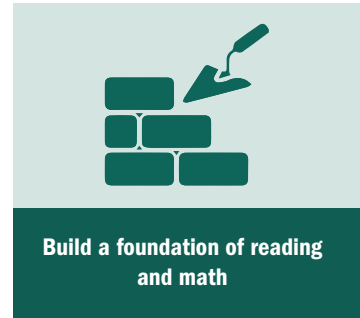


## Family Engagement Is Essential in Early Childhood Education

Increasing family engagement in early childhood education from birth to age 8 is essential to lay a strong foundation for reading, math, and school readiness. Although families have a primary role in preparing their children for school, they often report feeling ill-equipped to do so. According to a recent survey, Texas families stated they want to help their children but lack the confidence to support them academically due to uncertainty about how to interact with school personnel, particularly if there are cultural and language barriers.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Texas survey noted that teachers face several barriers to family engagement and identified the need for preparation and supports to engage diverse families in their children's learning.<sup>2</sup> To bridge this gap in early childhood education, stakeholders are developing action plans to increase engagement of families of children ages 0–8 years old that include outreach, training, and high-quality resources, tools and other opportunities focused on achieving targeted goals and early childhood education indicators.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, family engagement should be integrated throughout early childhood systems and programs, and administrators, educators, and families must commit to work in partnership to overcome barriers in order to promote the success of every child.

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### Family Engagement Fosters School Readiness and Early Learning in Reading and Math

Recent studies on family engagement in early childhood settings indicate that when families are engaged and supported in goal-oriented curriculum and evidence-based programs focused on math and reading, young children show notable improvements in learning and school readiness.<sup>4</sup> Young children benefit when families are meaningfully and routinely involved in their child's learning as reflected by the following research findings:




- ▶ Significant increases in parent involvement were linked with growth in literacy skills when parents focused specifically on promoting reading skills such as learning word recognition.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Literacy curriculum–based texts along with positive parenting tips sent to parents three times a week by PreK program staff increased parent involvement at home, ultimately leading to increases in literacy development of lower performing children.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ High-quality digital media along with parent training on how to use digital games, short videos, and online materials to support children's learning improved math skills and narrowed school readiness gaps for children across all socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

Positive relationships between families and school staff are key to increasing engagement and children's school readiness. A study on the effects of parent involvement on academic achievement from kindergarten to grade 5 found that student math and reading achievement were strongly associated with positive teacher-parent relationships.<sup>8</sup> Families want to learn how to support learning at school and at home. When families understand their children's strengths and needs and receive guidance and tools to use at home, they become more engaged in their children's early education, which benefits children. Thus, with the correct knowledge, skills, and supports, families can feel empowered and confident to partner with educators to develop their children's academic potential.

"Parents are equal partners in what we do and they realize that they are with me on this academic journey, providing strength and support to their students. The students feel valued and they know that they're able to continue growing and becoming lifelong learners."

Amy O'Connor, Bilingual Kindergarten Teacher  
Klein Independent School District

## Strategies and Actions to Increase Family Engagement

 Districts	 Schools/Educators	 Families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Develop a district family engagement action plan</b> in collaboration with families, educators, and community stakeholders that includes a focus on children ages 0–8.</li> <li>▶ <b>Provide educators with professional development on how to meaningfully engage families.</b> Training should address relationship building and understanding the context and needs of the school community. For example, <b>Klein ISD's</b> Family Engagement 101 training for administrators and educators includes cultural awareness and effective strategies and best practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Plan learning opportunities for families.</b> For example, <b>Klein ISD</b> hosts regular reading and math nights where parents learn from educators about practical and fun reading and math strategies that they can use at home with their children.</li> <li>▶ <b>Provide activities for children and parents</b> to help them make a smooth transition to PreK and kindergarten. <b>Laredo ISD</b> schools help parents access H-E-B's Read 3 early childhood literacy programs that provide free books and at-home lessons and activities for parents of kids not ready to go to preschool. Parents read to their child three times a week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Participate in early childhood evidence-based training programs offered by schools</b> to learn how to reinforce math and reading skills at home.</li> <li>▶ <b>Participate in demonstrations of math and reading activities</b> to increase confidence in using them at home. For example, <b>Laredo ISD</b> families participating in an adult literacy program for Spanish speakers practice with instructor and peers on how to use reading materials with their children at home.</li> <li>▶ <b>Access parent resources in English and Spanish</b> at ESC 16's Statewide Parent and Family Engagement Initiative's <a href="#">Early Childhood Education website</a>.</li> </ul>

## Family Engagement Tools and Resources

- ▶ TEA Early Childhood Education Family Resources: [https://tea.texas.gov/Academics/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/Family\\_Resources](https://tea.texas.gov/Academics/Early_Childhood_Education/Family_Resources)
- ▶ Region 16 ESC Early Childhood Education Resources: [https://www.esc16.net/page/title1swi.earlychildhood.education\\_parent\\_resources](https://www.esc16.net/page/title1swi.earlychildhood.education_parent_resources)
- ▶ Little Texans, Big Futures: <http://www.littletexans.org/DownloadGuidelines.aspx>
- ▶ Children's Learning Institute Engage: <https://cliengage.org/static/>
- ▶ The Centers for Disease Control Milestone Tracker: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html>
- ▶ Talking is Teaching: <https://talkingisteaching.org>
- ▶ Start Smart Texas: <https://startsmarttexas.org/>
- ▶ NAEYC Family Engagement: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement>

<sup>1</sup> Texas State Board of Education. (2018, November). *Long range plan for public education*. "Community conversations, 2017–2018." Austin, TX: Author. Retrieved from [https://tea.texas.gov/About\\_TEA/Leadership/State\\_Board\\_of\\_Education/LRP/Texans\\_provide\\_input\\_at\\_Community\\_Conversations](https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Leadership/State_Board_of_Education/LRP/Texans_provide_input_at_Community_Conversations)

<sup>2</sup> Texas State Board of Education. *Community conversations*.

<sup>3</sup> Texas State Board of Education. *Community conversations*.

<sup>4</sup> National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2018). *Family engagement and school readiness*. (Research to Practice Series on the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework). Washington: DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/understanding-family-engagement-outcomes-research-practice-series>

<sup>5</sup> DeCusati, C.L.P., & Johnson, J.E. (2004). Parents as classroom volunteers and kindergarten students' emergent reading skills. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 97(5), 235–246.

<sup>6</sup> Cortes, K., Fricke, H., Loeb, S., & Song, D. (2018). Too little or too much? Actionable advice in an early-childhood text messaging experiment. (EdWorkingPaper: 19-15). Retrieved from <http://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai19-15.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, B., Li, L., Tiu, M., Atienza, S., & Sexton, U. (2015). Learning with PBS KIDS: A study of family engagement and early mathematics achievement. Retrieved from <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1446854213resourcelearningwithpbskids-3.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Park, S. & Holloway, S. D. (2017) The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level: A longitudinal study. *The Journal of Educational Research*, (110)1, 1–16, doi:10.1080/00220671.2015.1016600