



# Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota: **Opportunities, Barriers and Parent Preferences**

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# Acknowledgments



Collaboration among the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, NDSU Extension and the North Dakota Parent Education Network made this project and study possible. The goal of this project, which was undertaken to fulfill objectives associated with the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5) federal grant, was to expand understanding of and opportunities related to family engagement in early childhood settings in North Dakota.

Multiple focus groups consisting of early childhood professionals and parents were conducted to gain a better understanding of current family engagement opportunities in North Dakota. Further, a parent feedback survey was employed to gather additional information on family engagement, and a scan of existing resources on family engagement was conducted to create a menu of family engagement opportunities.

We would like to thank the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction for allowing us the opportunity to aid in conducting research on this pertinent topic. Work on this project was conducted in association with ND DPI Contract #3485, a subcontract extended to NDSU Extension as part of a competitive federal grant received by North Dakota in 2019 to focus on improvements to the state's existing early childhood infrastructure and resources. Specifically, work on this project was associated with Goal 3.10 in the overall project: "Expanding and understanding opportunities for family engagement."

Additionally, we extend our thanks to the early childhood professionals and parents who participated in this study. Their insight and perspective on the topic of family engagement and related activities provided valuable contributions regarding the available opportunities, barriers and preferences in North Dakota. With this study and report, we aspire to enhance the lives of families with young children in North Dakota.

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# Executive Summary



Early childhood education programs and resources potentially can provide enormous benefits to a young child's development during the rapid period of growth from birth to 5 years old. In early 2019, North Dakota was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5), a competitive federal grant intended to improve states' existing early childhood infrastructure and resources. NDSU Extension was responsible for leading and coordinating efforts to complete the work for Goal 3.10, "Expanding understanding and opportunities for family engagement."

For the purposes of this project, we utilized the definition of **family engagement** that states, "Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families." This definition was written by the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, a revision of the PFCE Framework (published in 2011 by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families).

For optimal development to occur in children ages birth to 5 years old, families and early childhood professionals must be synchronized in their attitudes, beliefs and actions regarding child development best practices. Family engagement opportunities with early childhood professionals or other community resources are important because these activities enhance and promote building the synchronous mindset required for a child's optimal development.

Consequently, the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five that was awarded by the federal government to North Dakota incorporated understanding and expanding family engagement opportunities. At the end of 2019, 19 participants in varying roles (for example, parents and early childhood professionals) participated in three focus groups at different sites across the state and discussed the available opportunities, prominent barriers and parental preferences regarding family engagement activities.

The focus group results indicate that participants had limited knowledge of available resources and family engagement opportunities. We also found a variety of context-specific barriers that created difficulties for families, which reduced overall involvement in family engagement activities. Lastly, the participants reported a range of preferences regarding resources and opportunities for family engagement throughout North Dakota. Listed below are the key points that were identified through thematic analysis of the focus group discussions:

1. A variety of family engagement opportunities in early childhood settings are available in North Dakota. Contexts for activities include community-based options, professional community organizations, informal community connections and formal education options.
2. Parent preferences related to means of contact for family engagement opportunities vary. A majority of participants indicated they would like to be informed via technology options, mailing/printed information, phone calls and individual contact, and through group settings.

3. Strategies for increasing family engagement in North Dakota include utilizing a specific community resource as a mechanism for family engagement, facilitating parent-to-parent connections, creating consistent family engagement opportunities, utilizing a transition experience (for example, transition to kindergarten) as a way to engage families, and increasing the amount of family engagement activities offered in the formal education setting.
4. Common challenges that families in North Dakota face that decrease their involvement in family engagement activities often fall within the realm of *Attitudes, Awareness, Availability* and *Access*. Although what is important to note is that these challenges vary by family and community.

5. North Dakota families preferred human connection options for family engagement opportunities, followed by digital and community options.
6. Professional barriers also decrease family engagement opportunities in North Dakota. Typically, these professional barriers include *Awareness, Professional Development and Support and Policy Issues*, which limit or complicate opportunities.

In addition to these major thematic findings, this report includes a brief summary of results from a parent feedback survey on family engagement with 175 North Dakota participants (see Section Two). Finally, the report concludes with a menu of resources and opportunities associated with family engagement that were gathered through an environmental scan of existing resources on the topic of family engagement.

# Section One



## Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings – A Summary of Focus Group Themes

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## Introduction

In early 2019, North Dakota was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5), a competitive federal grant intended to improve states' existing early childhood infrastructure and resources. The planning grant of the PDG B-5 focuses on state-level needs assessments and strategic planning to optimize existing early childhood education (ECE) resources. The three primary activities are maximizing parental choice, improving transitions within early care and learning programs, and improving overall quality of ECE programs.

NDSU Extension was responsible for leading and coordinating efforts to complete the work for three specific goals (Goal 3.9; Goal 3.10; Goal 4.1) identified in the overall ND PDG B-5 grant. To accomplish these efforts, multiple work activities were planned and conducted to achieve the specific goals outlined in the scope of work. As part of Goal 3.10, "Expanding understanding and opportunities for family engagement," the following activities were listed:

- Coordinate with DPI staff and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) members to formulate a "menu" of opportunities for family engagement
- Conduct two focus groups (five to six per focus group) on family engagement contexts and options with families and B-5 ECE professionals; summarize feedback and results

In relation to the second activity noted, multiple focus groups were conducted to examine issues and strategies related to family engagement with families and B-5 ECE professionals. This section of the final report provides a summary of key thematic findings related to the topic of family engagement in early childhood settings in North Dakota.

## Site Locations, Participants and Analysis

Participants in the in-depth focus groups in North Dakota that focused on Family Engagement (Goal 3.10) were involved at three different sites across the state in November-December 2019. A total of 19 individuals participated in three focus group interviews: (1) Dickinson, N.D.—six participants; (2) Fargo, N.D.—nine participants; and (3) Minot, N.D.—four participants. Participants consisted of one male and 18 females.

Also, the participants were a mix of parents and early childhood professionals in various contexts. The early childhood professionals worked in settings including child care, Early Head Start and Head Start, Early Intervention services, Special Education, public health, school counseling and family services.

The focus groups were audio-recorded and the recordings were transcribed for purposes of analysis and feedback. Each focus group was led by two individuals, with one leading the participant group discussion and one focusing on note-taking and recording the discussion. Each focus group typically lasted one hour to 1½ hours. Child care was provided to assist with participation, and participants were compensated for their involvement in the focus group discussion.

Once the audio files for each focus group were transcribed, the NDSU Extension staff went through a two-stage coding process to identify and synthesize major and minor themes that emerged from the focus group discussions. An initial coding effort was made by a staff member to identify major themes and supporting themes in the focus group feedback using a process of thematic qualitative analysis.

Then a second process of coding and refining the emergent themes was conducted independently by a second staff member. These efforts were combined into a final document and reviewed by all members of the NDSU Extension research team. This thematic assessment resulted in a variety of major themes and supporting themes across the entire set of focus groups. These themes were identified and are represented in the report that follows.



## Focus Group Questions

The questions used to guide the discussion with focus group participants on family engagement in North Dakota were as follows in the content below.

“Family Engagement” refers to ways that families are involved and active in their child’s early care and education. Your feedback will help us better understand the quality of family engagement with your child’s early childhood settings and formulate a list of opportunities for improved family engagement.

- 1) Introductions: Name—Tell us anything you want us to know about you or your kids, and are you here as a parent, as a professional or both roles?
- 2) What are the opportunities for **family engagement** with children from birth to kindergarten age in your community?
- 3) In your child’s early care and education setting, what opportunities for **family engagement** have been provided? How have you been involved with your child’s school?
- 4) Have you received adequate support to do your job as an ECE professional in terms of **engaging families** in their child’s development?
- 5) What are the best ways to **engage you as a parent** in your child’s early care and education setting? For example:
  - A) How do you contact me—examples:
    - By using technology to communicate (texting, emailing, Facebook, etc.)
    - Mailing information—postal mail
    - Individual contact—Making a home visit, phone call
  - B) How do you involve me—examples:
    - Parent groups
    - Playgroups
    - Community events
    - Invite me to help in the classroom, on a committee, in the parent-teacher organization, at a school event

- 6) What are the **biggest challenges** of involving parents in your child’s early care and education?
  - Lack of awareness of opportunities or information
  - Lack of availability for opportunities for parent involvement
  - Too much information or opportunities to be involved
  - Too little information or opportunities to be involved
  - Lack of communication between parents and providers
- 7) Have you ever used state agency websites as a tool to learn about resources available to families regarding **family engagement**?
- 8) Which **specific sources** do you go to for information on family engagement?
- 9) (Professionals) If more support is required, which family engagement resources could provide further support to be more effective for families with whom you work?
- 10) If you wanted to learn more about your child’s growth and development or how to become involved in the child’s care and early education, to whom or where would you turn? Examples:
  - The internet
  - Care provider or teacher
  - Health-care provider
  - Friends or family members
- 11) What would you like to add to this discussion about family engagement? Any questions, comments or suggestions? What haven’t we touched on today that you’d like us to know?

**“I think families view engagement as important. It’s just finding the amount of time to do this. We all want to be the best parents we can possibly be; everybody wants that same goal. I think that being respectful of our time, with being working parents or stay-at-home parents or whatever it is, people are busy, but they want to find opportunities to be with their kids and to do family-oriented things.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**



# Key Themes and Supporting Themes on Family Engagement

The themes outlined here emerged from an analysis of the discussion and feedback provided by participants in three focus groups on the topic of family engagement in early childhood settings in North Dakota. Some thematic elements are repeated across different topics if they were mentioned in response to multiple questions.

## Topic One

### Opportunities for Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota

#### Theme 1.1 — Meaningful Opportunities for Family Engagement in Community Settings

**Key Finding:** Family members with young children and early childhood professionals highlight a range of meaningful opportunities for family engagement with children ages birth to 5 across multiple communities in North Dakota.

