

Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement

Quality early care and education programs in Rhode Island are on a continuous improvement path that is informed by Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) licensing regulations; Department of Education Basic Education Program (BEP) regulations; BrightStars Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Standards; and Department of Education Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Standards for Approval. The graphics below illustrate the state’s quality continuum for center-based programs, family child care programs, and school-based programs. Larger versions of the graphics can be found in *Appendix A*.

This Tip Sheet describes how programs progress on that continuum in the area of **family communication, involvement, and engagement**.



The early childhood community recognizes the important role that families play in their child’s education and understands that a strong partnership between families and educators improves social and academic outcomes for children. In addition, research in the field suggests that meaningful family engagement in children’s early learning experiences contributes to their school readiness and success in later years.¹ For these reasons, family communication, involvement, and engagement are essential features in Rhode Island’s quality continuum.

Rhode Island families are extremely diverse in culture, ethnicity, and family structure. It is important to recognize the contribution all family members make to children’s learning and development and to engage all significant family members in their child’s education. For this reason, Rhode Island has replaced the term “parent involvement” with the terms “family involvement” and “family engagement.”

¹ Halgunseth, L. C.; Peterson, A.; Stark, D.; & Moddie, S. (2009). *Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature*. NAEYC and Pre-K Now.

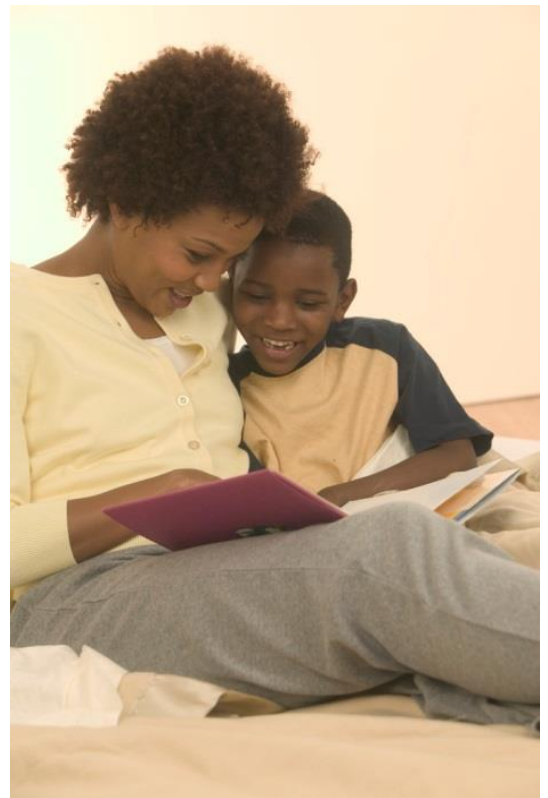
Tip Sheet: Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement

Many early care and education programs ask about the distinction between family involvement and family engagement. Traditionally, early childhood programs are accustomed to creating opportunities for families to be involved and then inviting families to participate. The families then choose whether or not to respond to these invitations. Family engagement goes a step further. Engagement occurs when early childhood programs and providers create ongoing, strengths-based, and reciprocal relationships with family members, leading the programs and families to communicate regularly and work together to create opportunities for children both individually and in groups.²

As programs work to continually improve their practices with families, Rhode Island's quality continuum should serve as their guide. Some examples from the continuum are described below.

DCYF regulations for center-based programs and family child care providers and the public schools' BEP regulations provide a solid foundation from which authentic family engagement can grow. DCYF regulations, for example, require programs to conduct pre-admission family conferences, hold ongoing family-staff conferences, and provide opportunities for families to engage in children's early learning and development aligned with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS).³ BEP regulations ensure that public preschools provide a broad spectrum of activities, programs, and services that directly involve families in their child's education, including volunteering, school decision-making, and more.⁴

As programs move up the quality continuum through their involvement in BrightStars, they enhance family communication and involvement through an annual family survey, multiple strategies for communicating with families, and a family advisory board to provide a mechanism for families to participate in program-level decision-making.⁵



² Ibid. p. 3.

³ See full listing of DCYF regulations related to family engagement in *Appendix C*.

⁴ See full listing of BEP regulations related to family engagement in *Appendix B*.

⁵ See full listing of BrightStars standards related to family engagement in *Appendix D*.

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At the pinnacle, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) CECE program standards require programs to develop written plans and policies for implementing consistent, high-quality family engagement services. These programs plan and implement a continuum of culturally relevant opportunities with families, foster strong two-way relationships, and ensure they have mechanisms for communicating with families who speak languages different from their own.⁶

Early childhood programs at all levels of the continuum support their staff in growing professionally in this area. Information on the knowledge and competencies needed by staff is located in Domain 2, Family Engagement, of *Rhode Island's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies*. Programs develop a system of family communication, involvement, and engagement by

- describing their plan in writing;
- designating staff responsibilities;
- incorporating staff responsibilities in job descriptions, staff qualifications, and performance reviews; and
- developing policies and procedures to support implementation of the plan.

