Preschool Initiative (PI) is funded through a Consortium Incentive Grant (CIG) from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Migrant Education (OME).

This staff development module is designed for use by preschool educators and paraprofessionals and is intended to strengthen the partnership between the preschool service providers and the parents of the preschool migrant children they serve.

The information and activities presented here are meant to supplement a preschool program staff development plan. Each segment may be used independently. The parent activities may be added to a variety of parent event settings.

Finally, we encourage users to access the references and resources for additional information on parent engagement.

“Schools need to make a greater effort to understand how marginalized parents are negotiating the concept of involvement for themselves so they can effectively ‘partner’ with parents on the parents’ own terms.”

Gerardo R. López
Educational Leadership & Policy
University of Utah

**In this module:**
- Overview of the MEP
- Positive Contributions
- What Parents Want Schools to Know
- Success Story
- Ensuring Educational Stability for our Nation’s Youth
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- References & Resources
Positive Contributions

The flexibility of migrant workers helps sustain the productivity of the American economy. Migrant workers fill important roles in fast-growing and declining sectors of the economy. They often do jobs regarded by some workers as unattractive or lacking career prospects. Their work ethic is unparalleled. Migrant labor is physically demanding and laborers must work long hours. Migrant parents often encourage their children to do well in school so they can take advantages of opportunities that many of them did not have.

Parent Engagement Activity

Migrant parents may have a different view about their role in assisting with their children’s education than what many school staff expect. Often parents just need to be informed of ways school staff would like them to work with their children.

- Explain 2-5 different skills that children need to know to prepare for kindergarten. These can be skills like learning their colors and numbers, counting to 10, recognizing shapes, identifying different body parts, and learning their ABCs.
- Provide simple ideas of how these activities can naturally be done at home in everyday life. For example, share ideas about how colors can be pointed out throughout the day such as when a child is getting dressed, or when sorting through laundry.
- Help the parent see that it is not necessary to teach these concepts in English if they are still learning English but that they can teach this in their native language.
- Migrant parents are the best first teachers for their child. They often just need some simple ideas to get started.
What Parents Want Schools to Know

- Parents want to help their children.
- They are often not sure where to start.
- They are often not aware of staff expectations of how they should be involved.
- They are uncomfortable going to a place that doesn’t have a translator if they are learning English.
- Many times activities are scheduled at a time when they are not available to come.
- They would like to be informed of how their children are doing.
- They appreciate the help schools provide their children.
- They are grateful for those who help them navigate the school setting.

Success Story - Comienza en Casa

*It Starts at Home (Comienza en Casa)* is a successful early learning model that was used in Maine, which integrates technology use with activities and information to promote migrant preschool and school readiness at home. Parents helped their children learn by offering them a variety of early learning activities in their home language (Spanish) that may have taken place inside or outdoors, as well as activities on the iPad using carefully selected apps (in English and/or Spanish). Learning modules included the following components:

- **READ** - eBook apps to learn more about a topic and/or experience a good story.
- **PLAY** - use educational game apps, providing another way for children to interact with featured concepts.
- **CREATE** - use creativity apps to create a story or project connected to the topic and/or of interest to the child.
- **OFFSCREEN** - participate in traditional early learning activities.
- **FAMILY FOCUS** - provide and discuss research-based information (e.g., articles, tip sheets) on different areas of early literacy and learning with parents.

Families were using the iPad with children to document activities, create new publications and learn using the various apps and resources provided. Feedback from families guided the development of the project and was gathered in a variety of ways, including:

- A school readiness checklist identifying learning goals for the season, discussed prior to and following the units
- Conversations during home visits
- Video reflections
- Discussions that took place at evening meetings with other parents
Ensuring Educational Stability for Our Nation’s Youth
(Adapted with permission from Frances Frost, Family Ambassador, U.S. Department of Education)

PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

SUPPORTS EQUITY TO ENSURE GOOD OUTCOMES FOR ALL CHILDREN

Welcoming all families
Empowers families
Effective 2-way communication
Linked to student achievement and development
Builds capacity of school staff and families
Builds community

Engaging Families

Create an environment where all families feel welcome and part of the community
◆ Reflect the culture of families in the school
Engage in 2-way communication between families and school staff
◆ Provide interpreters and written translations as needed
Build capacity of school staff, parents, and community partners
◆ Educate parents on school structure, curriculum, and policies
Empower families
◆ Include parents in program and policy decision-making that affect their children

What is Family Engagement?