■ A variety of selected family engagement opportunities can be found through *community-based options that vary based on the resources and organizations in local communities*. Examples of such options include:

- **Common Issues** that come up for parents with such opportunities — *cost; seasonal availability; age range; location; timing* (when offered — three days/week, etc.); other factors.
- **City Parks and Recreation Department** — City or county-level departments, particularly Parks and Recreation, offer a variety of fun and seasonal family engagement opportunities. Typically, these events or programs serve children or entire families, and coincide with seasons, holidays or other elements.
  - Fun Zone (Minot, N.D.) — A family engagement activity with “bouncy houses” and toys and other activities for children ages 0-6; free; offered weekly Monday through Friday from December to March; children have opportunities to play and socialize; parents have opportunity to get out and socialize.
- **Public Library** (Minot, N.D.; Dickinson, N.D.) — Variety of family- and child-friendly activities and events; for children of varied ages; hands-on and craft activities, reading activities; requires creative time options in small communities.
- **Discovery Center** (Minot, N.D.) or **Local Museum** — Location that focuses on introducing families and children to STEM activities, nature, history; not free, cost is involved; opportunities to activate child’s brain and imagination, hands-on activities; similar to a Children’s Museum; Dinosaur Museum (Dickinson, N.D.) has “tots hour.”
- **Local Zoo** (Minot, N.D.) — Many family engagement opportunities; lots of fun activities for kids and families.
- **Children’s Drama or Theater Groups** — Organizations that focus on involving children in drama, music, theater arts, etc.
  - Make a Scene Kids Theatre (Minot, N.D.) — A theatrical organization focused on engaging children and families in drama and performing arts; classes, theatrical productions, musical groups; not free.
- **Fitness or Recreation Center** — Local fitness or recreation centers, dance programs or other physical activity programs may offer family engagement options for children 0-5 (for example, Kids Fit in Dickinson, N.D.)
- **Music Education** — Local parent groups or music businesses or organizations may offer music education options for young children and families (Music Makers, Pitter Patter Club in Dickinson, etc.).

■ Many *opportunities for family engagement occur in the context of services and support provided through existing community organizations and family support efforts*. Examples of such organizations and efforts include:

- **Pregnancy Support and Counseling Clinics** — Private nonprofit organizations may provide pregnancy support services and counseling, including health-care consultation and educational classes (for example, Dakota Hope Clinic, Minot, N.D.)

- **Early Intervention Services**

- Right Track program — Right Track is a free program for all North Dakota children birth to 3 years of age. Right Track wants all children to have the best start in their physical, social, communication, emotional and intellectual growth, and supports parents by making regular home visits and sharing resources and information.
- K.I.D.S. (Key Infant Development Services) Program — This program is a home-based, family-focused early intervention program designed to support eligible children and their families at no cost. The K.I.D.S. Program supports infants and toddlers from ages 0 to 3. In early intervention with children who have identified developmental delays or issues, families and early interventionists work together to promote natural learning opportunities for the child during the family's daily routines. That is how early intervention is different from school or therapy for older children. Research has shown that children learn best through repeated daily interactions with their parents and caregivers in their natural environment. The learning that occurs with the parents and child between early intervention visits is what makes the greatest impact for that child and family. The amount of support or service that a child and family receive depends on their individualized prioritized needs. Visits can occur at a variety of places, including in the home, at the child's day care, out in the community or even at the playground.
  - During home visits, early interventionists support families using coaching models and provide a variety of strategies for families to consider and practice through time. Can include O.T. (occupational therapy consults), speech (consults).
  - This program was highly commended by parents and community professionals; K.I.D.S. is the Early Intervention provider in a limited region of the state, perhaps western and southwestern North Dakota.

- **Public Health Programs** — Public health nurses or social workers or others use a home visiting model and visit regularly in the homes of vulnerable parents or children to provide education and support to families. Programs support families with children up through age 2.

- **Early Head Start Program** — Home visiting efforts are provided from pregnancy through age 3 of a child.
- **Head Start Program** — Parents are invited to come into the classroom and participate with children in activities, observe examples of healthy interaction; education classes are provided for parents on child development and parenting.
- **Teen Parent Support Program** — Full-day mentoring and support program for teen parents, which combines teen parent academic learning and social support (toward high school degree) with early childhood care and education (for teen parent's child) in the same learning environment (not separated) (for example, Woodrow Wilson High School, Fargo, N.D.).
- **Preschool Settings** — The frequency of opportunities offered to parents from preschool settings to participate in learning opportunities or to be engaged with children in the classroom or school setting vary widely but tend to be much more infrequent or uncommon.
  - A preschool option through the local public school is offered quite often in regions across the state, particularly in some more rural communities, and this is one mechanism for engaging children in opportunities. In particular, children at 3 years of age with an I.E.P. qualify to attend.
  - Fewer private preschool options are available, but such options complement Early Head Start/Head Start and public preschool options.
  - Some settings for children in the ECE years include child care options that are dual licensed as preschools.

**On limited family engagement options in preschool settings — “I feel like the opportunities that I’m provided with to go and be involved in my children’s education in preschool are much smaller ... I don’t feel like we are offered education or offered the opportunities to be in the classroom very often. I was just invited for the first time yesterday for a Christmas concert, and that was the first time I’ve been invited into my child’s classroom at all. So the opportunities to learn or be engaged are slim.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

■ Many opportunities for family engagement occur through local, grass-roots efforts generated and supported by informal, parent-to-parent connections or formal, community-based efforts within local communities. Examples of such efforts include:

- **Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) groups** — These groups are local, parent-led groups that meet regularly (weekly, monthly, etc.) and provide opportunities for children to engage in socializing and play/learning activities, and parents to connect, discuss, share and learn from each other.
- **Faith-linked Parent Groups** — Local faith communities may provide similar, parent-led groups that meet regularly, provide play and learning opportunities for children, and link parents together in a supportive community environment.

■ The landscape of family engagement opportunities consists of a continuum of options that seem to include *play/social* options, *informal educational* options and *formal educational* options. Only examples of formal educational options are included here.

- **Formal educational options** for family engagement — examples include:
  - Kindergarten orientation — put on prior to beginning of school
  - Open house and classroom visit — visit of families and children to a specific school classroom and visit with teacher
  - Back-to-school night — evening for families to visit school, affirm schedules, find classrooms and lockers, ask questions, drop off supplies, etc.
  - Engagement with staff — engage in interactions with staff when children are dropped off or picked up
  - Attend an event — go to an event in support of a child (concert, etc.)
  - Assist in the classroom
  - Support a learning activity — be involved in a learning activity at school with their child (math, etc.)
  - Be on a school committee
  - Get involved with the parent-teacher organization
  - Volunteer with a family event
  - Participate in a parent education class (for example, Consequence Discipline class via Head Start; etc.)

## Theme 1.2 — Meaningful Contexts and Pathways for Family Engagement

**Key Finding:** For family members with young children, a variety of meaningful contexts supporting family engagement options already exist and often link with particular child or family needs or circumstances. Additionally, such contexts furnish a diverse but meaningful set of pathways for family engagement with children and families being served.

■ For families with children who have special health-care or other needs:

- **Newborn ICU Setting**

- *Nurses were the key resource to learn from about child needs and care* in this setting due to their experience and encouragement.
- Due to the “up and down” nature of having a child in the NICU, having nurses assist with a resource such as “Milestone cards” (little cards that celebrate small milestones — first outfit; first smile; first day without oxygen; 2 weeks old; etc.) was helpful. (Note: commercially available). Can personalize such items.
- Instruction toward the end on getting parents/caregivers ready to take the infants home and provide needed care is very helpful.
- Follow-up communication with NICU nursing staff, whether via text or email or phone, was helpful to provide reassurance and guidance on questions. However, this typically was initiated by the parent.
- **Recommendation** — A program for families with a child in the Newborn ICU that has support providers come in weekly (or regularly) to make connections and also determine needs or extend specific support.

- **Involvement in Early Intervention Services**

- *Having an early intervention provider visit a family weekly in the home was an invaluable resource.* This is particularly true for first-time parents.
- Benefits to the children and family from such visits included: stress reduction for the parent; brief but needed respite from caregiving activities; children receive needed engagement and learning opportunities; learning skills to engage children effectively; ability to ask questions and dialogue about child needs and parenting skills; learn through observation of visitor-child interactions; being connected to different resources to assist children (tips, speech specialists, etc.).

- Parents discussed learning many valuable aspects of knowledge, skills and resources from interaction with Early Intervention services.
- *Having a known and established provider of early intervention services in a community or region is helpful* for providing a referral or making a linkage with other needed resources (for example, Minot State Infant Development Program).
- K.I.D.S. (Key Infant Development Services) Program — This program is a home-based, family-focused early intervention program designed to support eligible children and their families at no cost. The K.I.D.S. Program supports infants and toddlers from ages 0 to 3. In early intervention with children who have identified developmental delays or issues, families and early interventionists work together to promote natural learning opportunities for the child during the family's daily routines. That is how early intervention is different from school or therapy for older children. Research has shown that children learn best through repeated daily interactions with their parents and caregivers in their natural environment. The learning that occurs with the parents and child between early intervention visits is what makes the greatest impact for that child and family. The amount of support or service that a child and family receive depends on their individualized prioritized needs. Visits can occur at a variety of places, including the home, at the child's day care, out in the community or even at the playground. During home visits, early interventionists support families using coaching models and provide a variety of strategies for families to consider and practice through time. The supports can include O.T. (occupational therapy consults) and speech (consults). This program was highly commended by parents and community professionals; K.I.D.S. is the Early Intervention provider in a limited region of the state (for example, western and southwestern North Dakota).

■ For families with children who are at higher risk due to limited resources or other circumstances:

- **Pregnancy and Parenthood Support and Services**

- Other community agencies can *link expectant parents to supportive community organizations*, such as a health-care clinic or pregnancy counseling center.

- Valued resources provided in this setting were expertise on pregnancy and family support issues; health-care consultation (ultrasound, etc.); on-site parent education classes; counseling as needed; and specific resources (coupons for diapers, baby items, etc.).
- Parents in vulnerable situations (for example, teen parents) can be supported by establishing support or learning environments where the parent can be present with and care for their child (not separating them), while also being mentored and supported in their transition to raising a child and managing household needs (resources, education or job, etc.).
- *Nurses who work in public health or similar settings function as a key resource in answering questions for parents during pregnancy and helping them transition as needed to support from other community organizations.*

- **Early Head Start Services** (ages 0 to 3 for limited-resource populations, etc.) or **Head Start Programs**

- Setting goals for family engagement by doing assessment, child goals or family goals is a simple but engaging method to get parents involved and wanting to see their child succeed.
- Home visiting efforts provide regular contact with families and their children; home visiting efforts are enhanced by doing specific, interactive learning activities with parents during the visit.
- Providing families with opportunities for group socialization on a regular basis was valued; typically happens every month or every other month.
- Families are encouraged to come into the classroom and engage with children in learning activities.
- Providing families with educational classes on specific topics related to parenting is valued; also, specific groups may be available for enhancing literacy or discussion support groups for men or women.
- Linking families and their children with other community supports or services that can assist with any specific developmental concerns or needs, offer screening and support, etc., is helpful.
- Sharing information among providers by having parents sign an informational release form assists with being able to support families and understand their needs.