High-quality programs continually express their values and beliefs in family communication, involvement, and engagement; prioritize this in their work; and map out program practices that reflect this priority.

⁶ See full listing of CECE program standards related to family engagement in *Appendix E*.

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Rhode Island's Quality Continuum as It Relates to Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement

This table describes increasing expectations in the area of family communication, involvement, and engagement as programs advance on the quality continuum. Evidence of increasing program quality begins with foundational DCYF licensing/BEP requirements, moves progressively up through the BrightStars rating system, and culminates with the highest standards articulated in the RIDE CECE standards for approval.

Regulations or Standards	Level	Progression of Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement Expectations as Programs Advance through the Quality Continuum	Quality Indicators
BEP Regulations		BEP Regulations, 2009, Chapter G-14-2.2(b)	In development
DCYF Child Care Program Regulations ⁷	Program	Family Engagement Section Three, Regulations VIII. A-G	DCYF confirms required documentation through license application/renewal, and Monitoring Visits. DCYF communicates with programs during Monitoring Visits.
	Classroom		

⁷ DCYF Family Child Care Regulations have not yet been promulgated.

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Regulations or Standards	Level	Progression of Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement Expectations as Programs Advance through the Quality Continuum	Quality Indicators
BrightStars Standards	Program	<p>Standard 10: Family Communication and Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 2-star through 4-star levels, programs must offer two of the following family communications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter • Family meeting, social event, or workshop four times per year • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home four times per year • Annual family survey • Support parents in transitioning children in/out and within program • Connect families with community services • At 5-star level, programs must demonstrate that they offer three of the above. • At 3-star through 5-star levels, programs must also demonstrate that they offer family conferences two times per year. 	<p>At 4-star and 5-star levels, programs must submit documentation demonstrating they conduct an annual survey.</p> <p>At 5-star level, programs must submit documentation demonstrating that they have an advisory board that includes families and meets four times per year.</p> <p>All submitted documentation should be dated within a recent 12-month period (month and year).</p> <p>In place of all of the above, programs may demonstrate that they are in compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards or are NAEYC-accredited.</p>
	Classroom		

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Regulations or Standards	Level	Progression of Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement Expectations as Programs Advance through the Quality Continuum	Quality Indicators
BrightStars Standards	Family Child Care	<p>Standard 8: Family Communication and Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 2-star through 4-star levels, programs must offer two of the following family communications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter • Family meeting, social event, or workshop four times per year • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home four times per year • Annual family survey • Support parents in transitioning children in/out and within program • Connect families with community services • At 5-star level, programs must demonstrate that they offer three of the above. • At 3-star through 5-star levels, programs must also demonstrate that they offer family conferences two times per year. 	At 4-star and 5-star levels, programs must submit documentation demonstrating they conduct an annual survey.

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Regulations or Standards	Level	Progression of Family Communication, Involvement, and Engagement Expectations as Programs Advance through the Quality Continuum	Quality Indicators
RIDE CECE Program Standards for Approval	Program	Standard Eight: Family Engagement Standards 8.1–8.9	<p>RIDE reviews and approves a Family Engagement plan scored using a standards-based rubric.</p> <p>RIDE reviews and approves the program’s Family Handbook to ensure the inclusion of required elements articulated throughout the Standards. Handbook is scored using a checklist.</p> <p>RIDE conducts administrator and education coordinator interviews and scores interview responses using a rubric.</p>
	Classroom	Standard Eight: Family Engagement Standards 8.10–8.15	<p>RIDE conducts teacher and education coordinator interviews and scores the interview responses using a rubric.</p> <p>RIDE reviews classroom documentation using a Classroom Observation Checklist.</p>

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Resources to Extend Your Learning

- Center for Early Learning Professionals InfoLine: www.center-elp.org
- The Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) professional development courses: *Implementing a Standards-Based Classroom, Implementing a Standards-Based Program*:
www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Workforce.aspx#23021-rields-professional-development
- Families and Community Relationships: A Guide to NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Related Accreditation Criteria:
www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/viewstandards
- Harvard Family Research Project: hfrp.org/family-involvement
- Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework: eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/im/2011/pfce-framework.pdf
- National PTA: www.pta.org/programs/FamilyEngagement.cfm
- Rhode Island's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals:
www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Workforce.aspx
- RIELS⁸ Implementing Family Engagement Opportunities Linked to the Standards to Involve all Families in Meaningful Ways:
www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Early-Childhood/Workforce/Selected-Resources-ImplementingFamilyEngagementOpportunitiesToInvolveFamiliesInMeaningfulWays.pdf
- RIELDS Fun Family Activities: www.ripin.org/EarlyLearning.html
- Epstein, J., et al. (2002). *School, Family and Community Partnerships, Your Handbook for Action*, 2nd edition, Corwin Press.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York: The New Press.

