

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Research indicates that the partnerships a preschool program builds with families can have a significant impact on children's school success throughout their education. Strong family partnerships support children's academic success by improving attendance and classroom dynamics, as well as increasing teacher expectations and cultural competence. Family participation in partnership activities are predictors of a child's cognitive and social-emotional skills. All of these positive impacts, in turn, result in higher teacher retention and a more positive center climate.

The Strong Beginnings Family Partnerships Implementation Manual section is aligned to the [MiFamily Engagement Framework](#) and the [ABCs of Family Engagement from WIDA](#). The MiFamily Engagement Framework details the impact and includes references to the research. Additional references and resources can be found at the end of this section.

There are four pillars of school-family partnerships: two-way communication, relationships and trust, learning and well-being, and shared decision making and power. Strong Beginnings programs would benefit from creating a family partnership plan that meets Strong Beginnings requirements and includes strategies to support all four pillars of family partnerships.

Requirements:

CCRESA has established minimum requirements for family partnerships, which include:

1. The active and continuous involvement of parents is accomplished through a minimum of four planned parent contacts.
2. Participation in a school readiness advisory committee, which is accomplished through both the Great Start Collaborative Parent Coalition and local family participation groups.

These legislative requirements are met through both individualized and group family partnership events. Each program is required to plan at least three individualized family contacts throughout the year. Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, the preferred pattern for programs to meet the four family contacts is as follows: three individualized family contacts with one home visit and two family conferences and one classroom, program, or mutually planned community family event. Additionally, each program must organize a family participation group. ISDs or programs should develop a cohesive process for documenting all family partnership events.

Programs must ensure that family partnership events are accessible to families. This includes special consideration for transportation, translation or language services, and childcare for other children in the home.

All events should be evaluated through appropriate methods that may include conversations with families, surveys, or exit tickets asking for verbal or written

responses. Programs should use the input to reflect and make improvements over time. It is important to share that information with families, so they know that they are being heard and what changes are coming from their input.

Individualized Family Contacts

Individualized family contacts, both home visits and family conferences, provide set times for teachers to connect with families, get to know their unique personalities and situations, and build personal connections with them. Children, families, and staff benefit when time is spent building relationships. Close to the end of the school year, teaching staff and Family Liaisons should spend time with each family to help them prepare for the transition into Strong Beginnings. See the [Transition](#) section of this manual for more information.

All contacts are planned well in advance, considering the family's schedule and preferences. This may mean that home visits and conferences occur outside of regular work hours. Please note that while programs are required to provide these opportunities, participation is optional for families. Anytime a program is unable to complete individualized family contact, documentation of outreach efforts and family responses must be retained.

It is important that programs clearly and effectively communicate with families to help them understand the purpose of these events. For a variety of reasons, families may be uncomfortable inviting a teacher or Family Liaison into their home or entering a school environment; a neutral space like a park or library may be best for some families. Programs must be willing to adjust meeting times or locations to support the needs of families.

Home Visits

Home visits are planned to last at least 45 minutes, exclusive of travel time, and include both the child and the child's family.

Purpose:

Home visits offer a unique opportunity to connect with the family and child in their space. This can make them feel more comfortable meeting someone who is or will become an important part of the child's life. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that the home visit occurs after the child is enrolled, but before the child begins the classroom program. The primary purpose of the visit is to establish a foundation for a positive partnership between home and school. It is designed to help the child and family with the transition into Strong Beginnings. A home visit focused solely on completing program paperwork does not meet the spirit of the requirement. The Family Liaison is often a valuable member of the home visit team.

Recommendations:

- Establishing the two-way relationship before the first day of school helps the family and child be more comfortable with the transition. This can set the tone for the child's entire school career, helping families understand that they can be advocates and speak up for what they need.

- Home visits establish the foundation of trust between early childhood professionals and families. To foster open communication and deeper understanding, professionals should create opportunities for meaningful connections during these initial visits.
 - A simple yet effective approach involves mutual introductions where the professional shares something personal about themselves, then invites the family to share a favorite activity or cherished tradition. This exchange helps families feel valued, seen, and heard while establishing the groundwork for ongoing collaboration.
- Before the home visit, share photos, an introduction, what to expect at the home visit, and a welcome to school message. After the visit, share information the family will need to ease the transition to school, like contact information, what to expect the first day of school information, what the child should bring to school, and transportation information.
- Where staff safety is a concern, teaching teams may complete home visits in pairs. Itineraries should be distributed to the pertinent staff who should be aware of the home visitor's location(s). A cell phone should be carried, and valuables should be locked in the trunk before arriving at the destination.