**On family engagement in Head Start — “In Head Start, for example, we’re always trying to involve the parents to come into the classroom. Tomorrow, for example, we’re having an event where families can come in and do a math activity in the classroom with their child. So we try and get them to come in and visit, spend time with their children. For some of our parents, school readiness comes naturally and they have no problems understanding those concepts, but for some of our parents, all of that is kind of new and they don’t quite know all those pieces. So we find it helpful to bring them into the classroom so they can see the teachers interacting with the kids age-appropriately and doing activities that hopefully they could do at home as well.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

- **Network of Community Services and Supports**

- What is important and helpful is if the individuals and organizations across the range of community services and supports, whether a hospital or a family nutrition program or a preschool, do as follows: 1) be familiar with other community resources, 2) know and have connections with other community resources and 3) make a linkage or referral as needed for families with young children to access needed supports or resources. This makes it possible to *identify and support families or young children with needs as soon as possible in the birth to 5 years period*, and also to *ensure that young children or their parents with particular needs do not get overlooked or slip through the cracks in the system of community supports*.
- As children transition between early care and educational settings, such *awareness and connections assist care or service providers to be aware of supports that already are in place and can be relied on for information or assistance*.
- *Partnering among community organizations helps leverage available but limited resources for the benefit of families*. For example, a parent resource center might do a family engagement class at Head Start, where the location and child care already are provided.

- For families of young children in general:

- **Informal and Formal Networks of Family Connection**

- Parents often *turn first to family members, friends, parents with children of a similar age or other informal sources* before thinking about or reaching out to formal, community sources of information. So finding ways to help parents connect with and share information via their informal networks is an important strategy to consider in family engagement.
- Local, informal or formal networks or groups can provide opportunities for family engagement. Such examples include faith-linked parent groups, library-based parent groups, Mothers of Preschoolers parent groups or others in the community.
- Such networks or groups tend to provide key things needed for family engagement, including connections with other families and their children; a location for connections or activities; a regular time and schedule to meet; low-cost or no-cost options for family engagement; and a natural flow of information and support between families.
- Sharing of information and communication among parents in such settings is facilitated by Facebook groups (or other social media connections) and face-to-face interactions.

- The landscape of family engagement opportunities consists of a continuum of options that seem to include *play/social* options, *informal educational* options and *formal educational* options. Also, some options are more *child-focused*, some are more *parent-focused* and some are *family-focused* (both child and parent).

- Families appreciate opportunities to be involved with their children and do family-oriented activities. Having such opportunities be respectful of family time while also trying to limit the costs associated with family engagement opportunities is helpful.

- **Education-linked Settings for Family Engagement**

- Family-based or Center-based child care settings — Such settings may engage families through family events (holiday outing, etc.) or a brief monthly meeting to share information.
- Early Head Start or Head Start — Uses a variety of approaches to foster family engagement with

children and families being served. Surveys their families to understand what works for them, topics of interest and such related to family engagement.

- Public or Private Schools – Elementary — Through working with children ages 5 and older, families with limited resources or who have a child who needs accommodations can be engaged by resource professionals (for example, wellness coordinator who is a social worker — Fargo Public Schools).

### Theme 1.3 — Supportive Strategies for Family Engagement in Community Settings

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals and family-serving organizations benefit as they think creatively and plan carefully to create and use supportive strategies in assisting families with engagement opportunities.

■ *A variety of supportive strategies can be utilized to create and manage family engagement opportunities in community settings.* Examples of such options include:

- Connect with families and children early in the birth to age 5 time period, such as during the period of pregnancy, so that you can offer helpful information or resources and link families and their children with supportive community organizations. This also helps families become comfortable with engagement in the community early in the parenting experience.
- Help families link with other meaningful engagement opportunities or groups once a particular activity is ended to provide continuity in connecting with and supporting families.

- Offer an activity on a regular basis for free so that a family can bring their child(ren) and see if they like it, then they can sign up for more activities if they meet the child's interest, etc.
- Offer the opportunity to parents to drop in or check in with their child at the most accessible times or in a flexible manner that works for the parent and the program.
- Make an effort to keep “family engagement” opportunities quite brief, focused and able to meet the needs of multiple family members; having parents bring their child(ren) with them is helpful.
- Persisting in providing family engagement opportunities is important to help families who face a variety of barriers or may struggle due to time challenges.
- Seasonal family engagement opportunities are meaningful during winter months in the region when outside activities are sparse or dangerous.

**On managing time to be involved in family engagement — “I think time is a major factor for everybody, making the time to take the extra steps to engage. One thing my son’s kindergarten class does is they have this mystery reader, so you could go in and read to your class as a surprise to your kid. It’s great and it sounded great at the beginning of the year, and here I am a few months in and I’ve just never had the time to go do it. So I think there’s different opportunities that do get presented to engage, but whether you have the time to do them or have the ability to make the time can be so hard.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

## Topic Two

# Preferred Strategies for Family Contact in North Dakota

## Theme 2.1 — Preferred Strategies for Family Contact for Engagement

**Key Finding:** Family members with young children and early childhood professionals describe a range of preferred contact strategies for pursuing family engagement, ranging from usage of technology options to phone calls to in-person visits and meetings.

■ *Technology options indicated as preferable for contacting and communicating with families for purposes of family engagement:*

- **Texting** — Suggested as a good and direct way to contact parents; a preferred method by many parents.
- **Email** — Suggested as a helpful method for some parents, not for others.
  - Teachers and other community professionals working with children indicate they appreciate brief, positive inquiries or contacts from parents that allow them to connect and share about the child.
- **Private Facebook Groups**
  - This option sometimes requires excluding children from pictures if a privacy issue arises; however, settings also can allow avoidance of that issue.
  - Parents can share information or engagement opportunities electronically with each other via community Facebook groups, online parent groups, etc. The “buddy system” of sharing with one to two other parents also works with this context.
- **Apps** — Technology tools that allow families to see and connect with small updates from a child’s day, including brief updates or pictures, are valued and useful. Parents then can engage a child with follow-up questions about the child’s daily experiences.
  - Seesaw App — platform for student engagement and content sharing
  - BrightWheel — teachers send updates and pictures

**On contact preferences for family engagement — “I think that options like apps or email would all be good; it’s just whatever they have time for. Everyone has complex schedules and we don’t always get to have that face to face, even though that’s really good, and I feel like it’s better than technology but it’s not always possible.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

■ *Direct contact options indicated as preferable for contacting and communicating with families for purposes of family engagement:*

- **Mailing Information or Printed Information**

- Some parents note that mailed information gets put aside and they forget about it.
- Some parents note that mailed information is a good strategy for contact because it provides a physical, useful copy of information.
- *Providing a family engagement calendar with specific dates, time and activities*, such as on a monthly basis, is useful for families.
- Printed information on services, resources or family engagement opportunities.
  - A location where parents or family members regularly can pick up printed brochures, printed reminders or other printed resources in a specific setting (a table at an office, a bulletin board, etc.) is very helpful.
- Communication notebooks that can be exchanged between parents and providers is a practical, useful tool for making contact and sharing information.

- **Phone Call**

- Suggested as a good method to make a direct contact with parents.
- A phone call is a more personal reminder of a need or opportunity and helps motivate parents.
- A phone call is appreciated as a preferred method of contact for a crisis concern or an issue that needs to be discussed, such as a child being ill (crisis) or a child’s behavioral concern (needs discussion).

### **On contact preferences for family engagement**

— **“We did get one phone call that was very hard to receive. [My child] had an accident at school and it was a very traumatizing phone call, it was very hard to get, but I would much rather be getting a phone call versus an email saying ‘Hey, we need you to come pick him up’ or ‘He’s in the hospital’ or something. I probably would have been a lot more ticked off if I would have gotten an email versus a phone call.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

■ *Direct contact options involving one-on-one visits or personal connections indicated as preferable for contacting and communicating with families for purposes of family engagement:*

#### • **Individual Contact**

- Making a Home Visit — Home visits are good to start developing at the beginning of the relationships. Also, a home visit helps kids because it gives them control and gives teachers a context of where the child is coming from. This also is a preferred option for making contact.
- Making Personal Connections — Individual contacts are valued as parents experience small moments of connection, such as being greeted when coming into a facility, seeing a child get settled in a classroom or being updated on a child’s activity during the day.
- Face-to-face Contact — A one-on-one contact allows you to ask and answer questions, make connections with others, be provided with useful information or resources, etc. This type of contact is preferable to contact using technology or at a distance, but anything is better than nothing.

- Meet Via a Conference or Parent-Provider Meeting — Parents desire more options to connect in a simple way during one-on-one time with a provider. This allows a chance to ask questions, check on how the child is doing and share feedback or ideas.
- Invite Parent Outreach — *Parents need to have a feeling of being able to reach out to staff about needs or questions and that this contact would be welcomed.*
- Personal Request — A parent is much more likely to accept or follow up on a family engagement opportunity (such as volunteering for something at the school) *if a fellow parent or a staff member asks the parent personally to volunteer and/or plans do it with the parent.*
- Expand Contact to Multiple Family Members (such as a grandparent, etc.) — *The likelihood of family engagement increases as contact is made or information is shared with multiple family members connected to a child (such as grandparents), especially those with more time because others may encourage pursuing opportunities for engagement.*

■ *Direct contact options involving groups or parent-to-parent connections is indicated as preferable for contacting and communicating with families for purposes of family engagement:*

- **Group Contact** — Hold a monthly meeting with parents to share information.
- **Parent Network** — Parent-to-parent information sharing, or “word of mouth” connections, help:
  - 1) allow parents to share useful information and resources;
  - 2) enable parents to set up meetings or activities, meet up with other parents;
  - 3) assist parents to ask questions of others (what pediatrician to use, etc.);
  - 4) facilitate connections between parents and children in differing families;
  - 5) encourage parents to share information with each other via social media, etc.



## Topic Three

# Strategies for Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

### Theme 3.1 — Preferred Strategies for Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

**Key Finding:** Family members with young children and early childhood professionals describe a large variety of strategies for facilitating family engagement in early childhood settings. Such strategies offer a menu of ideas that can be pursued in establishing and supporting family engagement options during the birth to 5 time period.

- *Provide an introduction or set up a linkage to a specific community resource as a mechanism for family engagement.*
  - Providers in the arena of early care and education can network with each other, and then provide on-ramps to family engagement by linking parents to other specific community resources.
  - Have information on specific resources in the community or family engagement opportunities available in a clear, easy location for parents to access — brochures, calendars, other reminders, etc.
  - Connect parents and family members with local resources or upcoming opportunities by inviting a representative (community professional, etc.) of that organization to meet with parents and share about the resource or opportunity.
- *Facilitate parent-to-parent connections* so that parents can share information, link each other to resources and build networks of support.
  - Support a “buddy system” for sharing information with each other, passing on reminders of family events, etc.
  - Facilitate an online support group for parents, such as a Facebook group for parents linked with a particular setting (local preschool, library, etc.).
  - Encourage parents to connect with other families (in a preschool, etc.) outside of the formal setting so they can invite each other to activities or set up other interactions.
  - Schedule regular play groups for children to play, parents to socialize.
  - Hold parent discussion groups.
  - Encourage Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) groups.

