciprocal, Respectful Partnerships**

**Learning Communities build partnerships with families that are strengths-based, authentic, reciprocal, and respectful.**

Learning Communities are responsible for reaching out to families to learn more about your strengths, challenges, goals, and cultures. What can families do to make these dynamic partnerships come alive? Below are some ideas for building strong, positive relationships with your Learning Community.

### **Know you are your child’s most important teacher**

Learning Communities have studied the research and best practices in their field for many years, but no one has studied your child as much as you have. You are the expert, when it comes to your child. Ways to demonstrate this include:

- Learning to see yourself as central to your child’s well-being and success;
- Claiming you are your child’s first and forever teacher and you have many strengths and areas of knowledge to share with your child; and
- Knowing your child’s success in school depends as much on your engagement in your child’s educational journey as it does on an educators’ knowledge and skill in the classroom.

### **Learn more about cultural differences and ways to show respect**

Being respectful of cultures, backgrounds and values is a two-way street in any partnership. Some ways you can be culturally responsive and respectful to those in your Learning Community might be:

- Learning about other cultures and showing respect and appreciation for differences in home language, values, interests, expertise, and vision for children;



- Understanding how different cultures influence caregiving styles, child development, family life, and relationships, including asking and learning from other families and educators;
- When misunderstandings occur, working to repair relationships and create positive and caring communities of learners for all children, families, and professionals, involved; and
- Welcoming and participating in events with families of diverse backgrounds.

### **Be inclusive of other adults in the family**

It can be difficult to work through challenging relationships within families. From a child’s perspective, being cared for by multiple adult family members strengthens their sense of support, safety, and opportunity. To support children’s well-being and development, you can take actions such as:

- Recognizing children benefit emotionally, financially, physically, and academically when they have various adult family members closely involved in their lives;
- Intentionally creating a network of caring adults the child considers to be family, regardless of gender, biological, or custodial relationship; and
- Communicating with and including other adults in the family who are closely and positively involved in your child’s life.

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### **What is culturally responsive education?**

Culture is at the heart of how and what children learn. It affects how Learning Community staff, families, and children communicate and receive information, and it influences how we think and learn. Learning Communities who are culturally responsive have a positive perspective about you and all families, have high expectations for all learners, incorporate cultural contexts and languages spoken in the community into learning experiences, are student-centered, utilize curricula that is culturally appropriate, and see themselves as facilitators—not always the experts—in children’s learning processes.

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## **Standard 3. Learning Communities and Families Together Support Children’s Learning and Development**

**Learning Communities partner with families to identify information, resources, and strategies to support you in your roles as teachers, models, encouragers, monitors, and advocates as you support your child’s learning and development.**

Learning Communities share resources and strategies with families like information about developmental milestones, learning standards and instructional practices. They ask about your families’ experiences and routines, create opportunities to expand your knowledge and skills, and discuss

children's progress and assessment results with you. Here are some ways you can be a partner with your child's Learning Community to support your child's learning and development.

### **Be proud of all you do to support your child's learning**

Family members do many things to support children's development and success, including:

- Being your child's encourager, monitor, role model, and advocate. The role as encourager is one of the most important aspects of children's success in school and beyond;
- Working with other family members to be wise decision-makers and collaborators; and
- Expressing pride in your child's unique gifts and your strengths as a family.

### **Value all aspects of your child's development**

Child development has many dimensions and is constantly changing. Two ways that families value all their child's developments are:

- Enjoying your child's desire to play and have fun as an important part of their learning process, especially in the early years; and
- Paying as much attention to a child's social and emotional development and life skills, as to their academic development. Examples of important skills for children include cooperation, communication, positive conflict management, the ability to ask for what they need and be assertive, problem-solving, decision-making, and the ability to manage stress and develop resilience. These skills are critical to success in school and life.

### **Communicate with your child and others about the educational journey**

Communication takes effort, but the rewards of good communication are invaluable. Sharing your child's strengths and interests, your family's experiences, and what learning or development is happening at home—and asking for help in areas where you could use some information is a first step to building a partnership with your child's Learning Community. Here are some ways that families can support effective communication:

- Asking for communication to occur in ways which work for you, whether it is by email, in person, by text, social media platforms or a phone call.
- Asking to communicate in a language you can understand, perhaps with the help of an interpreter or translator;
- Working with your Learning Community to set goals for your child and develop strategies to accomplish them; and
- Including your child in communication—for example, by asking and talking to them about their well-being, goals, and decisions.

