

Northwestern College, Iowa

**NWCommons**

---

Master's Theses & Capstone Projects

Education

---

Spring 2021

## Increasing Family Engagement in a Preschool Program

Meghan Reiman

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education\\_masters](https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters)



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

---

Increasing Family Engagement in a Preschool Program

Meghan Reiman

Northwestern College

A School Improvement Plan Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the degree of Master of Education

### **Abstract**

This school improvement plan was developed to increase family engagement within a preschool program in a public school district. Research has shown that family engagement can positively impact children's development. Parents and teachers share responsibility in creating a strong, trusting partnership with the common goal of supporting the child's growth and development. Existing research on family engagement contributed to the improvement plan by highlighting the use of technology as a means of engaging families. The three main components of this improvement plan include creating two-way communication with families, involving families in the process of setting goals for their child, and encouraging families to engage in learning activities at home.

*Keywords: Family engagement, school improvement plan*

**Table of Contents**

Introduction.....4

Literature Review.....5

Need for Plan.....16

Goals for Plan.....20

Plan Implementation.....21

Assessment.....28

Conclusion.....30

References.....32

Appendices.....37

## Introduction

Teachers across the nation have had to pivot and adapt their teaching practices over the 2020-21 school year as schools navigated teaching and learning during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many students and families were faced with new types of learning models including distance learning in which buildings were closed and students learned from home, as well as hybrid models in which students learned both from home and in school. Teachers, students, and families have experienced significant challenges, barriers and hardships as schools continue to strive to meet the needs of all their students in this uncharted territory of educating during a global pandemic.

Even through these difficult months, unexpected, yet positive and beneficial outcomes have surfaced. The Minnesota Department of Education conducted a survey of more than 130,000 parents regarding their experiences with distance learning in the spring of 2020. In response to the question “What went well during the distance learning period,” 61% of respondents said good communication from teachers and 55% said good communication from the school (MN Dept. of Education, 2020). Preschool teachers from the research site collected anecdotal evidence of a significant improvement in positive parent-teacher relationships, which might be attributed to strategies that were used during the months spent in the hybrid and distance learning models. Teachers have noted consistent communication with families, parental engagement in learning activities within the home, and an appreciation from parents for having a better understanding of quality preschool practices. The school improvement plan presented in this paper will build upon what teachers learned this school year in regards to engaging families through at-home learning activities, increased communication, and building trusting

relationships. The goal is to increase and maintain family engagement to benefit student outcomes.

As part of the process in creating a plan for increasing family engagement, a review of research was conducted to learn more about the benefits of family engagement, strategies for increasing engagement, barriers that may exist, and how technology can be used as a tool to increase engagement. The school improvement plan will include research-based strategies that were discovered in the literature as well as strategies that teachers and parents at the research site reported as being beneficial during hybrid and distance learning. This plan will provide detailed direction to implement these specific strategies for increasing family engagement in the 2021-2022 school year.

## **Literature Review**

### **Family Engagement Defined**

Family engagement is a shared responsibility and partnership between educators and family members. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education defines family engagement as “the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including in the planning, development, and evaluation of such activities, programs, and system” (2016, p.1). The term parent involvement is sometimes used interchangeably with parent engagement; however, it does not encompass all that engagement entails. According to Baker et al. (2016), parent involvement is defined as parents being present for school activities whereas engagement includes parents’ voice and partnership in supporting children’s development.

McKenna and Millen (2013) describe family engagement as including both parent voice and parent presence. Parent voice refers to two-way communication that includes both a

willingness from families to share and an openness from educators to listen to parents' ideas, opinions, and goals for their child. Parent presence refers to parents being actively involved in their child's education through formal structured school activities or opportunities parents have created themselves. This means parents can be engaged in their child's education by creating and supporting opportunities for learning in their home environment. Family engagement is more than just families participating in school activities; rather it necessitates a strong, trusting relationship between educators and parents in which together they work towards a common goal of supporting children's well-being and development.

Strong parent and teacher partnerships need to be intentionally created. "Teachers build positive and authentic partnerships when they truly value the family's role in a child's education, recognize how much they can accomplish with families, and prioritize working with families as part of supporting children's learning and development in the classroom" (The Creative Curriculum, 2020, p. 196). To build these partnerships, the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011) stated that teachers must develop relationships of mutual trust, listen to families, acknowledge family's methods of child-rearing, and respect the preferences of each family.

Epstein (2010) described a framework that has been developed for educators to use as a guide to enhance school and family partnerships. The six types of involvement described in this framework include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. All six of these components are recognized to be interrelated and necessary for strong parent and teacher relationships. Changes have been made in this framework over the years to expand the view of involvement not only happening inside the school building but to also include family engagement at home and in the community. "The six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of

partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers” (Epstein, 2010, p. 89). Using this framework, programs can work on building strong family and school partnerships that in return can create quality family engagement.

### **Academic Benefits**

Family engagement is a crucial component of a child’s education and is linked to positive outcomes. “Strong family engagement in early childhood systems and programs is central – not supplemental – to promoting children’s healthy intellectual, physical, and social-emotional development; preparing children for school; and supporting academic achievement in elementary school and beyond” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016, p. 1). Research has shown that when parents are engaged in their child’s learning and enter into a partnership with their child’s school, children are more likely to have higher academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Using longitudinal data from kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Dearing et al. (2006) studied the relationship that family involvement had on children’s literacy performance. The participants of this study included 281 students who attended the Comprehensive Child Development Programs, an early intervention program for low-income children. These children were then followed through a school transition study that examined how children’s development was impacted by family, school, and community factors. Family involvement was reported by the mothers of these children during kindergarten, third grade, and fifth grade. The literacy skills of the children were also assessed during those time periods. Results indicated that children’s literacy performance improved with an increase in family engagement in school. Further, the data showed that family



involvement had an even greater impact on children whose parents were less educated (Dearing et al., 2006).

Additional research on parent involvement and literacy skills was conducted by Arnold et al. (2008) and included 163 preschool-aged children, their parents, and 19 preschool teachers. These children attended preschool in seven different child care centers across urban New England. The majority of the children enrolled in the study were from low-income families. Teachers used a parent involvement questionnaire to rate the parents' level of involvement and standardized tests were used to assess all students. Data from this study indicated parent involvement was associated with the development of preliteracy skills in preschool-aged children (Arnold et al., 2008).

Hu et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study with 196 children and parents to learn more about the relationship between at-home math activities and children's development of math skills. A Likert questionnaire was completed by parents to determine the frequency that parents engaged in different math activities with their child at home. Children's math skills were assessed using a standard assessment over a three-year period. Results indicated that parents' engagement in math application activities positively benefited children's development of math skills. Math application activities were described as number games and experiences that promote active learning such as cooking or shopping. Children benefit academically when families are actively engaged in their child's education.

### **Barriers to Family Engagement**

Although family engagement is recognized as being valuable and important, several barriers can hinder a parent's ability to become engaged in their child's education. School staff

must be able to recognize and identify potential barriers. Ansari and Gershoff (2016, p. 572) found that “parents who faced more frequent obstacles were less likely to be involved.”

