

## **Child/Family Supports (Family Liaison)**

Strong Beginnings will often be the first point of entry for children and families into a system where they have frequent, ongoing, consistent connections with caring adults. Some of these adults may be the first ones outside the family to have the opportunity to observe and interact with the children as they become part of the classroom community. Others may spend more time talking with and getting to know the families—many of whom may be socially isolated and without other support systems. This gives Strong Beginnings a unique opportunity to learn the need for and then provide supports that will strengthen the foundation for both children and families as they begin their journey through the school system. This will not only benefit the children and families during their year in Strong Beginnings but will enable them to move on through the following years better prepared to meet challenges both at home and at school. Children and families do not arrive at Strong Beginnings with the same needs across the state or even across an ISD. In some cases, perhaps because of a lack of accessible family resources in a community, families who did not have a place to voice their needs and concerns may need more support than their children. In other instances, as when there are many foster families within a neighborhood, providing classroom support for children who have experienced trauma may be the highest priority. Because of this variability, Strong Beginnings programs have some options for the type of child and family supports they provide which are decided upon on a yearly basis. While each site must have a Family Liaison to provide support, resources and information to families, the amount of time this individual is hired for and the other supports provided may vary from site to site. Each site offering Strong Beginnings may select, in strong collaboration with their ISD, the amount and type of supports that will be offered to children and families yearly. These decisions should be based on input from teaching and administrative staff as well as from the local family participation group.

### **Options for Child and Family Supports**

There are two basic types of support available for children and families. One focuses on the children in the classroom and one on the families. It is important to keep in mind, however, that any classroom supports for children are more effective when aligned with family understanding and usage of similar practices. Similarly, many family challenges involve parenting issues and suggestions for such things as improving bedtime routines or resolving tantrums may incorporate ideas also used in the classroom. In some cases, Strong Beginnings classrooms may elect to select only family supports which are required in all programs and in other cases they may decide to utilize some child supports as well. Either approach is acceptable if based on program needs. In either case, it is imperative that there is a strong working relationship between the Strong Beginnings teaching team and the Family Liaison. In order to ensure that there is a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each of these partners, it is the responsibility of the Early

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Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual

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Childhood Specialist to facilitate the completion of the *Division of Shared Roles and Responsibilities of Strong Beginnings Classroom Teachers and Family Liaisons* form at the beginning of the school year and review it with the team during the year. The form may be found in the For ECSs, For Family Liaisons or For Teachers—Forms folds of the Strong Beginnings shared Program Partners drive.

## **Family Supports**

Mandatory family supports focus on supporting Strong Beginnings families with resources and information needed to deal with unmet basic needs, family issues (including but not limited to the child enrolled in Strong Beginnings) or any broader concerns such as employment or housing that impact family wellbeing. These supports are provided by a Family Liaison who should work at least 8 hours weekly with each Strong Beginnings classroom. There are four essential components to the role of Family Liaisons.

- Family Liaisons facilitate and support communication between the home and school to maximize family wellbeing and improve children’s opportunities for success. This is often done through conversations and meetings with individual families who are seeking support in dealing with child or broader family issues, including meeting basic needs, job training, finding a medical home and the like that generally impact family well-being.
- Family Liaisons are also expected to circle back and check in with families to determine if the resources and supports provided met the family’s needs. If they did not, the family and Family Liaison strategize new solutions that will work better for the family.
- The Family Liaison serves as a sounding board for families as they listen to and support/coach the family in making their own plans and coming up with their own solutions to issues.
- Finally, the Family Liaison has an important role in coaching the family to be advocates for themselves and their children in any situation such as school or work where advocacy is a useful tool.

Family Liaisons also support all families with information around child development/parenting and available community resources and support the program in ways described below in order to develop and deepen relationships with families,

In order to work effectively with families, it is paramount that the Family Liaisons are able to build strong relationships with both the Strong Beginnings families and teaching staff. It is only when trusting relationships have been developed that support will be welcome and utilized. For this reason, it is usually necessary that the Family Liaison have a strong connection to the culture and the community of the Strong Beginnings classroom rather than appearing as an outsider. While education and experience in both early childhood development and education and social work are important for this position, the ability to build relationships and connect with the members of the school community are stronger requirements. A

minimum of an Associates Degree in Early Childhood, Social Work or a related field is required for this position. Prior training and experience in coaching families is also an important asset for Family Liaisons. Each Family Liaison who does not have a background in social work should have the ability to connect with one in case advice is needed on a difficult and sensitive issue such as spousal abuse. It is the responsibility of the ISD to ensure that this social work support is available to every Family Liaison.