- Support faith-linked parent support groups.
- Encourage family-based child care — family events such as holiday parties, etc.
- *Furnish a consistent opportunity for parents to gather, meet and increase their knowledge, skills and connections to others or sources of support.*
  - Provide resources that assist parent and child participation, such as child care or other support.
  - Collaborate with other community groups to share resources and leverage support for families.
  - Offer a variety of opportunities that can meet the needs, interests and personalities of different parents and children.
  - Offer family meetings or activities to socialize with other parents and children.
  - Furnish educational classes for parents and children — parents can learn parenting skills, such as how to teach and engage young children.
    - Suggested as particularly relevant for first-time parents.
  - Provide regular parent discussion or support groups, perhaps specifically for men or women, for young parents, or on a specific topic of need or interest (literacy, etc.).
  - Offer a monthly meeting with parents to share information, do parent education (preschool setting, family child-care setting, etc.).

**On value of parent education opportunities — “I feel like I am lacking some of the skills ... if there were more groups that could help me engage and learn how to engage better, early intervention was great, but then it ended and it was only once a week and was a very limited time frame. So, as a first-time parent not having good teaching skills and engaging skills, I feel like I lack that skill, so if I had more opportunities in any setting to get together and learn how to be a teacher for my child, then I’m game for any of it — sign me up.” (participant, Minot focus group on family engagement)**

■ *Utilize a transition experience, such as a child's transition to kindergarten, to engage children and families in a systematic way that eases the transition and improves family engagement.*

- The public school system can provide a set of linked family engagement experiences in the transition to kindergarten, such as this example:
  - Kindergarten Orientation — Children come for a session and go through three to four different rotations of activities with the multiple teachers, who watch and assess them for making decisions about classroom placement; parents come to the same session and do a session with the school counselor or principal on school schedule, expectations, key procedures, etc. — all of this is designed to ease the transition to kindergarten for the family members.
  - Open House Experience — Following class placement decisions, families are contacted with this information and the child's teacher is identified, and then families are invited to come to an open house and visit the classroom and meet the teacher, allow the child to drop off supplies, etc.
  - Back to School Night — Families come at the beginning of school and get a chance to be in the building, find their child's classroom, ask any questions, etc.
  - This process allows three different opportunities for parents to come to the school setting and family engagement can occur across these opportunities.
  - Once the initial transition to kindergarten has occurred, some parents indicate a substantial drop-off in their feeling and experience of engagement with their child in the school setting. This seems due to limited contact with teachers or school staff, as well as fewer opportunities to engage.

■ *Utilize formal educational settings to offer specific opportunities for family engagement, such as helping in the classroom, being on a school committee, organizing a school event or being involved in the parent-teacher organization.*

- Connect with parents in small ways by greeting them as they come to a facility or classroom, helping a child transition, sharing small updates or explaining procedures for handling moments of child stress.
- Utilize simple, effective procedures for contact and communication with parents/family members about children, including:
  - Ask parents about their preferred method of communication and use what works for them.
  - Communication Notebooks — ECE staff and parents send notes or observations back and forth in a notebook that goes with the child (backpack, etc.).
  - Checklist of daily activities — “I ate my snack today” — helpful for children with I.E.P., speech difficulties, etc.
  - Send simple texts as updates about a child's activity during the day, if time allows.
  - Use communication apps (phone, etc.), such as Bloomz, designed for staff-family exchanges of information.
  - Set up a private Facebook or social media group for families to receive information of activities engaged in at the ECE setting (can exclude some pictures as needed because of privacy issues with a child).
  - Connect with parents in small ways by greeting them as they come to a facility or classroom, helping a child transition, sharing small updates or explaining procedures for handling moments of child stress.
- Identify multiple family members who can be contacted and invited to engage in activities with children beyond just one parent (include grandparents, aunt or uncle, etc.). Include them in contacts or invitations for family engagement.
- Offer parents and family members flexible or regular opportunities to come in and help with activities in the classroom or care setting so that they can observe a child's progress, maintain connections and increase their own learning.

- Try to find strategies that minimize difficulties with parent involvement in the classroom. Some parents noted that teachers discourage parent involvement in the classroom for particular reasons, including: parents can be a distraction, child behavior may change when a parent is in the room, parents may ask for extra time that is limited. Also, some teachers stick almost exclusively to parent-teacher conferences for parent engagement as their preferred method.
- Engagement with children in a school setting, such as doing a STEM activity, can enhance family engagement if children are excited by the activity and seek further opportunities and encourage parent support.
- Parents can be invited to participate with children in learning activities in school settings, which can familiarize them with content and expectations and healthy patterns of interaction.
- Cultivate an understanding among parents that they can comfortably reach out and contact staff for a visit or meeting if they have a specific concern, and that the contact will be welcomed and acted upon.

**On the value of simple contact methods for family engagement — “With some kids, too, we have communication notebooks and those go back and forth. We have even done little checklists, such as ‘I ate my snack’ or things like that, just so that you know what is happening, especially with a child who has language and speech difficulties, and they’re not able to come home and answer your questions. The parent can then visit with the child and say, ‘Oh, I see what your snack was today,’ just so that you have that knowledge. I think it’s OK for parents to ask for some kind of system, obviously not something that the parent has to write paragraphs and paragraphs, but is there some way that we can communicate so I know what is happening so that when the child comes home, I might say, ‘Oh, I see that you read X or Y book! Can you tell me about it?’ ” (participant, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

## Topic Four

# Challenges to Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

### Theme 4.1 — Identified Challenges to Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Across the landscape of early childhood contexts, early childhood professionals and families with young children articulate a detailed set of challenges that limit the possibilities or opportunities for family engagement in North Dakota during the birth to 5 years.

- Families may experience limitations in opportunities for involvement in family engagement options in the community *due to issues of attitude, awareness, availability and access to community options.*

#### Attitude

- Parents or family members may *be shy, uncertain or embarrassed about asking questions or accessing community resources.*
- Many programs and services to assist families with challenges (mental health, chemical dependency, etc.) are provided to *family members who participate on a voluntary basis, and the family members may decline or limit their involvement due to particular attitudes (desire for privacy; stigma about seeking help; etc.).* A sense of stigma related to help-seeking or receiving assistance or resources can be an attitude that limits family engagement.
- Parents or family members *may be fearful or lack trust in providers if dropping off a child at a child care or an ECE setting.*
- Parents or *family members may respond in different ways to family engagement from different programs or providers, with some being responsive and interested while others are uninterested and cautious to engage.*
- Attitudinal *barriers to family engagement can be lowered by making a personal connection with the individual, increasing the person's comfort level and familiarity, and offering or inviting family engagement opportunities.*
- Parents or family members may be *reluctant to impose on the time availability of staff in ECE settings (preschool, etc.) who are busy or*

*overworked (asking for a one-on-one meeting, etc.).*

- Some public officials *diminish the value of family engagement or the ECE system and its benefits to children, suggesting instead that children should simply stay home with parents in these years.*

**On the difficulty of stigma attitudes and family engagement — “That’s a problem, too, is the social thing with the stigma, people thinking that if you’re on W.I.C., there is something wrong, or that you’re one of ‘those’ families. They provide a lot of resources.” (participant, Dickinson Focus Group on Family Engagement)**

#### Awareness

- Parents or family members *may lack awareness or have limited knowledge of community resources or family engagement opportunities.* This may be particularly true for certain populations (for example, home school parents) who may be less connected to common sources of information.
- *Lack of awareness is a primary barrier to family engagement; the identification and use of marketing strategies that effectively reach families is a key challenge.*
- Parents or family members *may lack awareness in specific population groups that struggle with information awareness for differing reasons.* Such populations may tend to include those who are not income-eligible (higher-income groups) for a resource or service, those in tribal or reservation communities, or those in areas with sparse services or lack of trained staff (frontier areas). A similar population often lacking awareness due to communication challenges may include dual-language learners moving to a new location.
- Using *effective strategies to increase awareness of family engagement options might include providing information to key access points for families, such as teachers, day-care centers or other points where parents gather and network.*



- A key access point for increasing awareness to families is the school system because information can be provided to children and it then likely will be taken home to parents.
- Parental awareness of specific family engagement options frequently fades without available and specific reminders. A “digital reminder” in a person’s email or text sometimes is set aside or forgotten easily, whereas a physical piece of paper can be posted at home for a reminder.
- For limited-resource populations, *economic difficulties may limit contacts by phone or text* and so other strategies for awareness may be needed at times.
- Parental awareness of online resource websites that can link them to local community resources or opportunities seems to be very limited.
- Lack of awareness of available community resources or options is also at times a challenge among community professionals, such as in the pediatric setting, where less communication with the ECE community may occur.
- Families moving to the region from other locations may struggle with awareness of local community resources and options, particularly if such resources were not available in their previous location. Connecting them with resources via outreach or local personal connections is an important step in facilitating family engagement.

**On the importance of increasing awareness of family engagement — “I wish there was a better way for more people to know how to access those resources and to even know the importance of family engagement. We talked about a lot of the barriers, and a lot of parents are just trying to survive and family engagement doesn’t hit high on the list. I don’t know what the answer is but that’s something to consider.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

## Availability

- The number of *slots available for a child/family in particular settings (child care, public preschool, etc.) may be very limited* in a community (waiting list, etc.) or *too expensive for a family to afford*.
- The number of *opportunities in a community to engage in group settings with other parents and their children may be limited*.
- Parent activity or support groups may have a “cap” on the number of participants, so may be “full” if you seek to join or you may need to be on a waiting list.
- The ability to engage families for support with a specific child issue or need may be limited due to a *shortage of key providers* (for example, pediatric mental health, special education, etc.) *in that area*.  
– Comment: “We have an incredibly low amount of services for children.”
- *Particular ECE settings, such as preschool settings, may offer none or only a very limited number of opportunities for family engagement* (to be in the classroom with a child, etc.).
- *ECE staff who are serving children in a high staff-student ratio setting may simply not have much time available for family engagement* (what staff can provide realistically).

## Access

- Gaps may exist in family engagement opportunities for some families due to *guidelines that specify qualifications for involvement in family support programs*.
- While specific programs supported by federal or state funds provide family engagement opportunities, *some families do not qualify for participation due to not meeting specified guidelines* to participate. For example, some families economically “make just enough to not qualify.”  
– Gaps seem to exist in the ECE system in the ability to provide family support or engagement opportunities for limited- to moderate-resource families that earn too much to qualify for designated programs but also earn too little to afford other opportunities (high-quality child care or preschool settings, etc.).  
– Local service systems or community resources available to families are often confusing and cumbersome to understand and access (lack of familiarity, complexity, etc.).

- Policies designed to preserve confidentiality for some children (children with special needs) may conflict with and limit family engagement options, such as in a public preschool setting, where inviting parents into the classroom due to those policies (HIPPA, etc.) often is difficult. Additionally, a program may limit engagement due to requiring forms to complete or other requirements.