### *Parents’ Work Schedules.*

Research acknowledges that conflicts with parents’ work schedules can be a barrier for parents attending school-sponsored activities (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Baker et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2017; La Paro et al., 2003; Mendez, 2010). La Paro et al. (2003) followed over 80 high-risk children and their families from preschool through kindergarten to track participation in school-sponsored activities that were offered to support the transition from preschool to kindergarten. During interviews, parents identified numerous barriers that affected their ability to participate in transition activities. Conflicts with work schedules were noted to be the most common barrier. La Paro et. al. (2003) reported that 74% of families indicated that their work schedules impacted their ability to be involved in activities at their child’s school.

Ansari and Gershoff (2016) found similar findings during their research of parent involvement in Head Start programs. They examined data collected from 1,020 preschool-aged children and their parents through the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey. Results indicated that 56% of parents stated that work obligations had interfered with their involvement in Head Start activities and 31% of parents reported that child care needs inhibited their involvement.

Parents’ work obligations, amount of allowed time off, and work location may all contribute to their difficulty in participating in school activities. When teachers demonstrate flexibility in scheduling activities and in-person meetings, they are acknowledging the value that parents hold in relation to their child’s development (Smith, 2020). Because parent schedules can

vary, it is imperative that schools consider this when planning on-site activities and that school staff recognizes the need to provide various opportunities for engagement.

### ***Transportation***

In addition to parent schedules, transportation can be a barrier to family engagement. Baker et al. (2016) identified barriers to family engagement during parent and staff focus groups. These groups consisted of 50 parents that participated in one of eight focus groups, and 76 staff that participated in one of twelve focus groups. During these focus groups, the lack of transportation was identified as a barrier. Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock (2020) examined the relationship of work, family, and school and the impact they play on parent engagement. Research was conducted in a racially diverse, Title I public elementary school in a midwestern city. A survey was completed and returned by 47 parents. Interviews were conducted with 17 mothers, 5 teachers, and the school principal. Transportation was noted, especially by low-income mothers, to have played a role in parents' ability to be involved at their child's school. Even with attempting to overcome this barrier by offering free cab or bus transportation to school events, it remained a challenge for families. Parents may desire to attend events, but not have the means to get to their child's school.

### ***Parent Perceptions***

Another barrier to family engagement is parent perceptions of their child's teachers and school. Baker et. al (2016) described how parents reported feeling unwelcome in their children's schools and feeling intimidated by school personnel. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) also reported evidence suggesting parents' perceptions of the school can be a barrier. Participants of their study included 48 parents, 39 educators, and 12 community members that completed surveys and focus group interviews. Judgement or fear of judgement as a contributing factor to

poor family engagement was reported by 50% of the focus group participants. Further, parents were worried that they asked too many questions and perceived that educators didn't want them at school.

Stone and Chakraborty (2011) claimed that parents' memories of their school experiences may create a challenge to becoming involved. These memories may negatively impact a parent's current perception of their child's school. Parents' perceptions of their child's school, accurate or not, could impact parents' and teachers' ability to build a strong and trustworthy relationship.

### ***Communication***

Communication is key to building relationships; therefore, a breakdown in communication can be a barrier to family engagement in early childhood programs. Teachers may have difficulty communicating with parents who do not speak or read English. Smith (2020) described both the challenges and the success that teachers in a migrant head start program had in building relationships with families who worked long hours and did not speak or read English. The qualitative study consisted of 7 in-depth interviews with staff and a focus group with 3 additional staff members. Teachers shared that relying on other multilingual staff or interpreters to communicate with families that do not speak English can create challenges in building strong relationships with families. Further, teachers stated that although written communication that has been translated into a family's home language can be effective, utilizing it without communicating its purpose can be problematic.

Recognizing that families' home language can be a barrier for parent-teacher communication is both essential and relevant in today's world. During the 2020-2021 school year, 8.4% of Minnesota's students were English Learners (MN Report Card, 2021). The MN Report Card indicated the presence of at least one language other than English in these students'

homes. Moreover, 13.4% of students who attended Minnesota public pre-kindergarten programs in 2019-2020 were English learners. Parents of these children also may not speak or read English proficiently and therefore may have difficulty communicating effectively with teachers.

### **Use of Technology**

Technology is an important and regular part of everyday life. Many technology tools can be used in an education system to improve communication, provide parent education, and strengthen family engagement. Parents and teachers see digital communication as being valuable as it is more convenient and can be more immediate than traditional communication methods (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). According to Pew Research (2019), 81% of adults in the United States own a smartphone. Digital communication between parents and teachers can occur through the use of text messaging, applications, and digital platforms developed for educational purposes. Digital tools like these can be readily used on parents' smartphones.

Teachers can use text messaging as a means of communicating with parents, providing parent education, and encouraging engagement in learning activities at home. York et al. (2018) studied a text messaging program that delivered text messages to 1,031 parents of four-year-old preschool students over a two-year period in the San Francisco Unified School District. The purpose of the text message program was to promote parents' involvement in supporting their child's early literacy development. Each week parents would receive a text that provided information on a specific academic skill, a second text that would provide a quick way to embed this academic concept into their family's everyday routine, and a third text that would provide parents with encouragement or a follow-up tip related to the weekly skill. York et al. (2018) reported that almost all of the text messages that were sent were opened and read by the parents. Further, "parents who received READY4K texts were about .28 standard deviations (SD) more

likely to use the information than parents who received placebo texts” (York et al., 2018, p. 25). The findings from this study demonstrate that text messaging can be an effective way to share short and concise information with a large group of parents to increase parent engagement in their child’s learning.

Cabell et al. (2019) also studied the use of text messaging as a way to communicate and share information with parents of preschool children. Participants included 174 preschool parents, with 87 parents receiving the treatment texts that included language and literacy messages and the other 87 parents in the comparison group receiving messages on children’s health and well-being. Across both conditions, parents were responsive and engaged with the text messages. 76% of parents responded to the texts at least once, and 58.6% of parents responded at least five times. The findings of the study were mixed in that children who initially had higher literacy skills benefited more from the language and literacy texts whereas children who initially had lower literacy skills benefited from the health and well-being texts. The researchers claim that text messaging can be an effective way to share information with parents, but the context of the messages should be varied based on the needs of families in the program.

Sharing photographs in a digital format is a strategy that can be used to help families feel more connected to their child’s school. Bacigalupa (2016) studied the benefits of sharing digital photo collages daily with the families of the 55 children who were enrolled in an early childhood lab school on a state university campus. The photo collages were called Daily Explorations that included photos from the preschool day, and short, written descriptions to explain what was happening in each photo. During the study, parents indicated that receiving these daily explorations increased their knowledge of child development, provided a better understanding of

learning through play, and enriched their conversations with their children about school activities.

Videography can also be a beneficial technology tool for family engagement. Walsh et al. (2018) studied the use of parent videos to support families in their child's transition from preschool to kindergarten. 4 videos were created, with parents as the intended audience. Teachers in 6 classrooms shared the links to the videos to 141 parents. Of those parents, 110 parents participated in the study by responding to at least one survey question. Results indicated that parents were satisfied with the videos being 5 to 8 minutes in length and rated the videos positively overall. Specifically, parents found that the videos provided general information about the transition into kindergarten, activities they could do with their child, and information on typical child development (Walsh et al., 2018). Videos can be an effective way to share information with families.