The Strong Beginnings families should see the Family Liaison as a seamless partner in the provision of Strong Beginnings services. Teachers, the Family Liaison, site program administrators and everyone else who is an integral part of the Strong Beginnings program at each site should be presented to families as part of the same team, all working together to improve child and family outcomes for those in Strong Beginnings. It is important that families understand who the Family Liaison is, their role in Strong Beginnings and view them as an integral part of the team. The following methods should be incorporated to do this:

- The Family Liaison should be mentioned, introduced and their role summarized in any welcome letter sent to families about the Strong Beginnings program.
- The Family Handbook should also mention and introduce the Family Liaison and explain their role.
- The Family Liaison should be present and introduced during Back-to-School night, Curriculum night, welcome picnic or other events that might be held to welcome and acquaint families with the Strong Beginnings Program.
- The Family Liaison and their role should be mentioned at home visits. They may also be included on some or all of these visits.
- Classroom newsletters and other such materials should include some information from/about the Family Liaison.
- Bulletin Boards with staff pictures, etc. should include the Family Liaison.
- Any apps such as ClassDojo that include Strong Beginnings teaching staff and families should also include the Family Liaison. The Family Liaison should be enabled to send messages and communicate with families through this app.

The roles and responsibilities of the Family Liaison, may include the following as well as the four essential components. These activities will in many cases allow the Family Liaison to develop and strengthen the relationships with families that are necessary for the role to be successful:

- Participating in the application and enrollment of families interested in Strong Beginnings.
- Following up with families, whether offered enrollment in Strong Beginnings or not, who indicate unmet basic needs on their Strong Beginnings applications.
- Participating in welcoming families to the program.

- Attending selected Home Visits and/or Parent Teacher Conferences where their support or input would be valuable.
- Greeting families at drop off/pick up time or riding the bus to say hello to families as children board and depart.
- Planning content, inviting families and otherwise supporting family engagement activities and events.
- Initiating or supporting communication between the program and families on child related issues such as absenteeism.
- Supporting the teacher and family by providing information and perspectives to both for children with challenging behaviors in classrooms where no behavior specialist is available.
- Providing information to the teaching team about events, such as a new baby or impending divorce, that are impacting a child in Strong Beginnings.
- Assisting the teaching staff in understanding more about issues such as child trauma that impact children in Strong Beginnings.
- Dealing with suddenly emerging needs that impact the well-being of Strong Beginnings families.
- Other roles seen as mutually helpful by the classroom staff and family support specialist.

It is important for the Family Liaison to always keep in mind that there are families from a wide range of economic and educational backgrounds in most Strong Beginnings classrooms. Because of this, different families will vary greatly in the level of need and desire for support they evidence. It is essential to always be mindful of these differences and offer information in a way that respects family differences. In sending a group email about winter clothing resources, for example, the Family Liaison might say "Some of you have asked about resources for winter clothing so I am sending this information in case you, a friend or family member find it useful". This can assure families that it is not assumed everyone is in need or want of helpful resources.

The CCRESA Strong Beginnings Implementation Consultant must be notified if there is a permanent change in the Family Liaison assigned to a classroom within two weeks after the change is made.

## **Child Supports**

Child supports focus on supporting children's success in the Strong Beginnings classroom. They may consist of additional plans, strategies and support provided to the teaching team by an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, Behavioral Consultant, School Social Worker or other such individual who has experience and education in supporting children with challenging behaviors. This individual would observe in the classroom, meet with the teaching team to offer suggestions and develop a plan, observe again and reflect with the teaching team on progress in a continuous cycle until the child's/children's behaviors become more appropriate. They would also likely meet with parents to understand more about the child and

the parent's insight into their behavior, review the classroom concerns and share ideas that could be used at home to support the efforts of the teaching team. This work would be done in conjunction with the Early Childhood Specialist who is responsible for assisting the teaching team in adopting developmentally appropriate classroom strategies that form the base of the Pyramid approach. See the [Early Childhood Specialist](#) section of this manual for additional information. In addition to direct classroom support, the behavioral specialist might also support the Strong Beginnings program by providing professional learning opportunities and other resources for Strong Beginnings staff or families in the areas of social-emotional learning and behavior.