**On gaps in the ECE system for working families — “If we would have qualified for Head Start, it would have been a great opportunity for [our children] to get [support for] them developing, stuff like that, but it just wasn’t possible. That’s why I feel like there’s a gap for that middle-class, where we just don’t make enough money but you make too much to qualify for that [spot]. ... I’m letting you know I didn’t want to take that spot [for my child] because someone needed it more than me. I think that is a gap that definitely needs to be filled nationwide. It’s federal guidelines, yeah, so I would say we only have so many spots.” (participant, Minot focus group on family engagement)**

## Theme 4.2 — Specific Family-linked Challenges to Family Engagement in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Many families with young children in North Dakota experience particular family-linked challenges or resource difficulties that can limit time, energy or availability, thus limiting the possibilities for their involvement in engagement opportunities during the birth to 5 years.

- *Individual or family background challenges or health issues* can limit family engagement or influence risks to the development of young children.
  - Mental health issues (parental depression, etc.)
    - Post-partum depression
    - Personal anxiety; fear of asking questions
  - Trauma — in the history of the parent or child
  - Child health issues
    - Child may have a diagnosed (or undiagnosed) health condition that limits their availability —

parent may be occupied with providing care or support to child; child may not be well enough to participate in certain opportunities, etc.

- Unmet economic or social support needs frustrate or limit a child’s development.
  - Children who must struggle through a “gauntlet of difficult situations” on a daily or regular basis experience greater stress and challenge in their development.
- Chemical dependency of parent or child (newborn infant, etc.)
- Involvement of family in child welfare system due to issues of abuse or neglect (CPS, etc.)
- Early parenthood (teen parents, etc.) and limited resources
- *Conflict with busy work schedules can limit family engagement* or ability to contact families about potential opportunities for involvement.
  - Some ECE programs (Early Head Start) require fairly intensive commitments to family engagement (home visits weekly, etc.) that conflict with busy work schedules for a family.
  - Family members may be occupied with busy work schedules and so engaging them if not at home, between work and school, or if they are arriving home due to late work schedules, is challenging.
  - For working families or limited-resource families, transportation can be limited because the family may have just one vehicle and it is often unavailable for use (working family member is using it) when family engagement opportunities exist. Alternate transportation options (taxi, Uber, etc.) may be too costly, and limited local public transportation options may be available (no bus system in rural area, etc.).
  - Family members may be occupied with demanding work schedules that have no or limited flexibility for them to respond to family engagement during work hours.
  - In the energy (oil production) region of the state, many families have adult members doing “shift work” and they are busy two weeks at a time on “oil field schedules.” This may leave just one parent who is busy with primary parenting responsibilities and work. Alternatively, both parents may need to work multiple jobs if someone is not working in the oilfield, which makes living in that region costly. This pattern also can be true for those working in agriculture.

**On work conflicts in North Dakota and family engagement — (1) “We do live in an ‘oil state,’ and so I am an ‘oil wife’ and my husband works a lot of hours, and I’m usually a single mom for two weeks when he is working 14 days straight. I know that’s how it is for a lot of parents who have spouses in the oil field. One parent does everything. So I think that’s kind of a challenge, too, for North Dakota.” (2) “You see that with agriculture as well. Many farmers would be the same. You are too busy, it is your livelihood and that has to be your priority. Absolutely, between oil and agriculture, that is the priority. That is how you make your living, and that priority comes way above making sure you went to your kid’s family night.” (participants, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

- *Economic or resource barriers or external barriers in the environment* can result in difficulties that limit participation in family engagement opportunities for families and children.
  - *Transportation limitations* may include lack of access to a reliable vehicle, limited public transportation options or other issues.
  - *Limited financial resources* may make participation difficult.
  - *Weather conditions* may occur that limit the motivation or ability of families to participate.
  - *Economic challenges may cause families to lose phone coverage that allows for simple communication with them* about family engagement opportunities.
- *Inability to manage the time commitment* involved can limit family engagement in particular opportunities offered to families and children.
  - *For families involved in multiple service systems, the time commitment can be very challenging and their time is limited*, also competing with other commitments.
  - *For families with multiple children at young ages, the time needed to split attention between caring for and supporting different children can limit family engagement.* Challenges can include lack of child

care for children, other children seeking parental attention while a parent is engaged in a class, or stress of managing multiple young children or children in a variety of activities.

- *For busy families balancing work and other challenges, taking the extra time that is needed to be involved in family engagement opportunities can be difficult to manage.*
- *Organizations that provide family engagement opportunities may ask for too much time (for example, two hours or such) from families with young children, which can conflict with mealtime, bedtime or other activities or needs.*

**On challenges in being involved in family engagement (work schedule) — “A lot of [families] aren’t able to participate; it’s because they’re working so much. I feel so sorry for them because they’re working constantly ... [With home visits], it’s hard because they consider their ‘home base’ at their home, and they’re not necessarily home — we’re catching them going to work from school, or from this to that, or after their work. I do a lot of late home visits because they are working late.” (participant, Minot focus group on family engagement)**

### Theme 4.3 — Specific Community-linked Challenges to Family Engagement in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Many communities in North Dakota experience particular community-linked challenges or resource difficulties that can limit availability of program staff, funding or other resources, thus limiting the possibility of offering engagement opportunities during birth to 5 years.

- *Limited English-language abilities of children or family members and a shortage of ESL support resources* can be a barrier to family engagement or development of children.
  - Communication of basic procedures in ECE contexts or particular materials (for example, developmental screenings) to parents can be challenging. Limited professional resources may exist to assist with doing assessment or screenings with ESL speakers.

- A major concern is that often the only available alternative seems to be usage of Google Translate on a phone, which is not very helpful and inadequate.
- No or limited availability of interpreters for specific languages is not uncommon. This can be due to cost or lack of interpreter availability.
- Setting up an interpreter for key settings (parent-teacher conferences, etc.) is important, as is finding language support from a parent's family, friends or neighbors who can interpret as needed.
  - Child may speak English but communication with parents who do not is needed.
- Making certain that ELL (English-language learner) populations understand the invitation to specific family engagement opportunities is needed.
- ESL services do not start until kindergarten but are very needed for dual-language children and families during the period of birth to 5 years.
- Very little resources or training are available for ECE staff (for example, child-care provider, preschool instructor) on working with dual-language learner situations. Specific training in practical tools and techniques for how to navigate communication challenges with limited English-language speaking children and families in daily interactions is recommended.
- Positives in the process of serving dual-language learners: ELL services are available; each child enrolled in school has to take a language survey; ELL teachers screen and assess children and provide different levels of support based on need; meetings are held with families to review ELL needs and issues.
- Positive — Young children typically learn a new language quickly and well when exposed to it regularly in a learning environment.

**On the challenge of dual-language learners and family engagement — “That is another need for training, though. How do you communicate with children and families who are dual-language learners? What should we be doing and using? We don’t have that kind of training here. ESL services don’t start until kindergarten. You definitely have a whole population of children that would qualify for those services, but the state doesn’t provide them until kindergarten. So yes, all of our schools have to have an ESL teacher; good luck having someone with the proper training for that, and sometimes they contract those services, but again, who is providing that in a preschool?” (participant, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

- *Limitations in the child-care system, a shortage of available child-care openings and challenges with staff resources in child care all can be a barrier to family engagement or development of children.*
  - The state has a significant shortage of child-care options for children under the age of 2 years.
  - The state has a shortage of preschool options in general, and specifically, a shortage of affordable preschool options.
  - Economic circumstances for a family may require both parents to work, yet limited child-care options are available to them if both parents work or they work multiple jobs.
  - Finding qualified staff for these early childhood settings is a challenge in many communities, particularly due to a combination of lower wages and staff turnover (rate of burnout is high, etc.).
  - Some families with children in a dual-licensed child care and preschool are paying double for both services — the cost is prohibitive to families.
  - For a preschool setting, most settings have policies that may limit them as options for a family due to a child being required to already be potty trained. This issue is difficult for staff (privacy needed in limited space) and worrisome for parents (need to leave work, etc.). An exception often exists for children with special needs, or more “full-service” preschool options (Head Start, Montessori, etc.).



- Some children may be removed from child care due to behavior concerns, which causes stress for families. Certain settings such as Head Start are more able to work with those situations, which builds appreciation and trust with parents.
- Some child care and/or preschool settings exist with policies that limit some family engagement options. For example, children who have an I.E.P. (special needs) have confidentiality needs, and so the preschool will not invite parents into the classroom due those limitations.
- If parents previously had a child in a more high-engagement setting (Early Head Start, K.I.D.S. program, etc.), then transitioning a child to a more limited-engagement setting with minimal staff interactions, etc., can be a major transition. It may not meet a parent's expectations or needs for family engagement.

■ *Limitations in the system of early intervention services or health care resource limitations, including a shortage of available staff resources in key areas, can act as a barrier to family engagement or development of children.*

- North Dakota has a *lack of trained speech-language specialists to help children in multiple regions of the state* (for example, Dickinson area and southwestern North Dakota). As a result, *families must be on long waiting lists for extremely limited services or travel a significant distance to reach available services in another location* (cost in time, funds).
- The requirements for staff to specialize in particular services (speech-language assistance, etc.) may need to be modified to make recruiting or training qualified staff for particular ECE service needs easier to do. Also, wages available to such service providers need to be substantial enough to keep them in a region.
- For particular early intervention supports or services, such as speech-language assessment and treatment, some insurance providers do not provide any payment supports. This issue can be very challenging in accessing needed supports for early intervention.

- Some community professionals, such as in the pediatric community, have limited interaction with the ECE community and therefore have limited awareness of available resources. As a result, they may not fully understand how the ECE systems work, particularly with regard to early intervention services and programs (example: referring dual-language learners to early intervention for speech issues).
- North Dakota has a shortage of trained staff and/or key resources in the health care area for certain areas or rural sections of the state, specific to serving young children and their needs.
  - In southwestern North Dakota, children with particular physical health conditions often must be treated in Bismarck, Fargo or other locations. This involves cost and travel difficulties experienced by the families.
- North Dakota has a shortage of trained staff and/or key resources in the mental health area for certain areas or rural sections of the state, specific to serving young children and their needs. Professional caseloads are too heavy; professionals must travel distances to see children with needs; other related challenges.
  - Similarly, families face challenges with cost, travel to services, long wait times for services and other difficulties with accessing mental health supports.

**On limited availability of speech-language services in North Dakota — “There is not a single speech pathologist in Dickinson right now. The waiting list is 200-plus children waiting to get those services. So you have to drive really far to get those services. The public school system is trying to do it through using tele-therapy. Also, we are using tele-therapists in our rural schools to provide speech pathology, which is not the best thing for a 2½-year-old that cannot sit still.” (participant, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

## Topic Five

# Preferred Resources and Opportunities for Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

### Theme 5.1 — Human Connections and Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals and families with young children indicate that personal connections and human resources provide the first preferred option for possibilities of family engagement in North Dakota during the birth to 5 years period.