### **Learning at Home**

Teachers can educate parents on typical preschool development and developmentally appropriate goals by providing activities that families can complete at home. Lin et al. (2019) conducted a study of 262 parents of preschool children to determine the relationship between parent and teacher communication and the frequency of learning activities occurring within the home. The findings suggested that as teachers communicated more with parents about their child's individual growth and development, parents increased their frequency of engaging in learning activities at home with their child. Purposeful communication between teachers and parents can increase family engagement and benefit children's growth and development.

Providing families with specific learning activities to be completed at home can increase parents' understanding of expected preschool outcomes while also increasing quality parent and

child interactions (Floyd et al., 2009). A school district in North Carolina found success in sending home learning kits as a means to increasing family engagement. During the two-year study, 76 families participated by using the take home learning kits. Of the total families, 33 were from ethnically diverse backgrounds and 21 had students with disabilities. Positive effects of the learning kit program included parents understanding the importance of their interactions with their child, ideas on how to use simple, everyday items as a way to engage in learning with their child, and strengthened partnerships between parents and teachers. Most importantly, “the kits encouraged families to view themselves as teachers of their own children and reinforced the importance of that role” (p. 165).

When provided support and guidance, parents can encourage their children to engage in scientific inquiry. Strickler-Eppard et al. (2019) recruited five families to participate in family science activity packs to be completed at home. Although the sample size was small, significant data was collected with the families completing a total of 20 activity packs. Data was collected through parent surveys, phone interviews, and video recordings of the families completing the science activities at home. Qualitative data indicated that parents utilized the activity descriptions to encourage exploration of the topic and engage in inquiry with their children. When parents are provided at-home learning materials, such as the family science activity packs, they are capable of facilitating inquiry-based science experiences with their children.

Teachers can support families’ engagement in learning activities at home by sharing material in the family’s home language. Rowe and Fain (2013) studied how parents of preschool children responded to a home book reading program that included providing dual language books and audio recordings to families whose home language was something other than English. In addition to reading together with their child, parents were encouraged to engage in



conversations about the book and create an entry in a journal. Of the 164 total participants, 67% of families completed at least one journal entry. This rate is even higher for families of second language learners, with 76% completing at least one journal entry. Rowe and Fain (2013) emphasized that parents who speak a language other than English in their home commented favorably to having dual-language books and digital recordings sent home for them to read together with their child.

### **Need for the School Improvement Plan**

#### **District Information**

The school improvement plan that is presented in this paper has been developed for the early childhood department in a diverse public school district located in west-central Minnesota. This school district serves students from one larger town and several surrounding smaller towns. Together these towns comprise more than 27,000 residents, with over 20% of these residents identifying as a race other than white. In the 2020-2021 school year, the school district enrolled 4,382 students. It operates three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, several alternative programs, and a community education program. The district's student demographic profile for the 2020-2021 school year included 38.3% Hispanic or Latino, 37.3% White, 18.4% Black or African American, 3.2% Asian, 2% two or more races, and .9% as other. 23.9% of students were reported to be English learners and 56.3% of all students qualified for free and reduced meals (MN Department of Education, 2021). These demographics were considered in the development of the school improvement plan.

#### **Early Childhood Department Information**

The school district enrolls nearly 150 students in its four-year-old preschool program. Preschool students attend school at one of the three elementary buildings. Programming options

for four-year-old children, or those that are one year out from attending kindergarten, include a full-day, everyday classroom or a half-day classroom that is in session four or five days a week. Demographics for enrolled students during the 2019-2020 school year included 39.3% Hispanic or Latino, 29.7% Black or African American, 29.7% White, and 1.3% Asian. Higher than the district average, 40.6% of enrolled preschool students were English learners (MN Department of Education, 2021).

The early childhood department staff includes the early childhood program manager, early childhood coach, classroom staff, special education staff, parent educators, cultural liaisons, and an administrative assistant. The elementary building principals offer additional guidance and support to the preschool classrooms located in their buildings. The staffing model for the preschool classrooms includes an early childhood education teacher and a paraprofessional. Most preschool classrooms also have a special education paraprofessional that supports students on an Individualized Education Plan. A special education teacher provides support as written in the student's IEP. The cultural liaisons provide support to students, parents, and staff through building relationships, interpreting for teachers and families, translating documents, and providing cultural awareness information to staff.

The school district is just finishing its first year of adopting the Classroom Engagement Model framework in its preschool program. "The Classroom Engagement Model (CEM) is a set of research-based teaching practices that increase engagement and full participation of every child. Increased engagement leads to more learning, increased skill acquisition, and better outcomes for children" (MN Centers of Excellence for Young Children with Disabilities, n.d., para. 1). One of the key components of CEM is family engagement. The CEM framework promotes effective parent and teacher communication, a partnership with families in setting child

goals, and in providing support to families to work on these goals and overall engagement at home. During year one of the five-year innovation, the implementation team and the staff from one classroom completed all five modules of CEM training. Each year, staff from additional classrooms will become trained in CEM practices and will be supported by the internal CEM coach. By the end of year five, all of the preschool staff in the district will be fully implementing the CEM practices in their classrooms.

### **Early Childhood Department Need**

The Classroom Engagement Model (CEM) uses several tools for data collection that can be used to inform decision-making and support the implementation of the key teaching practices. Data from The Benchmarks of Quality tool and The Classroom Engagement Model Key Practices Self-Reflection both support the need for this school improvement plan. The CEM implementation team uses the Benchmarks of Quality tool to monitor the progress of adopting CEM practices throughout the whole program. This tool is completed twice per year and is used to guide the implementation teams' next steps. It is expected that the percent of key practices being implemented will start low and increase each year as more classrooms begin fully using the CEM practices. From data collected in the fall of 2020, the district was showing that 0% of the family engagement practices were partially or fully in place. This low rating in the family engagement category can be attributed to the district just starting the CEM innovation in the fall of 2020. The benchmarks for family engagement include:

1. Family input is solicited as part of the planning process. Families are informed of the program-wide goals for increasing child engagement and asked to provide feedback on adoption and mechanisms for promoting family involvement in the implementation.

2. There are multiple mechanisms for sharing implementation goals with families including narrative documents, parent handbook, and parent meetings to ensure that families are informed of the implementation.
3. Families are encouraged to team with program staff in the development of individualized plans of support for children including the development of strategies that may be used in the home and community.

(MN Centers of Excellence, n.d.).

The school improvement plan that is described in this paper will address the third benchmark by creating a plan to involve families in setting goals for their children and assist families with increasing their child's engagement in activities within the home setting.

The Classroom Engagement Model Key Practices Self-Reflection is another tool that teachers and classroom staff can use to measure their individual growth in implementing the strategies of CEM. The tool asks teachers and other staff to rate the frequency that CEM strategies are being used in the classroom. The question "How often do I use this practice?" can be answered with rarely, sometimes, usually, or always. The self-reflection tool that was completed by a teacher participating in the implementation of CEM this school year was reviewed. Results show that the teacher usually has an established two-way communication system set up with families, families are sometimes asked about goals for their child, and resources or materials are sometimes provided to assist families in supporting their child's goals at home. The school improvement plan includes detailed steps to increase the frequency of all of these practices.

