

(<https://www.actforchildren.org/champion/join-movement/e-advocate>)

This Issue September 2019: Family Engagement, 2020 Census, Voter Registration



As a new school year gets underway, it is a great opportunity for early childhood professionals to be intentional about implementing best practices, and not just with the children they serve—their families as well.

Principles of Family Engagement



Engaging families from the start (<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/learning-module/engaging-families-start>) is an important way to ensure parents and early childhood professionals are partners in young children's development and early learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has a set of six principles for family engagement (<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement/principles>):

1. Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child. Programs invite families to actively take part in making decisions concerning their children's education. Teachers and families jointly set goals for children's education and learning both at home and at school.
2. Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication. Strategies allow for both school- and family-initiated communication that is timely and continuous. Conversations focus on a child's educational experience as well as the larger program. Communication takes multiple forms and reflects each family's language preference.

3. Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal. Programs and families benefit from shared resources and information. Programs invite families to share their unique knowledge and skills and encourage active participation in the life of the school. Teachers seek information about children's lives, families and communities, integrating this information into their curriculum and teaching practices.
4. Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community. Programs use learning activities at home and in the community to enhance each child's early learning and encourage and support families' efforts to create a learning environment beyond the program.
5. Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts. Programs invite families to actively participate in making decisions about the program itself. Programs also invite families to advocate for early childhood education in the wider community.
6. Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement. Programs institutionalize family engagement policies and practices and ensure that teachers, administrators, and other staff receive the supports they need to fully engage families.

Positive relationships with families are critical for implementation of recent and upcoming requirements and standards for early childhood programs. Most notably, Public Act 100-105 prohibiting the expulsion of children 0-5 years old due to child behavior, and Public Act 99-922 requiring licensed child care centers and homes to test their drinking water for the presence of lead. These are complex topics that require intentional and meaningful conversations with families.

Find resources on family engagement, along with other expulsion-related resources, on the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development website here (<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/OECD/Pages/Suspension-and-Expulsion-Resources.aspx>).

Find resources on lead in water, including a set of template letters for communicating with families about this sensitive topic, on Illinois Action for Children's website (<https://www.actforchildren.org/lead-water/>).

In addition to program policies and procedures that build family engagement into everyday practice, state and federal level policies need to provide guidance and resources that support implementation at the program level. Below are some examples of opportunities for policy to better promote family engagement in early childhood:

- Provide funding for family engagement activities, including staff capacity and event logistics (transportation, food, etc.)
- Embed effective family engagement in quality standards and credentials
- Set expectations for how programs engage and share information with families at the time of enrollment
- Ensure family representation on statewide advisory bodies and workgroups

Engaging Families in the 2020 Census



The 2020 Census is fast approaching, and we need to ensure an accurate count of our young children. This is critically-important to make certain that Illinois receives the federal investments needed to provide vital services for young children and their families. Research indicates that young children are historically undercounted in the census. Check out this infographic from the Census Bureau to learn more about the undercount of young children and what you can do to ensure families and children are accurately counted in the 2020 census.

([https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-2020.html)

[2020.html](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-2020.html))

Engaging Families in Voter Registration



Another upcoming opportunity to engage families is the 2020 general election. National Voter Registration Day is September 24, 2019. As always, before the 2020 election, IAFC will have updated voter registration materials for providers and communities to utilize to bump up voter turnout—but in the meantime, check out the current voter registration activities on our website for information on how you can engage the families you serve around voter registration (<https://www.actforchildren.org/for-advocates/partner-voter-registration-toolkit-2/>).

Coming Soon—Fall Into Action!



If you want to learn about all these topics and more, be on the lookout for information from us on Illinois Action for Children's upcoming public policy workshop series—**Fall Into Action**—taking place this fall across the state!