

Partnering with Families: Parent Leadership in Action

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series

[Music]

Narrator: Encouraging parents to take a leadership and advocacy role in their children's lives has always been at the heart of Head Start and Early Head Start programs. This video shows how one program partners with families as leaders and advocates for their families and their children.

Teacher: Today we're reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Narrator: At the Meeting Street Early Head Start home-based program in Providence, Rhode Island leadership begins with confident and empowered parents.

Linda Donley-Dupont: The kids are only going to be as healthy as their parents are. If they're feeling confident, if they're feeling like okay, I have a direction, and I can do this and I have supports. If they're feeling secure, then oftentimes their children feel secure, too.

Teacher: Where's the cat Sasha?

Child: Cat.

Narrator: Building authentic relationships with families is key.

Linda: We start out in the beginning talking about hopes and dreams that parents have for their children, and that's a great place to reflect back on and remind them of.

Lori, Parent: I thought it was going to be a lot of, well, you're doing this wrong, and you're doing that wrong, But it's not, it's more of talking. And more of understanding each other.

Evangeline Brennan: We really try to make it a conversation with the family about where are you right now, and where do you aspire to be? What steps we can do to support the family to meet those goals, and what things the family is doing to sort of advocate for themselves in getting there.

Teacher: If you feel like he's ready to transition, try it.

Parent: Okay.

Teacher: You're not going to know until you try.

Narrator: Home visits are one way Meeting Street works with parents to meet these goals.

Evangeline: We may go in with ideas that we think are appropriate for the child developmentally, but really, the core of that is that it comes from them.

Teacher: What do you like about doing the reading activity?

Parent: I like that it gives me one on one attention sometimes, with each one of them.

Sheila, Parent: In terms of like how to prepare your child to be, you know, psychologically healthy, and like ready for education, that stuff is not intuitive.

Teacher: Can you find pink, Sasha? Where's pink? There we go. Can you put it on the string?

Sheila, Parent: You know, that it really does help to have another person guide you.

Evangaline: I think that once the family realizes what their child is doing, and how amazing it is, and they start to see some of those wonderful things from week to week, then they want to be more involved.

Narrator: Socialization time at the Center is an extension of the ideas brought to the home.

Genesis, Parent: They do their little circle time, they read. They do little activities like that, and that's great for them.

Lori, Parent: He gets to interact with other children, and I get to focus on adults that have children that are the same age.

Evangeline: Socialization is an excellent opportunity for families to connect with each other, and to build relationships and friendships of their own within the context of the classroom because we want to give parents an opportunity to see other children doing the same kinds of things that their children are doing. And it really helps build confidence when they see well, my child really is, you know, right in line with some other kids his or her age.

Narrator: Building on a family's strengths and listening to what parent's want for their children, helps families thrive.

Lori, Parent: I didn't realize that something that young could respond to something like that. And I never realized that I have that much of an influence on him until Meeting Street school came in.

Linda: It's really important to become comfortable and understand that you do have expertise as a parent.

Sheila: It's really improved like my feeling of being confident in my own parenting, of like knowing that I know what it is that you're supposed to do.

Narrator: And confidence as a parent, builds confidence as a leader.

Sheila: I feel like if a parent is able to report that, that should be...

Narrator: At Meeting Street, parents are encouraged to become advocates who influence the program's policies and practices that shape their children's lives.

Genesis, Parent: In Policy Council and Parent Committee, both talk about like the programs.

Evangeline: The other suggestion was have you have trouble paying rent and utilities.

Parent: I think it's definitely we should put that in there and give it five points because that's like a big issue.

Sheila, Parent: I love that idea.

Genesis, Parent: The feeling of being able to have a say in things, it's a great experience. There's so many bills to pay in every single family.

Sheila, Parent: When you're a single parent and you have the economic constraints that everyone in this program has, I think it's really easy to feel powerless. The impact it has had on me is actually much more profound than I was expecting. Being a member of the Policy Council has made me realize that like I do have good ideas to bring to the table.

Narrator: Parents learn and grow with each other and with staff partners, leading and looking towards the future.

Evangeline: We try to really support every small success along the way and build parents up and let them know that they're doing a great job, and continue to support them.

Narrator: Great things can happen for children, families, and communities when parents act as leaders and advocates.

Genesis, Parent: I am way less shy, I'll talk to anyone. There are multiple reasons why a child would be living with anyone other than the parent. Like, I have like higher goals for myself and my son now.

Lori, Parent: It was like something inside me had just opened up. It's amazing!

[Music]

[Did you see these PFCE Framework strategies and outcomes?]

[National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement]

[We would like to thank the families and program staff of the Meeting Street Early Head Start program in Providence, Rhode Island.]

[Dedicated to the memory of Hank O'Karma, video producer and friend.]

[Selected music from Bensound.com]