The Program Administration Scale (PAS) also provides evidence for the need for this school improvement plan. The PAS measures organization-wide administration policies and practices. It includes 25 items that are organized within 10 categories. Each item is assessed on a

7-point scale from inadequate to excellent (Talan & Bloom, 2011). Family communications and family support and involvement are the two items that are categorized under family partnerships. The author of this school improvement plan completed the family partnership subscale from the PAS to gather additional data to help describe the current family-school relationship in the preschool classrooms. Results indicate a score of 5, which is a rating of good for family communications and a score of 4, which falls in between minimal and good for family support and involvement. This school improvement plan includes strategies that will increase these ratings.

### **Goals for Plan**

The goal for this school improvement plan is to increase family engagement by creating quality and effective two-way communication between parents and teachers, including families in the process of goal setting for their child, and by supporting families in recognizing their interactions at home as learning opportunities. First, teachers will ensure that all parents are connected through at least one mode of communication during the initial orientation meeting in September, 2021. Teachers will then verify during the October family conference that this chosen mode of communication is going well for parents. Teachers will complete a parent communication form to record all parents' preferred mode of communication. Second, teachers will provide support to parents in selecting one or two goals for their child during the fall conference held in October, 2021. Teachers will check in with parents regarding their child's progress towards meeting their goals at least two times before the next family conference held in February, 2022. The third goal of this improvement plan is to have families engage in at least two learning activities at home per month and share these family interactions with teachers either through written comments, photographs, or video.

## **Plan Implementation**

### **Overview of Plan**

Increasing parental engagement in the preschool program will be centered around three main components including improving parent-teacher communication, providing at-home learning activities for families, and involving families in the process of setting child-specific goals. Throughout each of these components, teachers will focus on building strong and trusting relationships with families, supporting families to increase their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices, and increasing parents' awareness of what their child is doing at school.

The Family Engagement Plan document (Appendix A) will provide teachers a guide on incorporating family engagement activities into their monthly plans. This document includes a section for the communication plan, at-home learning activities, and individual child goals. The plan has been completed for the months of September and October. These plans will be presented by one of the preschool teachers to all of the other four-year-old preschool teachers during the week of August 30 – September 2, which is the school districts' back to school workshop week. Teachers will have the opportunity to review and suggest edits to the document during this time. Together as a team, suggested edits will be considered and a final plan for September and October will be agreed upon. Further, the planning for the remaining months of November thru May will be added to the agenda of future professional development hours that are scheduled as part of the preschool calendar.

### **Communication**

The first component of this school improvement plan focuses on creating positive and consistent two-way communication between parents and teachers. During the family orientation

meetings that will occur the week of September 7-10<sup>th</sup>, the teacher will discuss several communication options that could be used during the school year including the Remind communication application, email, phone calls, in-person, and written communication.

A parent survey during the months of February and March of 2021 allowed parents of current four-year-old preschool students in this school district the opportunity to share their preferred method of receiving communication from their child's teacher. 78% of parents that responded stated that using text messaging through the Remind application was their preferred method of communication. Anecdotal evidence supporting the use of the Remind application includes parents' comments such as "the Remind app is amazing", "all methods are great but most parents have their phones by them the most and are able to communicate the quickest through text/remind app", and "email and text are a tie for best communication method". Further, parents expressed the challenge with written notes that are sent home in backpacks by stating "any (type of communication) would work except letter home in backpack. It tends to disappear quickly before I can see it." Another parent reported, "anything works but in the backpack. He takes it out on the bus and it doesn't always make it home." This information supports the decision in using the Remind application as the primary way to communicate between parents and teachers.

During the orientation meeting, all parents will strongly be encouraged and assisted in signing up for the Remind application. This application allows the teacher to send class announcements to all parents, as well as individual messages to parents. Parents can respond to the teacher with their message visible only to the teacher and not visible to other parents. This creates a strong platform for effective two-way communication. Parents can choose to download the app or simply opt-in to receive text messages from the teacher by sending a text message

with the class invitation code to join the teacher's class. Parents also have the option to receive and send Remind messages through their email. The Remind app has the capability of translating messages into other languages. Smith (2016) reported language barriers as a concern with family engagement; using the translation tool on the Remind application with families who do not read English can be used as a strategy to overcome this barrier.

The Remind app will be used to send class announcements, parent tips, and conversation prompts. Class announcements may include general information about the classroom, special activities that are happening, and could include sharing photos from the classroom. Messages that include parent tips will be used as a way to educate parents and increase engagement in activities and routines at home. York et al. (2018) found that using text messaging was a beneficial way to provide short, informative parenting tips to increase family involvement in learning activities at home. Conversation prompts will be used as a way to encourage dialog between parents and teachers. The minimal number of class announcements, parent tips, and conversation prompts will be listed on the *Family Engagement Plan* (Appendix A) for each month.

Although the Remind app will be the primary method of regular communication between parents and teachers, other means of communication will be available. Parents who transport their child to and from preschool may have the ability to communicate with the teacher in-person on a regular basis. In addition, parents will be provided with the teachers' email and classroom phone number to provide additional communication methods. During the family orientation meeting, teachers will record parents' preferred communication method on the Family Preferred Communication Form (Appendix B). If teachers find that parents are not responding to teacher communication through the Remind app, the teacher can reference the parents' response on the



Family Preferred Communication Form and try a different method of communication in the future.

### **Learning At-Home Activities**

The second component of this improvement plan is sharing learning at-home activities with families. “Given that communication regarding children’s learning and development helps parents better understand their children’s developmental level and how to support their children’s learning parents may subsequently be better able to scaffold their children’s learning by engaging them in more frequent, age-appropriate educational activities” (Lin et al., 2019, p. 766) Teachers will share two to three learning activities each month that can be completed in the home. These activities will align with a specific learning objective that has been chosen to be the monthly focus. Google Classroom will be used as the platform to share these at-home learning activities. Each child will receive an iPad with the Google Classroom app preloaded during their family orientation meeting the week of September 7-10. Parents and children will receive a tutorial on how to use the iPads and Google Classroom during this orientation meeting. Google Classroom will be used not only to share these at-home learning activities, but to also provide a place for parents to document the completion of the activities with written comments, photographs of their child, and/or videos of their family completing the activities. Teachers will have the ability to review these comments, photographs, and videos and then provide further feedback and encouragement to parents and children.

The at-home learning activity slides have been created for the month of September and are included in the Family Engagement Plan (Appendix A). The learning activity slides for the remaining months of the 2021-2022 school year will be created after the learning focus and planned activities have been selected during the preschool team’s professional development

meeting times throughout the year. Teachers will be asked to take turns creating the slides and adding them to the Family Engagement plan document for the whole team to review and approve. All of the at-home learning activity slides will also be added to a shared Google Drive called Family Engagement 2021-2022. Teachers will be responsible for adding the activity slides to their own Google Classrooms by the first of each month. (Appendix C). The activity slides will be posted in English. However, a video recording will be made by a teacher or cultural liaison to include oral directions in English, Spanish and Somali for all of the activities and then posted to Google Classroom for families who may not read English.

Parents will also be encouraged to watch a short parent education video that describes the importance of the learning objective, relates it to families' everyday routines, and provides additional ideas or resources. These monthly videos will be called Parent Pointers and will be created by one of the district's parent educators. Walsh et al. (2018) found that parent videos were an effective way to share general information with families, provide ideas for at-home learning activities, and educate parents on child development.