■ *The most critical resource or strategy to enhance family engagement is making personal connections and building personal relationships between parents and community professionals or providers.*

- A variety of *benefits accrue to parents if relationships are formed that facilitate family engagement:* 1) relationships provide a beginning point for parents to access a community resource, 2) relationships can diminish uncertainty or embarrassment and instead build comfort and familiarity with a family engagement setting or opportunity, 3) relationships allow parents to ask questions of someone they know or trust, 4) relationships make sharing a family engagement opportunity easier to do and 5) relationships allow parents to get a recommendation on helpful opportunities to engage in for their family.
- Relationships between families allow families to share information with each other, encourage or support each other in involvement, and use word-of-mouth to highlight and promote family engagement opportunities.
- Relationships often are facilitated by giving attention to small connection points, such as greeting parents when they come into a facility, helping a parent see the child's effective transition into a classroom or care setting, brief and positive communications during the day or welcoming a parent into the classroom setting.
- Relationships that enhance family engagement are furthered by giving attention to several key elements: 1) establishing a connection that is based on support and trust, 2) providing information that is helpful and accurate, 3) acting as a supportive partner and not a source

of judgment and 4) facilitating awareness and learning to engage with and support one's children.

- Parents seem most likely to trust those community sources that: 1) the parent has contact with that individual on a regular basis, and 2) the individual also sees the parent's child on a regular basis and is familiar with the child's life and needs. For this reason, parents may turn to child-care providers rather than a pediatrician when first seeking information.

■ *The most likely source of information that individuals turn to first for learning about family engagement opportunities are their personal connections, meaning their family members, friends and parents with children of a similar age.*

- Parents often turn first to family members, friends, parents with children of a similar age or other informal sources before thinking about or reaching out to formal, community sources of information. So, finding ways to help parents connect with and share information via their informal networks is an important strategy to consider in family engagement.

### Theme 5.2 — Digital Connections and Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals and families with young children indicate that digital connections provide a useful pathway to understanding possibilities of family engagement in North Dakota during the birth to 5 years period.

■ *The usage of the internet or digital technologies in relation to family engagement primarily was mentioned as a contact mechanism, a resource for information or for sharing information with others.* Feedback related to this topic was explored more in other sections of the report.

- Social media options for engaging with families primarily focus on sharing reminders of school activities, invitations to upcoming events or brief information about a child.

- Digital technologies and platforms allow for the adoption and usage of new approaches to sharing family engagement options, such as the concept of the “electronic backpack,” an online school-provided resource that communicates and stores information or events shared with families (and replaces “hard copy” materials sent home with a child).
- Online Sources of Information consulted — websites, etc.
  - Attendance Works — [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
  - Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning — <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>
  - Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECKLC — known in ECE community as “E-Click”) — <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov>
  - NAEYC (National Association for Education of Young Children) — [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
  - Zero to Three website — [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)
- State agency website (DPI, etc.) or resources on family engagement
  - Parents and community professionals did not have any familiarity with state agency-level websites or resources on family engagement, specifically; however, we found some minimal familiarity and usage of the DPI website.

### Theme 5.3 — Community Connections and Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals and families with young children indicate that community connections with established providers in the ECE community furnish a broad network of resources and possibilities for family engagement in North Dakota during the birth to 5 years period.

- *The network of community providers serving children and families can facilitate awareness and engagement by providing informational resources and links to other providers and contexts in the ECE and broader community.*
  - Community Resource Board
    - Different community organizations provide a “community resource board,” which has folders on the board sharing information about specific

community resources and opportunities (Head Start, Child Care Aware, WIC, etc.). Other community professionals use this to quickly share information about other resources with families.

- *The health-care providers, institutions and networks in a community function as a key source of information and connection for families and their children during birth to 5 years. Parents and ECE professionals shared specific resources and suggestions related to these community connections and family engagement.*
  - *Health-care providers* in settings such as pregnancy counseling clinics, public health, pediatric offices, Head Start and other settings are viewed as a key contact point for information and connections in a child’s early years (birth to 3).
  - *Nurses are often the key providers from public health or other settings to engage with parents during pregnancy and in the first year after a child’s birth.*
  - *Primary care providers, pediatricians or family practice providers can be a useful source for linking families with resources or opportunities.*
  - *Parents appreciate the opportunity to ask questions of a health-care provider when faced with concerns about a child’s health, so resources such as the Ask-A-Nurse helpline are a valued way to facilitate connection with families.*
  - *Health-care settings and providers who make connecting or getting a child checked on easy for families are highly valued.*
  - *Health-care organizations (for example, Sanford Health) are often a good source of family engagement through parenting classes, childbirth education or other family engagement approaches.*
  - *The availability of a health-care professional who understands children’s needs, such as a nurse, in a setting that serves children (Head Start, public school, etc.) is reassuring and helpful to parents.*
  - *When information is provided in health-care settings (baby born in hospital, etc.), what is most helpful is if the information is not just provided (for example, put in a take-home folder) but discussed in a systematic way with parents at the location or in a home-based follow-up call or visit.*

## Specific Resources Discussed — Health-care Providers

- **W.I.C. (Women, Infants, Children)** — W.I.C. is a specific program that aims to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at risk nutritionally by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthful eating and referrals to health care. Participants commented on the value of this program, but also noted that getting families to engage with WIC program services seemed challenging.
- **North Dakota Health Tracks Program** — North Dakota Health Tracks, also known as the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program, is a preventive health-care program for newborns, children and young adults through age 20 who are enrolled in Medicaid. The program is made up of comprehensive periodic screenings and well-child checkups that help prevent and identify health problems before they become too complex and costly to treat.
  - Operated by regional health districts, *Health Tracks was identified as a valuable resource for health screening and referral to other resources.* Professionals indicated that response by families differed depending on the family, and some will not follow up on screening opportunities.
  - Because Health Tracks targets those who qualify via Medicaid, *the suggestion was made that “we are missing a large population.”* Such populations may tend to include those who are not income-eligible (higher-income groups), those in tribal or reservation communities or those in areas with sparse services or lack of trained staff (frontier areas). Another population being missed may include dual-language learners moving to a new location. Question asked: “I don’t know who is screening them or how they are being screened.”

■ *The early childhood intervention and support system, and associated providers, also function as a primary source of information and connection for families and their children during birth to 5 years. Of course, this is particularly true for families who have children with specific life challenges. Parents and ECE professionals shared specific resources and suggestions related to these community connections and family engagement.*

## Specific Resources Discussed — Early Childhood Intervention and Support

- **Right Track program** — Right Track is a free program for all North Dakota children birth to 3 years of age. Right Track wants every child to have the best start in their physical, social, communication, emotional and intellectual growth, and supports parents by making regular home visits and sharing resources and information.
  - Right Track is a high-quality and valued resource. Helping families understand what it is and what it provides for them is sometimes a challenge.
- **Early Intervention - K.I.D.S. (Key Infant Development Services) Program** — This is an early intervention program available to kids ages 0 to 3 in North Dakota who qualify with a developmental issue or delay. It’s not available in all service areas. It’s a highly valued resource; regular home visits by early interventionists help children and parents. This Early Intervention program was identified as useful by focus group participants in the region it serves.
- **Tele-Health Options** — Mechanisms being used to supplement a shortage of available service providers in specific topics (for example, speech-language) or locations (for example, southwestern North Dakota) include tele-therapy options, web-supported providers (NDConnect, TIENet) or providers needing to travel a distance to locations.

**On value of Right Track as a family engagement resource — “When my oldest was younger, we were enrolled in Right Track, so that was one thing as first-time parents we found helpful, having somebody assure us that things were right or when things were different and some ways to help with that. For example, our oldest child was starting to get a flat spot on his head from being on the floor, so Right Track suggested just putting a little pillow under his head to help prevent that. So, it’s great to have people who have seen so many different kids and many different ways that kids develop, and be able to give you some of that advice.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**



■ *The educational providers, institutions and networks in a community function as a key source of information and connection for families and their children during birth to 5 years. Parents and ECE professionals shared specific resources and suggestions related to these community connections and family engagement.*

- *Teachers in early childhood settings and child-care providers are viewed as a trusted and valuable resource for information and connections in a child's early years (birth to 3).*
- *Information provided to school staff and personnel can be passed on to families at home, so awareness of family engagement opportunities is increased.*
- *Dedicated staff who are assigned to family engagement provide the most consistent mechanism to reach out and engage families — wellness coordinators who are social workers in the school system, etc.*
- *Parents note that regular conferences with preschool or school staff are a very helpful mechanism for support and family engagement.*

### **Specific Resources Discussed — Educational Providers and Institutions**

- **Specific Outreach Programs** — To help young children make transitions to school or assist parents with family engagement:
  - Keys to Kindergarten
  - Gearing Up for Kindergarten
    - Comment: “An excellent way to learn about transition to school.”
- **Early Childhood Special Education programs**
- **Early Head Start and Head Start**
  - **Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)** — known in ECE community as “E-Click) — <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov>
  - Uses a variety of approaches to foster family engagement with children and families being served. Surveys their families to understand what works for them, topics of interest and such related to family engagement. Also, Head Start is valued because of well-informed professionals who understand early childhood issues and challenges, and also connect well with families.
    - Attendance Works — [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)

### • **NDSU Extension**

- An under-rated resource to connect with other resources in the community.
- Need to provide and share information widely with other community professionals — flyers, brochures, etc.
- Particular resources, such as the *Parenting Posts* parent newsletters, meet the need and interest of parents for having a tangible, printed resource with reminders of family engagement options that they can read and post at home.
- NDSU Extension provides a variety of reliable and trusted resources, ranging from educational publications to classes to family engagement opportunities.

### • **Parent and Family Resource Centers (PFRC)** —

- This resource was highlighted in a very positive way and was highly commended by those who mentioned it. Each regional center provides outreach and family engagement opportunities to families and professionals via an online website, a physical location with a library of resources, classes on parenting and other topics in many communities, and other mechanisms.
- Link: [www.ag.ndsu.edu/pen](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pen)
  - Offers a useful connection point to a variety of resources for the community.
  - Provides some training for child-care providers and other ECE professionals that is highly welcomed.
  - Facilitates family engagement with parents specifically by allowing them to attend with child care offered, which helps overcome the barrier of no child care.
  - A valued resource for parents to come to learn from professionals and from each other.
  - Monthly “Lunch and Learn” sessions offered as a class format or a discussion and support group format are good sources of information and support.

