How Technology Can Support Family Engagement


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What is Family Engagement?

Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature

- Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision making related to their children’s education.
- Consistent, two-way communication is facilitated through multiple forms and is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family.
- Families and programs collaborate and exchange knowledge.

What is Family Engagement?

- Programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community.
- Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs.
- Programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers are dedicated, trained and receive the supports they need to fully engage families.
What is Family Engagement?

Harvard Family Research Project
*Family Engagement in Anywhere, Anytime Learning*

- Family engagement—a shared responsibility among families and educators, continuous from birth to young adulthood, and reinforced across multiple learning contexts.
- Family engagement in anywhere, anytime learning involves the support that families provide to learners to pursue interests. It also includes the knowledge, skills, and encouragement that schools and communities offer families to do this well.

What is Family Engagement?

Harvard Family Research Project
*Family Engagement in Anywhere, Anytime Learning*

- It involves the ways families, schools, and communities connect children to learning opportunities across different community settings and the ways families and local organizations are coordinated to increase family access to nonschool learning resources.
- It involves the efforts that families, schools, and communities make to create learning pathways that last over time, and the capacity of communities to sustain and bridge these paths.
With technology becoming more prevalent as a means of sharing information and communicating with one another, early childhood educators have an opportunity to build stronger relationships with parents and enhance family engagement.

Technology tools offer new opportunities for educators to build relationships, maintain ongoing communication, exchange information and share online resources with parents and families. Likewise, parents and families can use technology to ask questions, seek advice, share information about their child, and feel more engaged in the program and their child’s experiences there.
From the Position Statement

Modeling the effective use of technology and interactive media for parent communication and family engagement also creates opportunities to help parents themselves become better informed, empowers them to make responsible choices about technology use and screen time at home, engages them as teachers who can extend classroom learning activities into the home, and encourages co-viewing, co-participation, and joint media engagement between parents and their children.

Digital Age Family Engagement?

Keys to building community within a classroom include cultivating a culture of collaboration and engaging in effective, culturally sensitive communication. Children need to feel secure and see their classroom as their “school family,” and the collaboration between teachers, children, and their families must be transparent in their everyday interactions.

Luisa Cotto

*Technology as a Tool to Strengthen the Community*
Digital Age Family Engagement

These tools and your creativity will be the powerful bridge to connecting with families. Families are living further away from their support systems and looking towards their children’s teachers for more help navigating their child’s development. This also means that families are under more stress and need to be part of supportive community programs. Ask yourself how you can use your tech toolbox to bring families into the classroom and build a new community.

Tamara Kaldor

Technology as a Tool to Strengthen the Home-School Connection

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

WWW.MYCHILDNOW.COM

MYCHILD INC.
820 DAVIS STREET #452
EVANSTON, IL 60201
The Family Engagement Problem

- Parents and teachers lacking time for consistent quality communication\(^1\)
  - Teachers spend 40% of their day filling out paperwork\(^2\)
  - Parent work schedules\(^3\)
  - “Our Parents are busy and are living fast paced lives”
    - Sherri Davis, Director at Tots Learning Center
- Parents feel shut out of the collaborative learning process for their child\(^4\)
  - Cultural differences\(^1\)
  - Language Barriers\(^13\)

\(^1\)Mahmood 2013
\(^2\)Chicago Metro AEYC
\(^3\)Halgunseth et al. 2009
\(^4\)NEA 2012
\(^13\)Hilado et al. 2011

How would parents prefer to be contacted by their child’s preschool?

In a study performed by Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, we discovered that 73% parents prefer email contact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Answer</th>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>174</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Telephone Call</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Text Message</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mobile/email app</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Classroom newsletter (hard copy)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Personalized notes (hard copy)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Scheduled in-person meetings</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Discussion during drop/off/pick-up</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Secure website</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Other (please list)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How much do parents value communication between teacher and parent?