The Parent Pointer videos were first created and used during the 2020-2021 school year when teachers and students were in the distance learning model. Preschool parents were surveyed to learn whether they found these videos to be helpful or not. Of the 31 parents who responded to the survey, 54% stated they found the Parent Pointer videos to be helpful and 26% said they either did not watch the videos or did not know about the Parent Pointer videos. With more than half of the respondents finding these videos to be helpful, the Parent Pointer videos will be included in the family engagement plan for the 2021-2022 school year. Anecdotal responses within the survey indicate that some parents were not aware of what these videos were or how to access them. One parent stated, "Did I miss these? Not sure I saw them". Another

parent reported, “Didn’t find yet can’t comment then.” A greater emphasis on ensuring all parents are made aware of the videos and know how to access them will be included in this school improvement plan. The Parent Pointer videos will be uploaded to the Early Childhood Family Education YouTube channel. Teachers will share and promote the videos in their Google Classroom and through messages sent to parents using the Remind app. These videos will also be discussed with parents at the family orientation meeting before school starts and during family conferences in October and February. Parents will be encouraged to share their thoughts, ideas, and questions with the teacher and other parents in the comment section of Google Classroom.

The parent educators in the district will be responsible for creating the monthly Parent Pointer videos. The video *Building Independence in Children*, which will be used to support the learning focus for the month of September, has already been created. This video will be uploaded to teachers’ Google Classroom by September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 so that teachers can introduce the first Parent Pointer video and share with families how to access it during the family orientation meetings. The videos for the months October-May will be developed at a later time. The parent educators will take guidance from the four-year-old preschool team to determine the monthly video topic and ideas that could be included in the video. Once completed, the parent educators will email the YouTube link of the videos to the preschool teachers as well as add them to the Parent Pointer Video list in the shared Family Engagement 2021-2022 Google Folder.

### **Goal Setting**

Setting child goals will be the third component of the improvement plan. The practice of having families set goals for their child is an important component of the Classroom Engagement Model (CEM) that this district is currently in the process of implementing. Entering into the 2021-2022 school year, staff from one classroom will have completed all the training modules

for CEM. It is expected that staff from several more classrooms will begin training in September of 2021. Although not all teachers will have completed CEM training at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, it will be expected that all teachers invite families to engage in the process of setting goals for their child. Teachers will receive a short training on family goal setting during one of their scheduled PLC meetings in September.

The Parent Guide that accompanies Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Early Learning Standards shares with parents that "Children of the same age are often at different places in their learning. Knowledge of how children grow, develop, and learn is important in setting goals" (MN Department of Education, 2013, p.). As part of this parent engagement plan, teachers will help parents choose an appropriate goal for their child based on the child's current behavior and skills as well as the goal being developmentally appropriate.

The teacher will introduce the idea of goal setting with parents during the family orientation meeting held at the beginning of September. Near the end of September, the teachers will share the *Ideas for Child Goals* form with parents through a Remind text message, posted on Google Classroom and sent home in children's folders (Appendix D). This will provide parents time to reflect on possible goals for their child and be ready to choose one or two goals during the family conference in October. At the conference, the parent and teacher will work together to complete the *Family Goal Setting* form (Appendix E). Activities to help support the child in meeting his/her goal and additional resources or materials that the family may need will all be discussed and recorded on the form. Teachers will be expected to check in with families on at least two occasions to offer support, encouragement, and additional resources as families work towards supporting their child in meeting their chosen goal. The *Child Goals: Family Contact* form will be used by teachers to document these check-ins during the period between the

October conference and the February family conference. Inviting families to set goals for their child, and then offering support and resources as families work on their child's goals, are both key practices of the Classroom Engagement Model.

### **Potential Barriers to Implementation**

A potential barrier to implementing this improvement plan is whether all preschool students in the district will be given an iPad to use at home for family engagement activities. The school district provided all preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students an iPad in the 2020-2021 school year due to the likelihood of needing to learn from home at some point in the year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The school district already had a policy in place for 1:1 student devices for grades 6 through 12. Preschool staff have been informed by the technology department that iPads should be available for preschool students during the 2021-2022 school year if the early childhood department needs them. However, if this changes and iPads are not available for student and family use, this school improvement plan will need to be altered to include additional ways to share the at-home learning activities with families.

### **Assessment**

Family engagement will be the topic discussed by the four-year-old preschool teachers during the two-hour professional development time scheduled for the beginning of May 2022. This will provide an opportunity for the teachers, the early childhood coach, and the early childhood program manager to reflect and evaluate the successes and challenges of engaging families during the 2021-2022 school year. The agenda will include discussion time for the three proposed family engagement goals. Teachers will be encouraged to bring evidence to support the achievement of these goals in the form of anecdotal notes, communication logs, family goal setting forms, and photos or videos that families uploaded to Google Classroom.

First, teachers will be asked to share about their experiences with communicating with parents. Each teacher will report how many parents and families they were able to successfully engage with in regular two-way communication throughout the school year. Regular two-way communication will be defined as parents responding to or initiating conversation with the teacher at least two times per month. Teachers will use the parent communication form, email records, Remind app records, comments recorded on Google Classroom, and communication logs to verify that two-way communication did occur. The number of families reported by teachers will be used to compute the overall percentage of families engaging in two-way communication with their child's classroom teacher. The goal for the 2021-2022 school year was that all families would be connected through at least one mode of communication but did not specifically include engaging in communication on a regular basis. The percentage of families engaged in regular communication in 2021-2022 can be used to set a goal for regular, two-way communication for the 2022-2023 school year.

Family goal setting will also be discussed. Teachers will be encouraged to share anecdotal evidence regarding the success of including parents in the process of setting goals for their child. Teachers will reference their Child Goals: Family Contact form to report if all parents participated in choosing goals for their child. Additionally, teachers will share if they were able to communicate with all parents specifically about their child's goals at least twice between the family conferences held in October and February. Challenges that arose during the goal setting process will also be recorded for further discussion and reflection.

Last, the goal of having families engage in at least two at-home learning activities per month will be evaluated. Teachers will use data collected from Google Classroom to report on how often families marked the at-home learning activities as completed and documented the

completion of these activities by submitting comments, photographs or videos. Patterns in the type of activities most often completed will be identified and recorded. Conversely, the type of activities that were not completed will also be discussed. Teachers will also be asked to share the benefits and challenges they encountered with the reviewing of the family submissions on a regular basis. The reporting of evidence and the subsequent discussions on all three goals will be used to not only assess the success of family engagement in the 2021-2022 school year, but also to plan for the following school year.

Teachers will be asked to complete the Classroom Engagement Self-Reflection: Engaging Families tool by answering the self-reflection questions through a Google form. This tool will allow individual teachers to reflect on how they imbedded the CEM family engagement strategies during the past school year. In addition, the combined results from all teachers will be shared anonymously with the whole four-year-old teaching team. The results will be used to assess how the department as a whole has implemented the family engagement strategies and will then be used to set goals and expectations for the 2022-2023 school year.

The CEM implementation team will complete the Benchmarks of Quality tool during their monthly meeting in May 2022. The team will use the evidence provided from teachers during the previously held discussion on family engagement to determine a rating for the three family engagement benchmarks. The implementation of this school improvement plan should reflect an increased rating for the third family engagement benchmark, which refers to families setting goals for their child.