**On the value of parent resource centers for family engagement — “I love West Dakota Parent and Family Resource Center. I went to the director with my child and said, ‘We need a parent support group. We need to just get together, meaning parents who have hyperactive kids, we need to get together and talk and learn.’ A lot of parents, when you have a child like that, you wonder what to do and how to handle situations. After visiting with the Parent Resource Center, we decided to start these ‘lunch and learn’ sessions and it was awesome. I love this place because even if they don’t have it, if you come as a parent to them with an issue, they will figure out how to help.” (participant, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

■ *The other supportive providers, institutions and networks in a community function to link children and families with helpful information, support and connections during birth to 5 years. Parents and ECE professionals shared specific resources and suggestions related to these community connections and family engagement.*

### **Specific Resources Discussed — Community Providers and Institutions**

- Community Organizations — Noted as helpful with family resource needs or making connections to services or supports for families.
  - **County social services; regional human service center**
  - **Food pantries**
  - **Specific government assistance programs** — SNAP, etc.
  - **FirstLink** — useful for connecting with resources, services
  - **Youthworks**
  - **Abuse crisis center**
  - **Child Care Aware** — A resource and referral system for families and providers; professional development information and opportunities for providers.
  - **Faith Community Groups or Programs**
    - Local community faith-based groups often provide networks of connection, regular programs or activities for children and parents (playgroups, etc.).

## Topic Six

# Professional Issues for Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

### Theme 6.1 — Awareness and Opportunities for Family Engagement in ECE Settings

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals note that awareness of family engagement options and support of opportunities for engagement continues to be an important but evolving topic of consideration for professionals working with families in North Dakota during the birth to 5 years period.

- *Awareness of family engagement options and opportunities for engagement are important topics that also face some limitations among professionals serving families in early childhood settings.*
  - Awareness of Family Engagement Options
    - *Selected community providers are a useful resource for information on the variety of available community resources and family engagement options (for example, NDSU Extension).*
    - *Networking and communication among different community professionals allows for learning about the variety of community resources and making referrals between different organizations.*
  - Opportunities for Engagement
    - *In the public school setting, “family engagement” has been somewhat of an evolving topic. It is of high interest to those working as professionals in that setting, but debate has developed over how to most effectively use educator time and also reach families well because challenges such as low attendance have arisen.*
    - *Effective family engagement through social media is also a topic of interest and some uncertainty because it allows sharing of upcoming events but may not necessarily build personal connections with families.*
    - *Opportunities for family engagement can be limited when staff-student ratios are high, which makes time and/or energy for such activities extremely limited.*
    - *Opportunities for family engagement can be limited when sufficient space is not available to support such activities with children and families.*

**On schools and family engagement — “For us with the [public] schools, family engagement is something that we are looking at more closely and what is the growth opportunity for us, but we are wondering what it should look like for educators in the school setting. We’ve talked about the challenge of getting families in. We will have events and maybe have low attendance, and so we might be thinking, well, if we can’t get them to come to us, should we go to them? Should we go back to doing home visits? But we’re just not sure that that’s what we’re wanting to do with educators - if that’s the direction we want to go. So I think family engagement is on our mind and something that we are looking for a role in, but we don’t have all the answers for what we want that to look like.” (participant, Minot focus group on family engagement)**

### Theme 6.2 — Professional Development and Support for Family Engagement in ECE Settings

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals note that the landscape of professional development varies for differing providers in ECE settings and that support of this topic can benefit from a variety of approaches to assisting professionals and the families they serve.

- *Professional development opportunities allow ECE providers to gain knowledge of supporting family engagement in their particular settings and can be supported through a variety of approaches.*
  - *North Dakota has a shortage of qualified paraprofessionals and teachers working with ECE populations — This shortage is exacerbated by high rates of teacher/ECE professional burnout and limited professional support in that context.*
  - *Head Start consistently has been a good source of training on family engagement. Head Start provides a variety of trainings on this topic that are useful, and many of them are available as online offerings.*

- Some *community professionals enter the field with very little training on working with children and/or family engagement*, so basic training resources on those topics can be very useful. This is *complicated by busy schedules and other training requirements*, but *more training options in such topics would be helpful. Focused training opportunities on a regular basis (monthly, quarterly) would be helpful.*

**On professional development options for family engagement — “I think they provide as much as they can but there is so much to know and so much to learn. I’ve worked in public health for just a little over a year and I started - we also go into the elementary schools, and I have had zero pediatric experience before that, so I would have liked to have a little more [training]. I have what I learned in nursing school, of course, but it’s just the bare minimum. I do think that there definitely could be more learning opportunities for us in the school setting.” (participant, Fargo focus group on family engagement)**

- *In-person, informal or formal mentoring is identified as a useful, meaningful source of professional support and development in ECE settings.*
- *North Dakota used to offer a collaborative effort in professional development for ECE professionals, using the annual Early Childhood Conference. This has not been the case in recent years. This training opportunity is missed. The collaboration among early intervention, Head Start, the DPI Office of Early Learning — this was appreciated.*
  - **Recommendation:** Offer this type of training again on a regular basis.
- *Very little resources or training is available for ECE staff on working with dual-language learner situations. Specific training in practical tools and techniques for how to navigate communication challenges with limited English-language speaking children and families is recommended.*
  - Some training provided in this area by WIDA (a consortium that consults and provides training on multilingual learners, educators), but “it wasn’t really about tips and techniques you can use

in your daily life.” Frustration was expressed that answers always came to down to “time and money,” which are limited for child-care providers, etc.

- *Specific topics related to family engagement that were identified as being of significant interest for professional development were:* 1) trauma-informed care and support (ACEs, etc.); 2) engagement of fathers; 3) working with grandparents and other “kin care” family situations to foster engagement; 4) working effectively with dual-language (ESL) learners and their families in ECE settings and; 5) working with young children and challenging behaviors.
- *Training opportunities seem more limited for some ECE professionals, such as child-care providers, and their context of work must be taken into account (limited time availability due to providing daily child care, cost limitations, difficulty in finding substitutes).*
- *Using technology in creative ways to provide more and practical professional development options for ECE professionals is recommended (at-home options; after-hours options; etc.).*
- *Very helpful professional development opportunities are offered by a variety of key organizations to ECE professionals, including Head Start, Child Care Aware, Parent and Family Resource Centers (NDSU Extension), and others that were mentioned.*
- *ECE professionals value the learning and support that can come via small-group meetings with others in the ECE field serving children and families. In particular, the opportunity to meet other ECE professionals and discuss detailed issues in a group setting is highly valued.*
- *Specific sources for information on family engagement (ECE professionals)*
  - Trauma-informed training has been provided to some community professionals and is very helpful.
  - Crisis prevention intervention and training on trauma
  - ACEs training



**On the value of the North Dakota early childhood conference as a professional development option — “I think that it’s a little bit unfortunate that our state doesn’t offer more. We used to have the Early Childhood Convention — and then we didn’t have it. I don’t know what happened. It was a collaboration of all entities, including Head Start, early intervention, Department of Public Instruction — there was this whole collaboration for people whether you were in child care, Head Start, etc. Whatever you were doing in early childhood, you could attend.” (participant, Dickinson focus group on family engagement)**

### Theme 6.3 — Policy Issues and Family Engagement in ECE Settings

**Key Finding:** Early childhood professionals and parents note that policy issues sometimes can affect the opportunities available to pursue family engagement with families during birth to 5 years.

- *Policies in ECE settings sometimes have the effect of limiting or complicating the possibility of family engagement with families and their young children. Examples of this pattern discussed by ECE professionals and families are shared.*

- For those in particular ECE settings (public preschool, etc.), engaging parents in some ways can be more difficult due to existing policies.
  - If children in the classroom have an I.E.P., confidentiality policies restrict the ability of ECE staff to invite parents into the classroom (limited or not available).
  - Parents volunteering or participating in the classroom may be restricted due to particular requirements or policies (for example, fingerprinting; background check; form completion; etc.).
- If staff work in ECE settings that are dual-licensed (preschool, child care), then they operate under, at times, conflicting sets of requirements (Department of Public Instruction vs. Department of Human Services). Such policies can cause burdens for staff trying to facilitate parent engagement:
  - Policies that require multiple completions of the same requirement (fingerprinting, etc.).
  - Policies that restrict inviting parents or others into the classroom (getting a substitute teacher, etc.).
  - Policies that require teachers to receive additional training for child-care licensing purposes – “different set of rules.” Such training requirements add an extra burden to an already busy schedule for professional training.
- **Recommendation:** Policies between these differing agencies should be reviewed, streamlined and fashioned to work better together for professional support and family engagement for the ECE professional community and serving families with children birth to 8.

## Section Two



# Parent Feedback Survey on Family Engagement

## Introduction

In early 2019, North Dakota received a year-long planning grant from the federal government known as the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5). As noted already, NDSU Extension planned and conducted specific work activities in an effort to meet Goal 3.10 in the grant: “Expanding understanding and opportunities for family engagement.”

As a portion of the research activities conducted to further this goal, NDSU Extension developed and implemented a parent feedback survey on family engagement to gather more quantitative information on this topic in North Dakota. This portion of the report briefly outlines the implementation and results associated with this parent feedback survey on family engagement.

# Survey Background and Implementation

The purpose of this parent feedback survey on family engagement was to fulfill Goal 3.10 of the grant project's focus on increased understanding about family engagement in early childhood settings in North Dakota. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction sought to understand more fully the sources that parents, caregivers and early childhood professionals utilize and prefer as related to family engagement opportunities between the ages of birth and 5 years. A brief summary of the survey's background and implementation are shared here.

## Study Design

The parent feedback survey on family engagement was designed by the project team with NDSU Extension with some input from state DPI staff members. As time and funding were limited, a convenience sample method was employed to gather feedback from parents, caregivers and community professionals in early childhood as rapidly as possible. When a final version of the survey was completed, it was placed online using Qualtrics survey software for ease of making the survey available and gathering participant feedback.

## Survey Measure

To maximize participant feedback, the survey measure was targeted and brief. Five questions of relevance for family engagement issues and opportunities in early childhood settings were included. The specific questions and the participant responses are outlined in the report that follows.

## Study Participants

Potential participants in North Dakota were recruited into the survey during a four-week period in January-February 2020. They were invited to participate in the family engagement survey via an email link that was shared.

Study participants were parents or caregivers of children between the ages of birth and 5 years of age in North Dakota, as well as early childhood professionals in the state. In North Dakota, a total of 175 participants completed the survey (representing 253 children in the identified age group of 0 to 5).

# Data Collection and Analysis

The parent feedback survey on family engagement was distributed to parent resource center coordinators and other early childhood professionals throughout North Dakota. In turn, these professional contacts shared the survey link via email on client mailing lists.

Survey responses were gathered from 175 adult participants in North Dakota in January and February 2020. Data were collected using Qualtrics survey software. The survey responses were gathered and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics embedded in the Qualtrics survey software.

## Survey Findings

The parent feedback survey on family engagement was conducted in early 2020 in North Dakota. A total of 175 participants completed the survey. Findings are shared below.

### Family Engagement Preferences

Participants were asked to indicate their preferred ways to be engaged relative to their child's early care and education via a question with multiple response options. Participants selected all options they typically utilize. The frequency of responses related to each family engagement option is reported in the table below (N = 175).