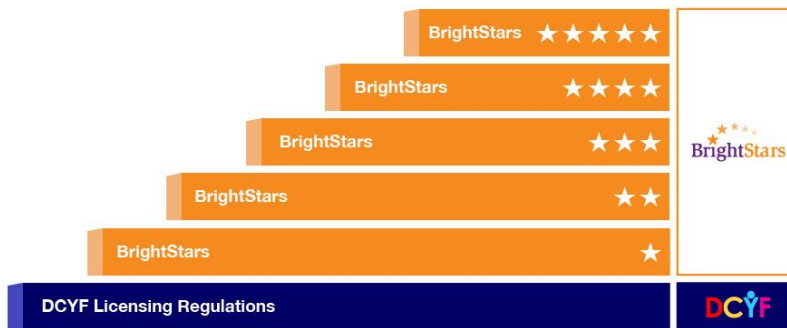
⁸ Rhode Island Early Learning Standards

APPENDIX A

Center-based Program Quality Continuum



Family Child Care Program Quality Continuum



School-based Program Quality Continuum



APPENDIX B

RIDE Basic Education Plan (BEP) Regulations, June 2009

Chapter 14: Safe, Healthy, and Supportive Learning Environment

G-14.2.2. Student, Family, and Community Engagement.

(b) Each LEA shall provide a broad spectrum of activities, programs, and services that directly involve families in their children’s education and personally engage families in the school. Therefore, each LEA shall adopt the national Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) *Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, which state:

- Communication: Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful;
- Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought; and
- School Decision Making and Advocacy: Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community—Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Standard 2: Communicating effectively—Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

Standard 3: Supporting student success—Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students’ learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child—Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

Standard 5: Sharing power—Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standard 6: Collaborating with community—Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

APPENDIX C

DCYF Child Care Program Regulations for Licensure, November 2013

SECTION THREE – LICENSING STANDARDS

VIII. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- A. The program is open to families for observation and visits whenever the program is in operation.
- B. Preadmission Family Conference
 - 1. Are scheduled to secure health and family history, obtain background information on the child and his/her home and develop the child's program.
 - 2. The completion of these conferences is documented.
 - 3. Areas of discussion includes:
 - a. child's strengths and needs;
 - b. families goals for a child;
 - c. family history and background; and
 - d. necessary supports and accommodations to ensure the child's health, safety, early learning and development.
 - 4. Opportunities are provided for the child and parent to visit the program one or more times before the child is enrolled.
- C. Family-Staff Conferences.
 - 1. The program has a plan for family-staff conferences.
 - 2. Programs operating infant/toddler programs develop a means of daily communication between staff and families.
 - 3. Shared information includes: references to the child's mood, health, feeding, sleeping, toileting, playing or other activities, noting changes, disruptions or note-worthy occurrences at home or at the program.
- D. Families are kept informed through the parent handbook, regular newsletters, bulletin boards, frequent notes, telephone calls and other communications.
- E. The program offers opportunities for the families to be engaged in their child's early learning and development. These experiences are informed by the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and suited to the children's age and developmental levels.
- F. The program maintains a directory of community resources and makes relevant information available to families.

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- G. Staff work collaboratively with local school districts to ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in child outreach screening. Screening is not used to label a child, determine a child's placement in the program, deny a child's entrance into a program or to infer a child's readiness.

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APPENDIX D

BrightStars – Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Framework, November 2013

Standard 10: FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT		Domain 6: Family Engagement		
<p>The program communicates regularly with families by engaging in two-way communication with families, offering ongoing opportunities for family involvement, and working to build partnerships with families.</p>				
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
<p>Program is Licensed by DCYF Community-based programs</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Basic Education Program (BEP) Compliance Public Schools</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly newsletter (three times/year) Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) Annual family survey Support parents in transitioning children Connect families with community services <p>OR</p> <p>Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards</p> <p>OR</p> <p>NAEYC Accreditation</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly newsletter (three times/year) Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) Annual family survey Support parents in transitioning children Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards</p> <p>OR</p> <p>NAEYC Accreditation</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly newsletter (three times/year) Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) Support parents in transitioning children Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Conducts annual family survey</p> <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards</p> <p>OR</p> <p>NAEYC Accreditation</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 3 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly newsletter (three times/year) Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) Support parents in transitioning children Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Conducts annual family survey</p> <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p> <p>PLUS</p> <p>Advisory Board An advisory board that includes families and meets four times/year</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards</p> <p>OR</p> <p>NAEYC Accreditation</p>

STANDARD 10: FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT



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BrightStars – Family Child Care Quality Framework, November 2013



Standard 8:

FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Domain 6: Family Engagement

The program **communicates regularly with families** by engaging in two-way communication with families, offering ongoing opportunities for family involvement, and **working to build partnerships with families**.