### **Conclusion**

Family engagement is an important component of early childhood education. A strong parent and teacher relationship is crucial for increasing engagement. This school improvement

plan outlines strategies that will be used to increase teacher and parent communication, include parents in selecting goals for their child, and educate parents on child development and ways to engage in learning activities in their home routines. The plan encourages the continued use of strategies that were successfully used during the time the school was in the distance learning model due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Strategies supported by current research, such as the use of text messaging and parent education videos, will also be implemented. Last, the plan supports the use of strategies that are a part of the Classroom Engagement Model that the school district is beginning to implement in the preschool program. These strategies will all be implemented in the 2021-2022 school year to increase family engagement in the preschool program.

Moving forward into the 2021-2022 school year, the desired outcome is that parents of students enrolled in the preschool program will feel supported, equipped, and excited to be engaged in their child's education. This increased engagement can result in positive academic benefits for students and create a desire for parents to continue their engagement in years to come. The Covid-19 pandemic changed how this district provided preschool education this past year including students learning at home with the support of their families. Survey results from the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE), which was conducted between May 25, 2020 and July 20, 2020, found that 74% of respondents agreed with the statement, "The Covid-19 crisis has helped me better appreciate the important role that families play in at-home learning" (2020). This school improvement plan allows teachers to capitalize on the opportunity to continue and increase the level of family engagement that has developed during the pandemic.



### References

- Ansari, A., & Gershoff, E. (2016). Parent involvement in head start and children's development: Indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 78*(2), 562–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12266>
- Arnold, D. H., Zeljo, A., Doctoroff, G. L., & Ortiz, C. (2008). Parent involvement in preschool: Predictors and the relation of involvement to preliteracy development. *School Psychology Review, 37*(1), 74–90.
- Bacigalupa, C. (2016). Partnering with families through photo collages. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 44*(4), 317–323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0724-3>
- Baker, T. L., Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R. J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. *School Community Journal, 26*(2), 161–184.
- Bordalba, M. & Bochaca, J. (2019). Digital media for family-school communication: Parents' and teachers' beliefs. *Computers & Education, 132*, 44-62.
- Cabell, S. Q., Zucker, T. A., DeCoster, J., Copp, S. B., & Landry, S. (2019). Impact of a parent text messaging program on pre-kindergarteners' literacy development. *Aera Open, 5*(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419833339>
- Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H. B. (2006). Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(4), 653-664.
- DeMarie, D. & Ethridge, E. (2006). Children's images of preschool: The power of photography. *YC Young Children, 61*(1), 101-104.

- Epstein, L.E. (2010). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan Magazine*, 92(3), 81–96.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200326>
- Floyd, L. O., & Vernon-Dotson, L. J. (2009). Using home learning tool kits to facilitate family involvement. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 44(3), 160–166.
- Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement: Annual synthesis*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hu, B. Y., Zou, X., & Ren, L. (2020). Parent-child number application activities predict children's math trajectories from preschool to primary school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(8), 1521–1531.
- Kang, J., Horn, E. M., & Palmer, S. (2017). Influences of family involvement in kindergarten transition activities on children's early school adjustment. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(6), 789–800.
- Kelty, N. E., & Wakabayashi, T. (2020). Family engagement in schools: Parent, educator, and community perspectives. *Sage Open*, 10(4), 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020973024>
- La Paro, K. M., Kraft-Sayre, M., & Pianta, R. C. (2003). Preschool to kindergarten transition activities: Involvement and satisfaction of families and teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17(2), 147–158.
- Lin, J., Litkowski, E., Schmerold, K., Elicker, J., Schmitt, S. A., & Purpura, D. J. (2019). Parent-educator communication linked to more frequent home learning activities for

- preschoolers. *Child & Youth Care Forum: Journal of Research and Practice in Children's Services*, 48(5), 757–772. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-019-09505-9>
- McKenna, M. K., & Millen, J. (2013). Look! listen! learn! parent narratives and grounded theory models of parent voice, presence, and engagement in k-12 education. *School Community Journal*, 23(1), 9–48.
- Mendez, J. L. (2010). How can parents get involved in preschool? Barriers and engagement in education by ethnic minority parents of children attending head start. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 16(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016258>
- MN Centers of Excellence. (n.d.). *Classroom engagement model*.  
<https://mncoe.org/mncoe/innov/cem/>
- MN Department of Education. (2013) *Every day is a great day for your child to learn: 3-5 Parents guide*.  
[https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=050749&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=050749&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary)
- MN Department of Education. (2020). *Public Summary of results for all respondents*.  
<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/publicEng/>
- Mn Department of Education. (2021). *Minnesota report card*.  
[https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/orgId--10347000000\\_\\_groupType--district\\_\\_p--3](https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/orgId--10347000000__groupType--district__p--3)
- NAEYC. (2011). *Code of ethical conduct and statement of commitment*. National Association for the Education of Young children. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/ethical-conduct>
- NAFSCE. (2020). *Survey: Family engagement during covid-19 pandemic summary of key findings*.

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/COVID\\_19\\_Survey\\_Summary\\_of\\_K.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/COVID_19_Survey_Summary_of_K.pdf)

Posey-Maddox, L., & Haley-Lock, A. (2020). One size does not fit all: Understanding parent engagement in the contexts of work, family, and public schooling. *Urban Education, 55*(5), 671–698.

Pew Research. (2019). *Mobile fact sheet*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

Rowe, D., & Fain, J. G. (2013). The family backpack project: Responding to dual-language texts through family journals. *Language Arts, 90*(6), 402–416.

Smith, J. (2020). Teachers' perspectives on communication and parent engagement in early childhood education programs for migrant farmworker children. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 18*(2), 115–129.

Strickler-Eppard, L., Czerniak, C. M., & Kaderavek, J. (2019). Families' capacity to engage in science inquiry at home through structured activities. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 47*(6), 653–664. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00958-0>

Stone, S. & Chakraborty, B. (2011). Classroom Idea. *Childhood Education, 87*(5), 5-15.

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool. (2020) *Volume 1: The foundation*. Teaching Strategies.

Walsh, B. A., Romo, G., & Jeon, H.-J. (2018). Parental perspectives on transition to kindergarten videos to promote family involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 46*(6), 655–663.

York, B. N., Loeb, S., & Doss, C. (January, 2018). One step at a time: The effects of an early literacy text messaging program for parents of preschoolers. *The journal of Human Resources, 54*(3).