We also discovered that **teacher-parent communication is a key factor** after location and reputation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Location</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Recommendations</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Reputation</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Curriculum</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Cost</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Communication between parent</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Teacher/child ratio</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technology as a Solution for Family Engagement

- **Teachers reduce time spent filling out paperwork**, and sending documentation to parents.
- **Parents can receive instant email updates** with information on what their child is doing at school and engage in conversations at home.
- **Parents can respond and interact with teachers** throughout the day through messages and comments to express their views.
- **By using pictures and videos to communicate parents can see what their child has been doing without needing to rely on language skills.**
Exploratory assessment of Technology as a Solution for Family Engagement

- Family Engagement surveys to families and center staff
  - 10 different schools
  - 5 different states (Illinois, New Jersey, California, Texas, Nebraska)
  - Sent out to a total of 732 family members and a total of 176 center staff (teachers and directors).

Since using MyChild how much more aware are you of your child's developmental progress?

46% of parents stated that they felt more to significantly more aware of their child’s developmental progress
Since using MyChild how much more involved do you feel with your child’s day?

The majority of parents surveyed (64%) stated that they feel more to significantly more involved with their child’s day.

Since using MyChild, how much more involved do you feel with your child’s school?

51% of parents surveyed stated they feel more involved to significantly more involved with their child’s school.
Since using MyChild, how much more do you talk to your child about school?

37% of parents surveyed stated that they talk to their child more or significantly more while 45% of parents stated that they talk to their child the same amount as before.

Center Staff Perspective –
Overall how has MyChild increased parent engagement at your center?

Parents have been in greater communication with teachers through the use of MyChild. MyChild provides parents a better tool for extending learning at home that partners with the learning that is happening during the day at our early learning center.

I think the main increase has been in using the children's diary, they do love to see pictures of their children throughout the day!

The Parents are enjoying the MyChild and Love getting to see all the pictures I post and the information they get from it. The Parents send more emails with this method also.

Parents are more likely to communicate with staff in a more casual way now that we are using MyChild.

The parents comment on the posts all the time! Now they get updates from my child and seem more involved in their child's education.
Center Staff Perspective –
Overall how has MyChild increased parent engagement at your center?

I wouldn't say that it has increased. I think parents enjoy getting a daily photo.

I don't feel that it has increased at all.

So, how can research help us to understand how to increase these parent and center results?

• What is the overall impact of using technology to increase parent engagement?
  • Are parents and teachers more engaged with each other?
  • Are parents more engaged with their child's development?

• How much time is saved for classroom intentional learning?

• Would we see better Kindergarten readiness as a result of higher parent engagement during pre-K and earlier ages?
References

- Northwestern Study?
How Technology Can Support Family Engagement: Pocket Literacy Coach Study

Alexis R. Lauricella
NAEYC
November 6, 2014

Typical Communication with families
Now Everyone Has Mobile Technology

Project Partners

the Ounce
Head Start Policy Council & Parent Involvement Subcommittee

Parent University
Text messaging program

Drs. Ellen Wartella & Alexis Lauricella
Center on Media and Human Development

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Project Goals

• **Innovate** and try out new ways to engage parents, building on relationship-based work with families
• **Understand** parent perspectives and get their input on texting programs to inform future efforts
• **Evaluate** whether the program was effective in providing parents with educational information and whether it helped parents with activities with children

Texting Program: How it Works

Parent University Text Messages

• One text message per day, Monday – Friday
• Parents sign up based on the age of their child
• 160 character text message sent to parents’ cellphones with a parent-child activity
• Activities focus on literacy or math development, parent-child bonding, or parent encouragement
• Available for parents of children ages 0-5
Sample Text Messages

2 year-old: Teach circles using coins. Put a handful of coins underneath a piece of paper. Help ur child use a crayon to rub over the coins to show lots of circles!

3 year-old: Today give your child 3 big hugs at random times for no reason at all & tell them you love them. Ask them to surprise you with a hug & say I love u, too!

5 year-old: After reading a story ask questions about the characters. Which is ur fav/least fav character? Which is most like u? Which char was in the story the most?