### **Keep learning and asking for information**

As the saying goes, there are no bad questions. Understanding learning standards – what children should know and be capable of doing at certain ages – and child development milestones, including:

- Ensuring healthy social and emotional development;
- Asking for information about assessment results and instructional decisions.
- Seeking guidance on when your child should see another professional for concerns related to physical and mental health development; and
- Welcoming opportunities to learn about infant, child or youth development, parenting, or culturally responsive practices.

### **Standard 4. Families Connecting with Other Families**

**Learning Communities provide intentional opportunities for families to connect and engage with each other.**

Families serve as incredible resources for each other, whether by providing practical help or encouragement, sharing information and resources, or being present during times of crisis.

#### **Take part in opportunities to get to know other families**

Connect with other families and the community, including by:

- Creating or participating in networks with other families in your learning community, neighborhood groups, faith-based communities, youth groups, sports activities, clubs, family support networks, and volunteer groups or service projects;
- Participating in events offered for families;
- Encouraging and helping other families, and sharing resources and information benefitting families and children; and
- Creating a voluntary family contact list or online group which facilitates communication between families.

#### **Communicate about expectations, roles, and responsibilities**

In the spirit of good communication mentioned earlier, it is helpful when you ask questions and provide feedback on roles and expectations, by:

- Asking for information about group communication systems, group norms for showing respect for families from diverse backgrounds, and responsibilities of, or



expectations for, participants in various activities;

- Making sure with group leaders that multilingual families can participate in events, group conversations, and community decision making;
- Ensuring parents with disabilities can participate in activities;
- Seeking information about confidentiality when there are group conversations; and
- Requesting groups, conversations, or events be held when working parents can participate.

### **Share your knowledge, skills, and encouragement with other families**

Families have many talents, skills, and strengths which children, Learning Communities, and neighborhoods need. You can enrich your community by:

- Serving as a mentor, sports coach, club leader, faith-based leader, or event volunteer to make activities possible for families;
- Using specific skills or resources to benefit the community or families, whether by providing haircuts, carpentry work, seamstress or tailoring skills, editing support, translation, graphic design, artistic abilities, organizational skills, sports leadership, and so forth; and
- Encouraging other families in times of need by being a positive, friendly presence, staying in touch through visits, phone calls, or social media, and organizing practical help such as transportation, food, or information.



## **Standard 5. Families Advocate for their Children and Support Other Families**

### **Learning Communities support families as they develop leadership and advocacy skills.**

Learning Communities value and encourage you to take the lead on planning goals, finding solutions and making decisions about your child's education. You can try some of these activities to grow your leadership skills.

#### **Become an advocate for your child**

Children, depending on their age, are dependent on their families to take care of them and speak up for them. You can be an advocate for your children by:

- Sharing concerns about your child with your Learning Community and/or other professionals and working together to seek a solution.
- Learning how to obtain information or even whom to ask for help takes time and practice. When you learn information from people who are helpful, sharing this information with others can help pave the way for them. When families make connections with resources it provides good role modeling of seeking and accepting supports. Encourage your child/youth to become a self-advocate and leader.

As children grow into middle and high school, they increasingly can advocate for themselves—with the ongoing involvement of caring adults as needed. You can encourage your child's self-advocacy skills in several ways:

- Supporting your child to ask for what they need to be safe, healthy, and able to learn.
- Fostering a sense of leadership, supporting them to make changes in their Learning Community in ways benefitting them and other students.
- Encouraging your child to participate in groups, promote skills and empower others to make a difference in the family, neighborhood, and community.

#### **Participate for positive change**

Learning Communities create opportunities for family engagement. When families take advantage of those opportunities—or create new ones, it supports not only your child but can transform communities in positive ways. Here are some ways of participating:

- In addition to speaking up on behalf of your child, speak up on behalf of other children.
- Sharing your ideas on how to improve community matters such as school policies, financial decisions, instructional strategies, or family engagement activities.
- Participating in voting for your city, county, state, or country is also an important civic contribution.
- Sharing your skills, culture, language, and talents. It will enrich your community and instill pride in your child. It also allows the community to see the diversity of backgrounds and skills present in the Learning Community.