Zero to Three. (2016). *Tuning in: Parents of young children speak up about what they think, know and need*. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1425-national-parent-survey-report>

**Appendix A**  
**Family Engagement Plan 2021-2022**

<b>September</b>
<p><b>Monthly Focus:</b></p> <p>Social/Emotional: TS GOLD Obj. 1c. Take Care of Own Needs</p> <p>Cognitive: TS GOLD Obj. 13 Uses Classification Skills</p>
<p><b>Communication Plan:</b></p> <p>Family Orientation (Week of 9/7-9/10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete classroom and school orientation (policies, schedules, expectations, tour of preschool area).</li> <li>● Introduce the communication plan. Assist families with signing up for Remind while parents are present in the orientation meeting.</li> <li>● Provide an orientation of Google Classroom using the students' assigned iPad.</li> <li>● Introduce the Learning At-Home activities. Allow parents to practice navigating Google Classroom and the posted Learning At-Home activities.</li> <li>● Introduce the Parent Pointer videos. Share with families that these videos will be posted monthly on Google Classroom and the link to the videos will also be shared through a Remind message each month.</li> </ul> <p>Google Classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Post General Classroom Information Handout (by 9/3/21)</li> <li>● Post "Meet Your Teacher" document that includes a photo and a short bio (by 9/3/21)</li> <li>● Post September Learning At-Home Activities (by 9/3/21)</li> <li>● Post September Parent Pointer Video: Building Independence with Children (by 9/3/21)</li> <li>● Respond to all comments, photographs and videos that have been posted by families.</li> </ul> <p>Remind Text Messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Help all parents with the process of signing up to receive Remind messages during the family orientation meeting. (Week of 9/7-9/10)</li> <li>● Send a photo to each family of their child from their first week of preschool.</li> <li>● Send at least two general classroom announcements during the month of September</li> </ul>

highlighting a special activity from the classroom.

- Send at least one question prompt during the month of September to encourage two-way communication between teachers and parents. For example: *We had a great day at school! Our room was full of action during our free choice time with friends choosing to play with many different things. Ask your child, "What did you do today? Did you build with blocks, play with the sand in the sensory table, play in the kitchen area, paint at the easel, or put a puzzle together?" Please respond to this message to share how your child answers this question. Respond back to the parent with a statement individualized to their child.*
- Send a "Parent Tip". Suggested parent tip for September: *During the preschool years, it is important that caregivers support children in increasing their independence. You can support your child by allowing him/her extra time to do tasks on his/her own. For example, allow your child a few extra minutes in the morning to put on their coat by themselves. Use descriptive words to encourage your child to persist even when the task is difficult. For example, you could say "You have one arm in! Keep reaching behind you; you are so close to getting the second arm in."*

**At-Home Learning Activities:** Two Learning At-Home Activities will be posted on Google Classroom for the month of September.

These slides will be a part of a Google Slide Presentation labeled September Learning At-Home Activity #1. It will be published to the web and the link will be posted under the September Learning At-Home Topic on Google Classroom.

Parents will be encouraged to attach videos or photographs of their child completing the activity when they "Turn-In" the assignment on google classroom. Parents will use the iPad to record a video or take a photo and then attach it to the assignment. Parents can also leave private comments that only the teacher can read.

Slide #1 Description of Activity

## Learning Activity #1





## After School Routine

**Create a routine for when your child arrives at home after school.**

1. Together with your child, decide where your child should put their coat, shoes, and backpack everyday when they get home. Think about labeling the spaces with your child's name. For example, write your child's name on a piece of paper and tape it above the hook that your child hangs his/her coat on.
2. Next, talk about how everyday your child will take out his/her folder from the backpack and empty the papers from the front pocket. Then, place the folder back in the backpack. Encourage your child to zip the backpack by him/herself.
3. Together, decide where you would like to put your child's school papers. Suggestions include: hang artwork up on fridge or place items in a special container. Not all papers need to be saved. You can decide what you want to keep and for how long!
4. Share with your child what he/she can do next. (Suggestions include play with toys, help a parent with preparing the evening meal, look at books, ect.)
5. Pretend your child just got home from school and practice your child's new after school routine.
6. Follow this routine each day when your child gets home from school. Allow your child the opportunity to complete the steps independently. Wait a few seconds before jumping in to help.

Slide #2 Example of a Printed Routine

### When I get home, I will ...

				
Hang up my coat.	Put my shoes on the rug.	Take my papers out of my folder and put my folder back in my backpack.	Put my backpack in my special spot.	<i>Choose next step as a family</i>

Slide #3 Background Knowledge to inform parents of typical development.



## Parent Information

## Building Independence

### Learning Objective: Takes Care of Own Needs Appropriately

**What does this mean?** Children develop confidence in themselves by successfully completing tasks and everyday activities on their own. Young children are capable of doing many things for themselves and can gain confidence and skills when they have the opportunity to do so.

Toddlers and young preschool-aged children will try to do things for themselves. For example, a child may hold their hands under the water faucet and look to a parent to turn the water on. Or a child may try to put on their shoe, but quickly give up while kicking the shoe in frustration.

As the child grows, they may show confidence in doing things for themselves. For example, a child may wash and dry their hands all by themselves. Or, instead of giving up in frustration with putting on their own shoe, the child may try a different way to put the shoe on. A child will also be able to put away their toys.

As skills continue to develop, a child will begin to take responsibility for their own well-being. For example, a child will remember to wash their hands before eating or after using the bathroom. They may also be able to describe why it is important to wash your hands. Or when returning home, a child will hang up their coat and place their shoes in a designated area.

Slide #4 Additional activities and parent tips to further engagement in the home.

### Additional Activities

### Takes Care of Own Needs Appropriately

- Encourage your child to get dressed by themselves. Allow extra time for your child to complete this task. If your child is struggling, first offer suggestions before stepping in to do the task for them. You could say, "Putting pants on can be hard! You may want to sit down and then put your legs in the holes."
- During mealtimes allow your child to serve him/herself. For example, instead of putting all of the food on your child's plate, allow your child to serve themselves one of the items. Your child could use a spoon to scoop up fruit or cooked vegetables from a bowl.
- After mealtimes, encourage your child to bring their plate and silverware to the sink.
- Create a bedtime routine that your child can follow every night. Routines might look different for families, but here is one example of a routine: Clean up toys, fun activity (like a family dance party), bathtime and/or get dressed for bed, brush teeth, read a book in bed, good night hugs and kisses. *Using photos to create a printed routine can be helpful for your child to remember what comes next. Let me know if you would like help creating a printed routine poster to use at home!*
- Rather than saying "Good Job", use descriptive words to describe what your child is doing. You could say, "You remembered to wash your hands!" Or, "You put on your pajamas all by yourself!"

Slide #5 Videos that provide the activity descriptions, parent information, and additional activities in an oral format.

## Takes Care of Own Needs

Videos will be inserted on this page. The videos will include a teacher or cultural liaison sharing all of the information from the previous slides.

English

Spanish

Somali

These slides will be a part of a Google Slide Presentation labeled September Learning At-Home Activity #2. It will be published to the web and the link will be posted under the September Learning At-Home Topic on Google Classroom.

Slide #1: Activity Description

## LEARNING ACTIVITY #2

## SORTING OBJECTS

Gather **10 objects** from your house and put them in a pile. These items could be toys, stuffed animals, food boxes, clothing items, ect. Look at the pile of items you found. Can you **sort** these items into smaller piles? For example, all things that have the color red can go into one pile and all the items that have blue can go in another pile. Or you could sort your objects by putting all the toys together and all the items from the kitchen together.

**Take a video of your child sharing how he/she sorted the objects and include as an attachment when you turn the assignment in on Google Classroom!**



Slide #2 Background knowledge to inform parents on typical child development.

## PARENT INFORMATION:

## SORTING OBJECTS

**Learning Objective:** Uses Classification skills

**What does this mean?** Classification refers to the action of sorting or grouping items together based on similar characteristics.