Children in Strong Beginnings classrooms may also receive needed extra support when a third member is added to the teaching team. This may be necessary in those classrooms where children's general developmental level, lack of self-help skills such as toilet learning, or challenging behaviors require ongoing, additional support. The focus of the additional teaching staff member may be on providing general classroom assistance, supporting one or more children with severe challenging behaviors, or a combination of both at different times of the school day or year. This additional staff would allow for the provision of a wider range of developmentally appropriate activities to be implemented in the classroom while keeping children under close supervision rather than having the third adult focusing on getting children to comply with inappropriate expectations. The additional teacher may also allow the Lead Teacher to have additional time to connect with families around child and family issues impacting the classroom and home.

## **Child and Family Support Plan**

In mid-August of each program year, the ISD is required to submit a child/family support plan that details the supports that will be available in each classroom and the rationale for those decisions. It will also require documentation of the funding levels used to provide the classroom supports. It is expected that about 15% of the funding for each child in Strong Beginnings will be used for these supports. Each child in Strong Beginnings will ideally be supported at between 1.25-1.5 times the allocation of a child in GSRP and much of this additional allocation (about 15% of the total allocation) is to be used for needed child/family supports that will put children and families on a trajectory of success that will support them throughout their school years and beyond. Information about the Child and Family supports to be used in each classroom will be collected by CCRESA using a SurveyMonkey tool. The following details will assist in developing a yearly plan for child/family supports.

### **General Information**

- The plan must include funding for the provision of support, resources and information to parents who need assistance with meeting basic needs, have family concerns (including but not limited to the child enrolled in Strong Beginnings), or are dealing with broader issues like employment or housing

that impact family wellbeing. This individual is expected to provide all of the four essential components of the role of the Family Liaison

- Staff to provide child and family supports may be hired/contracted by the ISD/RESA and/or the subcontractor.
- Although not typical, it may be possible that one person has the background necessary to fulfill more than one of the child/family support positions. An individual might be able to serve in a part time capacity as both the third adult in the classroom and the Family Liaison for example. This is permitted if the plan makes it clear that the individual is qualified for both positions and the positions are structured so that one person has sufficient flexibility to fulfill both.
- All SB sites in an ISD/RESA do not need to provide the same child and family supports. All site plans should be developed collaboratively by the ISD/RESA and the site and signed off on by the site.
- It is permissible to split funding for any Child/Family support positions between the dollars specifically included for that purpose and general classroom funding. The costs of a third adult in the classroom, for example, might be split between Child/Family support and general classroom funding. Each of the options for Child/Family supports may also be funded entirely by general classroom funds.
- Funding for any position may include a reasonable/proportional amount of time and funds for staff to attend general staff meetings, supervisory meetings, team planning, professional development and the like as well as for time and materials/expenses necessary for direct child and family support.
- Plans will include information on how the Family Liaison will be onboarded, coached and supported by someone selected by the ISD. This is necessary regardless of the employers/contractors of the Family Liaison.
- Plans may be amended once during the course of the school year with the agreement of the site, ISD/RESA and CCRESA Implementation Team. ISDs/RESAs should submit an amended plan that includes the signature of the site director, the proposed change and a rationale for the change.

### **Family Liaison**

- Individuals serving in this role should have a background/experience in child and family studies, child development, early childhood education, social work or a related field. A bachelor's degree is strongly preferred and an associate's degree is required. The ability to build relationships with adults, knowledge of child development and a connection to the culture and community of the Strong Beginnings classroom(s) they are serving are paramount in a successful Family Liaison. Training in coaching is also a valuable asset.
- A Family Liaison is often most successful if embedded within one center where they serve multiple classrooms. If this is not possible, a Family Liaison may serve more than one program.