### **Invite other family members to join you**

As you grow in your community participation and leadership skills, you can invite others to join you. Here are some ways to broaden the circle of participating families:

- Inviting new or excluded families to join conversations is a way of making a more inclusive circle within the community. It is especially important to look for and invite families who are different from other families because of national origin, home language, ability, race or ethnicity, income or education level, or where they live.
- Ensuring fathers and father-figures, grandparents, foster parents, and other family members and caregivers are made to feel welcome in activities and conversations will create a positive climate within the learning community.
- Sharing information and resources in a variety of ways can allow all families to stay current on events and decisions. Some families may not be able to participate in person, but they might appreciate another parent's update by phone, social media, or email.

## **Standard 6. Families Support Transitions**

**Learning Communities build partnerships with families during times of transition.**

Change is hard. A transition into a new program, classroom, or school is a time of change not just for the child, but often the whole family. Learning Communities develop procedures to support you through transitions and you can help your child through transition periods.

### **Prepare yourself and your child**

Preparation is an important part of a smooth experience through a transition for your family and your child. Knowing what to expect means fewer surprises, missed opportunities, and misunderstandings. Here are some ways families prepare for transitions:

- Gathering information (including enrollment, immunization, and other registration deadlines) a few months before an upcoming transition will allow you the time you need to prepare mentally and practically for the coming change;
- Attending meetings or reading information about the schedule, policies, goals, and philosophies of the new Learning Community, plus visiting the new site for a tour and meeting the new staff, if possible;
- Sharing information with your children will reduce their worries and questions



- about what to expect in the new environment;
- Talking to other families is a helpful way to gather information, get tips, and start developing relationships with others who will be going through the same transition; and
- Participating in or arranging opportunities for your child to meet other students, before programs or classes begin.

### **Share information with your new Learning Community**

Learning Communities want to know about you and your child. You can share information in various ways:

- Telling staff about your family’s culture, home language(s), important experiences, routines, concerns, stressors, and hopes for your child, not only increases the Learning Community understanding of and compassion for your child, but also helps them create safe and positive learning environments and goals for your child;
- Sharing school records, Individualized Education Plans, assessment results, and medical needs is important; and
- Letting your new Learning Community know if you need translation or interpretation and letting them know how you like to communicate about your child allows staff to easily connect with you.

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“We—parents, learning community staff, and partners—have talked for years about the importance of creating a statewide vision of family engagement that sets and creates a shared guide, goals and expectations. To finally realize such a vision is phenomenal and invaluable to our families, children, Learning Communities and partners in Pennsylvania!”

*The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework, p. 73*  
<https://bit.ly/PFEngagement>

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### **Help educators know what you do not yet know**

If there are aspects of the transition which worry you or seem unclear, Learning Communities want to know those concerns so they can provide the information you need. Families can reach out in various ways:

- Calling the new Learning Community is the best place to start to find information and resources;
- Contacting the Learning Community can give you a chance to get more information, or to find out whom your primary contact should be;
- Checking in with community partners can be an effective way of getting information, including libraries, pediatricians’ offices, community centers, your local Early Learning Resource Center, family support networks, parent-teacher associations, and so forth; and

- Asking for information—like attendance policies or financial aid information for colleges—will not only give you the information you need but may also help Learning Communities provide relevant information to other families.

## In Closing

The practices and standards explained show how important it is for Learning Communities and families to work together to create strong and lasting partnerships benefitting children. These partnerships allow children to experience positive, supportive relationships, leading to their success at school and in life.

Behind the scenes are important policies or regulations guiding the work of Learning Communities. For information about policies guiding early learning programs and schools, you can read *The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework*.

If you would like to know more or explore ways to make a positive difference for your family or Learning Community, the best place to start is often with your Learning Community. They usually have a wealth of information about local resources, regulations, and contact persons. In addition, *The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth Through College, Career, Community Ready Framework* includes additional information and a list of resources.

Please know, the best advocate for your child is you; it is you and your family who cares for, guides, and provides for your children across all areas of their development through the years. Thank you for all you do to engage with educators to support the children of Pennsylvania.





## References

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This is a companion piece to the *Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career Community Ready Framework*.  
For more information and to learn more go to <https://bit.ly/PFEngagement>

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