Family Conferences

Family conferences are planned to last at least 30 minutes and should involve both the child and the family.

Purpose:

Family conferences provide an opportunity for the classroom staff, family, and child to effectively communicate goals for the child. Conferences provide an opportunity to continue building positive relationships with the child and family, as well as fostering a collaborative and welcoming environment. Through this design, families will have the opportunity and support to strengthen the home-school relationship and partner with classroom staff to reach goals for the child. Family Liaisons can provide important support to this process, especially when families would feel more comfortable with a trusted ally.

Recommendations:

- Any concerns about a child should not be kept until a formal conference is planned. Immediate attention to questions about a child's development or documented concerns should be communicated early in private, personal communications with the family. Conferences may be useful for continuing those conversations but will primarily be an opportunity to discuss the progress of the child across domains and goals for continuous development.
- Classroom staff are prepared in advance:
 - a. Being aware of effective communication strategies to provide consistent opportunities for the family to share their points of view and to listen attentively and reflect families' ideas, questions, and concerns.

- b. Proactively setting the stage for collaboration by sending out a questionnaire to get family input before the conference with questions like:
 - i. What school topics, activities, friends does your child like to discuss with you?
 - ii. What do you see as your child's areas of strength?
 - iii. In which areas would you like to see more growth?
 - iv. Are there any additional topics you would like to discuss?
 - v. Are there any topics you would like to discuss that you would prefer your child not to be part of?
 - vi. Who will be coming to the conference?
- Setting a welcoming environment with comfortable seating, displays of children's work, and preparation for the conversation.
- Planning the flow for the conference to cover student goals, assessments, progress, and concerns while allowing and encouraging for questions and family input.
- Planning for how the child will be included in the conference, being conscious about the privacy of the child and the sensitivity of the information that may be shared in front of the child and any siblings that may be in the room.
- Planning for follow up to provide opportunities for families to continue to communicate through phone, email, or scheduled in person meetings.

Collaborative Family Contacts

Family Participation Groups

Strong Beginnings supports families as active decision-makers by developing and implementing training to instill confidence in them as active members of advisory committees.

Purpose:

Each Intermediate School District (ISD) is required to have Strong Beginnings/GSRP family representation on the regional advisory committees. Refer to the Intermediate School District Administration of Strong Beginnings section of this manual for more information on advisory committees.

Family members may also participate in a school readiness advisory committee, which provides for the involvement of classroom teachers, parents or guardians of program participants, and community, volunteer, and social service agencies and organizations. The advisory committee annually reviews and makes recommendations regarding the Strong Beginnings components aimed at enhancing the school readiness of all children.

At the center or program level, a staff member initiates a family participation group that includes both staff and families. Once established, the group is best led by a family representative who may be supported behind the scenes by the Family Liaison. This group encourages families to work together with center staff to

consider program improvements, plan events, and generate ideas that could benefit all involved.

Recommendations:

- Allow families to hold leadership roles that foster a sense of purpose and connection.
- Families should be seen as equal partners with early education professionals
- Create a family survey to assess interest in advisory committee participation, identify desired learning topics, and gather contact information. Survey results should be shared with all families, and interested participants should be contacted individually for follow-up.
- Updates from advisory committees should be shared, and input gathered to take back to those groups.

Family Partnership Events

Purpose:

Family partnership events are an excellent way to support family leadership, provide access to resources, and foster collaboration between families, educators, Family Liaisons, and community organizations. These events should seek not only to give a glimpse into what is going on in the classroom but should also provide avenues for parents and caregivers to extend the learning in the classroom into their everyday lives. Events could be large events with dinner and childcare, or small events with learning materials for parents and children to engage with together.

All family engagement events should be planned by the family participation group. This will help support the events to meet the needs of families and foster access. Like classroom activities, every event should be purposeful, intentional, and clearly identify learner outcomes. Events should also be fun and engaging for families, providing playful learning activities to engage families and encourage them to participate in future events.

Recommendations:

- Events can focus on educational outcomes, strengthening parenting skills, or providing leadership opportunities for parents in the classroom or in the larger school community
- Family engagement efforts should be tailored to meet the needs of all families. This may include offering transportation and food, providing all materials in families' home languages, and providing interpreters. Events might be planned with flexible beginning and ending times to accommodate families' schedules.
- In some cases, the family participation group might work with community partners to support or expand a community event that meets the needs of and supports families.