- On average, a Family Liaison is expected to serve about five classrooms. However, those FLs serving more than one center and traveling between them or serving families with a high degree of poverty and complex needs, especially in areas where community resources are scarce, may serve fewer classrooms.
- The agreement shall include information on the responsibilities of the Family Liaison. They must include:
  - Supporting families with resources and information needed to deal with unmet needs or family issues whether specific to the child enrolled in Strong Beginnings, other family members or to improve general family well-being.
  - Checking in with families to determine if the resources/information has been helpful and strategizing with the family to break down barriers and get new resources which will improve family functioning.
  - Acting as a sound board and listening to and supporting/coaching families as they discuss their own plans for solving family issues.
  - Coaching the families to be advocates for themselves and for their children across a variety of situations.
  - Facilitating and strengthening communication between the school and the family so that the children’s opportunities for success are maximized.
  - Providing child development related parent engagement activities.
  - Providing information on community resources to all families
  - Supporting teachers with information about children in their classrooms that may help the teachers better understand and plan for those children. (i.e. someone’s mom just had a baby or impact of trauma on young children)
- All Family Liaisons should be supervised by/have access to a social worker for necessary support in the role. Funds to support this supervision/assistance may be covered by the grant.

### **School Social Worker/Counselor**

- Need agreement indicating what percentage of time/number of hours school social worker/counselor will be supporting Strong Beginnings classrooms and the amount of compensation for this time.
- Strong Beginnings may pay for a proportional percentage of general meeting/supervisory time. For example, if Strong Beginnings pays for 15% of a staff members time, 15% of the time they spend in general staff or supervisory meetings can be charged to the grant.
- The agreement shall include information on the responsibilities of the social worker/counselor. They may include
  - Assisting teaching staff with strategies to meet the individual needs of children in the Strong Beginnings classroom, including development of behavior support plans.

- Assisting teaching staff with strategies to meet the social-emotional needs of the broader group of children enrolled in Strong Beginnings.
- Facilitating and strengthening communication between the school and the family so that the children’s opportunities for success are maximized
- Providing parent engagement activities in the area of social-emotional learning.
- Providing professional learning opportunities for Strong Beginnings staff in the area of social-emotional learning and behavior.
- Any social work functions required by the IEPs of children enrolled in Strong Beginnings or generally performed as part of the evaluation process for special education for a child enrolled in Strong Beginnings must continue to be funded by Special Education.
- If the social worker/counselor will be providing the teacher with classroom behavior/teaching strategies a plan for communication/coordination with the early childhood specialist must be included in the agreement.
- A school social worker may also fulfill the essential components of the role of Family Liaison and be considered the Family Liaison for a classroom.

### **Early Childhood Mental Health or Behavioral Consultant**

- Individuals serving in this role must have appropriate educational and experiential background (i.e., endorsement, coursework, experience with young children in a group setting). A minimum of a bachelor’s degree in a related area (early childhood education, child development, psychology, social work etc.) is required for this position.
- Need an agreement specifying approximate hours per week that consultant will work with Strong Beginnings, total hours contracted for and the hourly pay for this work.
- The agreement shall include information on the responsibilities of the early childhood mental health/behavioral consultant. They may include
  - Assisting teaching staff with strategies to meet the individual needs of children in the Strong Beginnings classroom, including development of behavior support plans.
  - Assisting teaching staff with strategies to meet the social-emotional needs of the broader group of children enrolled in Strong Beginnings.
  - Providing professional learning opportunities for Strong Beginnings staff in the area of social-emotional learning and behavior.
  - Facilitating and strengthening communication between the school and the family so that similar behavioral strategies are used in school and at home.
  - Providing parent engagement activities in the area of social-emotional/behavioral learning.
  - Supporting families with resources and information needed to deal with the social emotional development of their child enrolled in Strong Beginnings.



- The agreement should include a plan for communication/coordination between the behavioral consultant and the ECS.

### **Third adult in classroom**

- Individuals serving in this role must at a minimum meet the licensing qualifications for child care center staff. Programs may require higher levels of training and experience if they wish. A maximum of two consistent individuals may share this role.
- Need an agreement specifying number of hours per week the individual will work and the amount paid per hour or per school year. The agreement may include an appropriate number of paid hours for professional learning and/or staff supervision/planning/meetings. Benefits may be provided and should be included in cost estimates.
- The agreement should include information about the responsibilities of the third adult(s). The individual may be used for general classroom support, to shadow a child/children with behavioral challenges or a combination of both.
- A plan indicating the number of hours and times per day the individual(s) will be in the classroom. If the plan varies across the year (more assistance in the fall, for example) include that information in the plan. Indicate how the adults will share the hours if there will be two consistent adults utilized in the plan.
- Indicate how the third adult(s) will learn about the classroom curriculum, procedures and have time for planning with the rest of the classroom teaching staff.