Project: How We Did It

• Started with Ounce of Prevention Policy Council
• Texts are a subscription service – but made it available for free to parents for one year.
  • Available to all Ounce Head Start programs, serving about 1,500 children in Early Head Start & Head Start programs in Chicago and surrounding suburbs
• 3 of these programs agreed to partner with us in an evaluation of the project to learn more
Text Messaging Study

• 3 Head Start/Early Head Start Centers
  – 2 Urban Centers
  – 1 Suburban Center
• Recruited parents to participant in a research project. ~250 total parents participated.
  – Text Message Group
  – No Text Message Group
• Evaluation: Survey Design

Parent Survey Questions

Enjoyment of Texting Service

• Enjoyment of Pocket Literacy Coach (PLC) text messages
• Which types of texts did you most like to receive?
Parent Survey Questions

Activities with Your Child
• In the past week have YOU done the following things with your child? If yes, please indicate how many times you have done this in the past week.
  • Read your child a story
  • Told your child a story
  • Sang songs to your child
  • Played Dress up/Pretend Play
  • Described/narrated what you are experiencing
  • Taught him/her letters, words, or numbers
  • Worked on arts, such as drawing, pictures, scribbling
  • Talked with him/her while doing errands
  • Played counting games

Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Texts (n=121)</th>
<th>Non Texts (n=135)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Age</td>
<td>31.50</td>
<td>32.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/Divorced</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than College</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Phone*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Cell</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Families & Technology

- Parents in the study were very active media and technology users with high levels of ownership.

Parents’ Technology Ownership

- Smartphone: 85%
- Cable/satellite: 84%
- Computer: 73%
- Video game console: 69%
- High speed internet: 66%
Technology in child’s bedrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video game consoles</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Parents receiving texts engaged in more activities with their children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>p &lt; .05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text Group</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Text Group</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05
The texting program increased the variety of activities that parents did with boys.

The texting program increased the variety of activities fathers did with their children.
Majority of parents enjoy receiving the text message activities

- Strongly agree: 95%
- Agree: 5%
- Not sure: 0%
- Disagree: 0%
- Strongly disagree: 0%

Majority of parents enjoy the texts that give encouragement and support about parenting

- Strongly agree: 92%
- Agree: 8%
- Not sure: 0%
- Disagree: 0%
- Strongly disagree: 0%
Most parents agree that texts “help me as a parent”

97%

Enjoyment of Texts

Texts Liked Most

- Both equally 57%
- Activities 26%
- Encouragement/support 17%
Completing Activities

Texts Most Likely To Do: Learning Activities

- Learning activities: 51%
- Parent-child bonding activities: 28%
- Parent activities/reminders: 8%
- A mix of the above: 13%

Parent Satisfaction & Engagement

“My child loves the songs. I like these activities because she is so happy and smiling when I’m playing with her.”

“I’m affectionate to the activities where you tell your child you love them and hug and kiss them.”

“I like the matching coins activity. I never thought of teaching money and numbers at such an early age, but this was...fun.”
Survey Conclusions

Texting service...
• Very well-liked
• Encouraged increased activity engagement
  ✓ Especially for fathers and parents of boys
• Promising way to communicate & engage with parents

What Our Head Start Programs Noticed

• Intentional sign ups at the programs were key!
• Texts that recognized and appreciated parents were popular.
• Checking back in with parents once the project was launched provided valuable input into possible pitfalls.
• Parents had great suggestions about how this could connect with their child’s experiences in the classroom/home visits.
A Parent’s View

• Receiving the texts was inexpensive.
• Activities were used with things that were around the house.
• Text messages gave me ideas of educational ways to play with my kids.
• Text messages were received around 5:00
• If your number changes you need to re-sign up with the service.
Family Engagement in Your Setting

- Enhance what you’re already doing
- Get to know your families
- Assess the tools available to families
- Present multiple opportunities for engagement (tech and non-tech)

Bringing Families In

- Translation or language tools (ittranslate, Google, Duolingo)
- Recordings and creations of family stories (audio, photos, apps)
- Family photos
Building Community

- Classroom Blog or Website
- Tech talks at parent-teacher events
- Newsletter (paper and digital)
- Social media

Sharing Documentation

- Reporting System
- Creation apps with sharing options and/or online component (Thinglink, Educreations)
- Digital photo frame
- QR codes
Sharing Information

- Phone call
- Text Messages
- Email
- Video conferencing
- Storybird

Let’s Hear from Teachers

How do you use technology to strengthen the home school connection?
To view and download materials and resources from this presentation, visit us at www.teccenter.erikson.edu