BRIGHTSTARS FAMILY CHILD CARE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
<p>Program is Licensed by DCYF</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter (three times/year) • Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) • Annual family survey • Support parents in transitioning children • Connect families with community services 	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter (three times/year) • Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) • Annual family survey • Support parents in transitioning children • Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 2 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter (three times/year) • Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) • Support parents in transitioning children • Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Conducts an annual family survey</p> <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p>	<p>Family Communication Program offers 3 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly newsletter (three times/year) • Family meeting, social event, or workshop (four times/year) • Ideas and suggestions to support learning at home (four times/year) • Support parents in transitioning children • Connect families with community services <p>PLUS</p> <p>Conducts an annual family survey</p> <p>PLUS</p> <p>Family-Teacher Conference Offered two times/year</p>

STANDARD 8: FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT



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APPENDIX E

RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards for Approval of Preschool and Kindergarten Programs, 2013

Standard Eight: Family Engagement

The program has a written plan that describes program practices for communicating with and involving family members as partners in their child's education and in program decision-making. Family members include adults and children significant in the child's daily life who influence the child and support their learning.

Program Level

- 8.1 The program shall be **open to families** for observation and visits whenever the program is in operation.
- 8.2 The program shall implement activities to facilitate the **transition of children and families** including:
 - opportunities for the child and parent/guardian to visit the program one or more times prior to enrollment;
 - activities to support internal transitions within the program, e.g., from class to class, during program enrollment; and
 - strategies to support families with their transitions to other programs or schools as they transition out of the program. These strategies may include providing information on future program options, enrollment procedures and practices, networking with families who have already made this transition, and opportunities for program visitation.
- 8.3 The program shall use a variety of methods to engage all families in **active two-way communication** on an ongoing basis such as new family orientations, small group meetings, individual conversations, notes between program and home, and written questionnaires.
- 8.4 The program shall plan and implement a wide variety of **opportunities for families to be engaged in their child's education**, both within the program and in the family's home.
- 8.5 The written program plan shall delineate the expectation that **teaching staff engage all families in the education of their child**, including families with special needs and circumstances, so that they can take full advantage of family engagement opportunities.
- 8.6 Programs shall encourage collaboration with families by **making teachers available** to meet with families to discuss children's progress, collaborate with IEP teams by attending meetings, participating in relevant training, and/or sharing information to support children with and without developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

- 8.7 The written program plan shall describe the **opportunities for all families to be actively involved** in program decision making (e.g. advisory groups) and leadership.
- 8.8 The written program level plan shall describe how program **actively seek and utilize input** from families in the following areas:
- establishing or refining program philosophies, long-term goals and short-term objectives;
 - conducting program assessment and evaluation;
 - designing family engagement opportunities;
 - establishing strategies to ensure that the program remains relevant to the values, culture, identity and home language; and
 - creating a physical environment that is welcoming to families.
- 8.9 The program shall make efforts to **accommodate families with special needs and circumstances** so that they can take full advantage of family engagement opportunities.

Classroom Level

Classroom level family engagement emerges from the program level written plan as it is translated into individual teacher and staff practices with families.

- 8.10 Teaching staff shall implement intentional practices designed to **foster strong two-way relationships with all families** from the first contact and maintain them over time.
- 8.11 Teaching staff shall **communicate with all families in a variety of ways** on at least a weekly basis regarding children's activities and developmental milestones, shared care-giving issues, and other information that affects the well-being and development of their children.
- 8.12 Teaching staff shall **collect information from individual families** for use in designing family engagement opportunities appropriate to their interests and circumstances.
- 8.13 Teaching staff shall use a variety of resources to **communicate with families who speak languages different from their own** and, whenever possible, provide information for families in their primary language.
- 8.14 Teaching staff shall communicate with all families to **gather information** about their child's interests, approaches to learning and developmental needs, and to learn about each family's goals and concerns and goals for their children. This information shall be **incorporated into ongoing classroom planning and assessment**.

8.15 Teaching staff shall **plan and implement a continuum of opportunities** so that all families:

- know what young children should know and be able to do as articulated in the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and/or the Common Core State Standards;
- recognize how standards-based programs support their child’s learning; and
- understand and embrace the positive role that families play in supporting their child in learning at home and in the program.