Young children first begin to match similar objects. *For example, your child might choose several cars out of the toy bin to play with. Or they might find two matching animals while eating animal crackers for a snack.*

Next, your child will begin to group similar objects together based on a single characteristic (color, shape, size, or purpose). *For example, your child might put all the red toy cars in one line and all the blue toy cars in another line. Or while eating colored goldfish crackers, you might notice your child sorting the goldfish into smaller piles of red crackers, blue crackers, and orange crackers.*

As classification skills increase, your child may be able to sort objects by one characteristic and then sort again by a different characteristic. *For example, in the posted learning activity your child might sort the items they found first by color and then sort again based on size (small or big) or purpose (toys, house items, food, ect.)*

Slide #3 Additional activities and parent tips to further engagement in the home.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

## CLASSIFYING/SORTING

- Practice sorting items during cleanup time. Say to your child “Let’s clean up all the blue toys first.” Or, “Let’s put all the small toys away first.”
- On laundry day, talk with your child about sorting the dirty laundry. Say, “Let’s put the dirty towels in this pile, the dark clothes can go here and all the white clothes can go in this pile.”
- Talk with your child about how you sort and store your clean clothes. Say, “Look, we put your pants in this drawer and your socks in this drawer. Maybe we should put your short socks on this side of the drawer and your tall socks on the other side.”
- Use descriptive words with your child. Say, “We can sort our groceries by putting all the items together that need to stay cold. Crackers and cereal do not go in the fridge, so they can be together.”
- Ask your child, “Why do these things belong together?” or “Why doesn’t this object belong in this group?” Engage in further conversation by asking, “Can we group these objects in a different way?”

Slide #4 Videos that provide the activity descriptions, parent information, and additional activities in an oral format.

### Classifying/Sorting

Videos will be inserted on this page. The videos will include a teacher or cultural liaison sharing all of the information from the previous slides.

English

Spanish

Somali

Teacher Feedback: As parents upload videos or photographs of their child completing the activities, the teacher will provide supportive feedback through the comment feature on Google Classroom. Teachers will recognize the parent and child’s efforts, provide encouragement for extension activities,

and answer questions from parents.

**Individual Child Goals:**

- Send the *Ideas for Child Goals* list along with the conference sign up form home with children in their folders during the last week of September.
- Send the *Ideas for Child Goals* list in a Remind message encouraging parents to begin thinking about choosing 1 or 2 goals for their child.
- Post the *Ideas for Child Goals* list on Google Classroom.

**October**

**Monthly Focus:**

Literacy:

Math:

**Communication Plan:**

Google Classroom

- Post October Learning At-Home Activities (by 10/1/21)
- Post October Parent Pointer Video (by 10/1/21)
- Respond to all comments, photographs and videos that have been posted by families.
- Post several photos of children engaged in various activities, including activities that highlight the monthly focus.

Remind Text Messages:

- During October family conferences, confirm with all families that they are receiving the Remind messages. If they are not, assist families with getting signed up for Remind or determine another method for communicating.
- Send at least two classroom announcements that provide families information about what is happening in the classroom.
- Send at least one question prompt to encourage two-way communication between teachers

and parents. For example, *We have just completed our 4th week of preschool! Have you noticed any changes in your child since he/she started school? Please respond to this message and share your thoughts!* Engage in dialog by replying to parents' messages.

- Send a "Parent Tip". Suggested parent tip for October: *Young children often begin to recognize and name the letters that are in their name first. Write your child's name on a piece of paper. Now, go on a letter hunt all around your house looking for the letters in his/her name. Can you find any of the letters in your name on the cereal box? Or, how about on the front cover of this book? Where else can you find letters? As you find letters around your house, encourage your child to repeat the letter name as he/she points to the letter.*

**At-Home Learning Activities:**

The two learning activities, parent tips, and additional activities will be created by the preschool team during the week of August 30 - September 2. Once completed they will be added to this document.

**Individual Child Goals:** Parents and the teacher will work together to select 1 or 2 goals for their child.

1. During the October family conference engage in conversation with parents regarding child goals. Ask, "What do you want your child to accomplish or learn this year?" and "What tasks or routines are challenging for your child?"
2. Complete the *Family Goal Setting* form with the parents. Work together with parents to choose a goal that is measurable. Provide suggestions on activities that they can do together at home to support their child's progress in meeting their goal. Discuss resources or materials that family may need while working on their child's goal.
3. Share with families that you will be in contact with them at least two times between now and the next family conference in February. These check-in conversations can occur in-person, by phone, through email or with the Remind text messaging.

**November**

**Monthly Focus:**

<p>Literacy:</p> <p>Math:</p>
<p><b>Communication Plan:</b></p> <p>Google Classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul> <p>Remind Text Messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
<p><b>At-Home Learning Activities:</b></p>
<p><b>Individual Child Goals:</b></p>





## Appendix C

### Example of Google Classroom Layout

The screenshot shows the Google Classroom interface for a class named "Sample Preschool Class". The top navigation bar includes "Stream", "Classwork", "People", and "Grades", with "Classwork" selected. Below the navigation bar, there is a "Create" button and utility icons for "Meet", "Google Calendar", and "Class Drive folder".

On the left side, there is a sidebar with "All topics" and a list of topics: "Child Goals", "September", and "October".

The main content area displays the "Child Goals" topic. Below it, there is a post titled "Ideas for Child Goals" posted at 9:52 PM. The next section is "September", which contains three posts: "Learning Activity #1" (2:34 PM), "Learning Activity #2" (2:35 PM), and "Parent Pointer Video" (2:35 PM). The final section is "October", which contains three posts: "Learning Activity #1" (2:37 PM), "Learning Activity #2" (2:37 PM), and "Parent Pointer Video" (2:36 PM).

**Appendix D**  
**Ideas for Child Goals**

*You may use this list to help choose a goal for your child. You are welcome to discuss a goal that is not on this list with your child’s teacher as well!*

**My child will...**

<b>Social/Emotional</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify his/her emotions by labeling how he/she feels. “I am sad.”</li> <li>• Identify emotional responses in others and the reason why. “He’s sad because his block tower fell down.”</li> <li>• Clean up his/her toys every night.</li> <li>• Follow a bedtime routine every night.</li> <li>• Will set the table before meal time by placing a plate, fork, cup and napkin at the table for each family member.</li> <li>• Sit at the table for mealtimes.</li> <li>• Try at least one new food each week.</li> <li>• Will read a book with a family member at least once per day.</li> </ul>
<b>Language</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use complete four-to-six-word sentences.</li> <li>• Tell stories about other times and places including major details.</li> <li>• Engage in conversations of at least three exchanges.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide whether two words rhyme.</li> <li>• Decide whether two or more words begin with the same sound.</li> <li>• Recognize and name at least 10 letters, especially the letters in his/her name.</li> <li>• Produce the correct sound for 10 or more letters.</li> <li>• Retell a familiar story including major events and characters.</li> <li>• Write his/her name.</li> </ul>
<b>Math</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Count to 20 and count 10-20 objects accurately.</li> <li>• Describe two sets of objects by stating which group has more, less or the same.</li> <li>• Identify numbers 1 - 10 by name and connect each numeral to counted objects.</li> <li>• Extend and create a simple repeating pattern.</li> </ul>

**Appendix E**

**Family Goal Setting Form**

# My Child/Family Goal

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**

My child will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**Activities I can do at home to support my child's goal:**

- 
- 
- 
- 

**Additional resources or materials that my family may need:**

- 
- 
-