Staff Development Activity

Using sticky notes, write a brief response for the following questions.
- What is family engagement?
- How do you/your school engage with families?
Reflect on these as a whole group.

With the parents of your migrant students in mind, respond to these questions:
- What are barriers to greater family engagement?
- What can you/your school do to increase family engagement?
Reflect on these as a whole group.

“Family Engagement” Defined

“Family engagement refers to 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 systems.”

Many researchers concede that the size of a child’s vocabulary is a strong predictor of school success. When parents set aside time to talk to their children there can be a long-term positive effect on academic literacy development. Supportive play involving mothers and fathers increases positive language gains in their children. Simply encouraging parents to talk to their children at length every day and have the children tell their own personal narratives to their parents (i.e., with the parent responding and expanding on what the child says) will significantly increase the children’s vocabulary.

When books are not readily available in the home, many families have access to magazines, newspapers, flyers, comics, or catalogs. Simply engaging children in conversations using this variety of texts and pictures can stimulate language, vocabulary, and storytelling.

- Take time to get to know your migrant students’ parents.
- Establish a relationship of trust so you can determine how you can assist the parent through their process of being engaged in their child’s education.
- It takes time to establish rapport and trust. This is best done through clear conversation.
- Be willing to share a bit about yourself if you would like to learn more about them.
- Work to understand the types of work your students’ parents do to better understand the challenges they face as well as their work schedule and the best time to schedule activities.
- Provide clear concrete examples of how they can work with their students. Ensure that they are realistic within the bounds of the pressures the parent is currently facing.
- Help parents understand that learning starts at the beginning of life and that students are never too little to begin learning.
- Work to get to know resources and programs in the community that are helpful to migrant parents and their children and share these with parents.
- Help parents be informed of kindergarten readiness skills and provide clear examples of things they can do in the home to help their children.
- If parents have limited literacy skills, provide ideas of how they can help their children even if they do not read.
- Explain the benefits of reading to their children as well as how holding conversations with their children, even when they are very young, helps with vocabulary development.
- Provide a tour of your facility or program and answer questions parents have.
- Observe the body language of the parents that are coming into your school. Work hard to help the parents feel comfortable.
- Always keep your commitments and promises to the parents you work with. This is key in building trust.
- Let them know you appreciate their efforts and keep them well informed of how their child is doing.

**MILLION DOLLARS GAME**

- Use assorted catalogs
- Parents ask their children to search through the catalogs to find what they would buy if they won a million dollars and describe what they would do with it.
ACTIVITY - GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Am I aware of my migrant parents’ needs?
Are my expectations realistic?
Is my program providing services in a way that I am taking advantage of migrant parents as my student’s first teacher?
Am I empowering MEP parents with ideas on how they can help with their child’s education?
Is my school or program a place that MEP parents are comfortable coming?
Have I removed any barriers that are stopping parents from more actively participating?

References & Resources

♦ Office of Migrant Education and the Migrant Education Office - https://results.ed.gov/
♦ Parent Engagement Activities from Spark Innovations - sparkedinnovations@gmail.com
♦ Success Story: Comienza en Casa (project from Maine MEP) - https://www.manomaine.org/comienza-en-casa-resources
♦ Ensuring Educational Stability for our Nation’s Youth (adapted with permission from Frances Frost, Family Ambassador, U.S. Dept. of Education) - Frances.Frost@ed.gov
♦ Additional Resources:

Preschool Initiative

Email: PICIG@escmail.org
http://www.preschoolinitiative.org/

MEMBER STATES: Pennsylvania (lead state) Colorado | Florida | Georgia | Idaho | Maine Missouri | Oregon | Washington

PARTNER STATES: Alaska | Hawaii | Indiana Montana