**Table 1. Preferred Family Engagement Options for Parents of 0 to 5 Years Children (N = 175)**

Response Options	Percentage (%)
Family events (play groups, family nights, community events)	76%
Technology-based engagement options (texting, email, apps, podcasts, online support groups, etc.)	65.7%
Printed information (newsletters, mail outs, magazines, etc.)	48%
Personal contact (home visits, parent conferences, etc.)	42.3%
Parent education classes	26.3%
Other (please specify)	0.6%

These results indicate that among a variety of potential family engagement options, parents of children during the period of 0 to 5 years of age show clear preferences for particular types of activity. The most highly rated or preferred option was involvement in “family events,” which can range from play groups to family nights organized by a preschool or other early childhood program (76%). Typically, such events are preferred when they are offered at a convenient time, have a limited cost and furnish interaction opportunities with children.

The next most preferred option consisted of technology-based options for contact or involvement, such as texting, email contact or online support groups (65.7%). Finally, nearly half of participants indicated that they appreciated either printed information (48%) or personal contact such as home visits or parent-teacher conferences (42.3%).

### Barriers to Family Engagement

Participants also were asked to identify barriers that may keep them from engaging in opportunities related to their child’s early care and education. Again, multiple response options were offered in this question.

Participants selected all options that they felt limited them from being engaged or actively involved in their child’s early care and education. The frequency of responses related to each barrier option is reported in the table below (N = 175).

**Table 2. Barriers to Family Engagement for Parents of 0 to 5 Years Children (N = 175)**

Response Options	Percentage (%)
Not aware of engagement opportunities (lack of awareness)	44%
Lack of child care availability when needed	25.1%
Other (please specify)	22.3%
Too few opportunities to choose from	16%
Lack of communication between parents and providers	16%
Setting does not offer parent involvement	6.9%
Transportation difficulties	4.6%
Too many opportunities to choose from	2.9%
Language barriers	0.6%

The participant responses demonstrate that a fairly wide variety of barriers may occur that limit family engagement for families with children from 0 to 5 years of age. The most highly noted barrier was simply lack of awareness of existing engagement opportunities (44%). In addition, one in four respondents noted that lack of child care availability limited engagement (25.1%).

Beyond these items, other barriers of concern included “Other” considerations (22.3%), too few opportunities (16%) or engagement options not being offered (6.9%) or lack of communication among parents and providers (16%). Some other themes noted were work schedules and rural areas (too distant to travel).

### Family Engagement Sources

Another topic that participants were asked about was the sources they access for information on a child’s development or about how to be involved in their child’s care and education. Participants were provided with multiple response options in this question and selected all options of relevance to them. The frequency of responses related to each information source as being typically utilized is reported in the table below (N = 175).

**Table 3. Preferred Family Engagement Sources for Parents of 0 to 5 Years Children (N = 175)**

Response Options	Percentage (%)
The internet	63.4%
Child-care provider or teacher	62.3%
Health-care professionals	61.1%
Friends or family members	53.1%
Community professionals (counselor, clergy, social workers, etc.)	27.4%
Parenting books or magazines	23.4%
Parenting class or group	22.3%
NDSU Extension	17.1%
Other (please specify)	0.6%

Among these preferred sources of information for family engagement, the top three options listed each were noted with a similar level of frequency and included the internet (63.4%), child-care provider or teacher (62.3%) and health-care professionals (nurses, pediatrician, etc.) (61.1%).



Following these sources, the next most preferred option was family or friends (53.1%). These seem to be the sources that should be looked at as primary avenues of information for reaching parents about family engagement.

In addition, other sources of importance identified were community professionals (27.4%), parenting books or magazines (23.4%), parenting classes or groups (22.3%) and NDSU Extension (17.1%). Faith-based resources also were identified as another preferred information source.

### Child Age Demographics

Demographic data on children’s ages were collected to understand the context behind participant responses. Ages of 253 children were reported. Results are reported below.

**Table 4. Demographics of Child Ages Among 0 to 5 Years Children (N = 253)**

<b>Response Options</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Birth to 1 year old	10.27%
1 to 2 years old	9.49%
2 to 3 years old	18.98%
3 to 4 years old	17%
4 to 5 years old	19.76%
5 to 6 years old	24.5%

## Summary

Responses to the parent feedback survey of family engagement implemented in North Dakota resulted in data being gathered from 175 parents, adult caregivers and early childhood professionals. While the survey was brief and used a convenience sampling approach due to a limited time frame and budget, responses to the survey came from throughout North Dakota and included caregivers for children across the ages from 0 to 6 years.

Three key questions were asked of participants that elicited information on their views related to family engagement in early childhood settings. The first topic explored was preferred family engagement options relative to involvement with a child’s early care and education. The most highly preferred options were family events (family nights, etc.), technology-based options and printed information (see Table 1).

The second topic explored was barriers that may limit family engagement in a child’s early years. The most noted barriers were lack of awareness of engagement opportunities, limited child care availability and no or limited options for parent involvement (see Table 2). The third topic explored was the preferred sources of information that parents and caregivers rely on for family engagement.

The most preferred sources of information were the internet, child-care provider or teacher, health-care professionals and family members or friends (see Table 3). This parent feedback survey furnishes some useful information for consideration in exploring issues and needs related to the topic of family engagement in North Dakota.

## Section Three



# Menu of Opportunities for Family Engagement

## Introduction

North Dakota received a year-long planning grant from the federal government known as the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5). As a portion of the work activities pursued by NDSU Extension, an environmental scan of the landscape of resources related to family engagement was conducted in an effort to meet Goal 3.10 in the grant: “Expanding understanding and opportunities for family engagement.”

This process was not exhaustive of all available resources on the topic of family engagement. Instead, the priority was to catalog a menu of helpful available resources that might be consulted in exploring the topic of family engagement. This portion of the report explains a variety of relevant resources that are linked with the topic of family engagement.

## A Resource Menu for Family Engagement

According to the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, a revision of the PFCE Framework (published in 2011 by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families), “Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with — not doing to or for — families.”

Based on the environmental scan of resources linked with supporting family engagement, the state has many available resources and ideas that can be utilized in understanding and promoting family engagement in early childhood settings. What should be noted is that this is not an exhaustive menu of available resources on family engagement but instead is an illustrative menu that provides a starting point for exploring this topic. To bring some coherence to the variety of resources that were identified, we developed a four-level framework for categorizing the resource examples included in this menu of family engagement opportunities.

The four levels of the family engagement resource framework are identified as follows:

- **Educational Resources** — These are examples of resources that can be used by parents or early childhood professionals and consist of a variety basic educational resources, including reports, websites, brochures, podcasts, videos or other educational items.
- **Programmatic Resources** — These are examples of resources that can be used by parents, early childhood professionals or others and consist of programmatic offerings that are designed to facilitate family engagement opportunities.
- **Organizational Resources** — These are examples of resources that can be utilized by parents, early childhood professionals or others and consist of organizations or groups that can be accessed for support relative to family engagement.
- **Framework Resources** — These are broad frameworks that apply specifically to family engagement.

### Educational Resources for Family Engagement

Educational Resources are examples of resources that can be used by parents or early childhood professionals and consist of a variety basic educational resources, including reports, websites, brochures, podcasts, videos or other educational items. Many of them are available through specific organizations, but the focus here is on the useful educational resources. An illustrative list of possible resources for family engagement is included in this section.

- **Attendance Works** — Attendance Works is an educational campaign intended to enhance student success by engaging children and their families to reduce chronic absence. Many parents want their children to do well in school but don’t fully understand the connection between chronic absence and a student’s academic achievement. Attendance Works has many educational handouts, flyers, videos and similar resources to help families and build the habit of attendance. Under the “Resources” section of their website, a section on “Positive Engagement” highlights many of these tools.

– **Resource Link:** <https://www.attendanceworks.org>

- **Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP): Promote Family Engagement Social Policy Brief** — The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) provides policy briefs on topics of key social concern, including a thoughtful policy brief on promoting family engagement. This policy brief highlights relevant research and policy suggestions, and furnishes some specific recommendations and examples for family engagement and links to specific additional resources. The full brief is available at the link below. A listing of recommended family engagement ideas also is included.

– **Resource Link:** <https://www.clasp.org/babiesinchildcare/recommendations/parents-providers-and-caregivers-supported-by-and-linked-to-community-resources/promote-family-engagement>

## CLASP – Family Engagement Recommendations

- \* Organizing a parent advisory board
- \* Providing a bulletin board or newsletter
- \* Holding conferences and meetings with parents
- \* Developing and distributing parent handbook/written program policies
- \* Developing a parent resource center (library of materials, etc.)
- \* Developing and distributing a parent satisfaction survey
- \* Welcoming families at all times
- \* Developing and implementing a written system for sharing daily events
- \* Providing parents with consultation prior to children's enrollment

■ **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — Legacy for Children Program** — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supports and provides curriculum, training and coaching for the Legacy for Children parent support program. Tested nationally, the resources for this program are available and help give parents support and a variety of tools for being involved in a child's education. Resources for the Legacy for Children parent support program are highlighted in the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/legacy.html>

■ **National Academies Press: “Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8”** — Published by the National Academies Press in 2016, an excellent resource publication is *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*. This resource highlights substantive research on parent support and involvement in the early childhood years and provides a plethora of important recommendations in this area. The entire report can be accessed at the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/supporting-the-parents-of-young-children>

■ **National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement: “Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices” Brief** — This policy brief, part of the “Building Partnerships Series for Early Childhood Professionals,” is available from the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. This work was supported by the national Office of Head Start and related federal agencies. A very useful set of ideas, attitudes and practices relative to family engagement are highlighted.

– **Resource Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/strategies-family-engagement-attitudes-practices.pdf>

■ **National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement: “Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement” Video Series** — The “Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement” video series is designed to support each program's efforts toward systemic and integrated engagement. Rooted in the Office of Head Start (OHS) Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, the videos highlight examples of innovative approaches to engagement that foster strong relationships with families and lead to positive outcomes for children and families.

– **Resource Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/community-engagement/article/best-practices-family-community-engagement-video-series>

■ **Overlee Preschool Cooperative Association** — This resource is highlighted as an example of a “co-op” (cooperative) preschool that highlights parent involvement as a priority. Based in Virginia, the Overlee Preschool focuses on play, academic and social development, family engagement and other key priorities for early childhood settings. The unique value of a cooperative preschool lies in the learning experience it offers to the parents as well as the children. In this example, Overlee believes that parent involvement in a child's preschool education benefits the entire family. The program's example and philosophy related to parent involvement are highlighted in the resource links.

– **Resource Link:** <https://overleepreschool.org/about-us/>

– **Resource Link:** <https://overleepreschool.org/parental-involvement/>

- **Rand Corporation: “Families, Powered On: Improving Family Engagement in Early Childhood Education Through Technology”** — The Rand Corporation has made available a policy report that covers research and recommendations on the topic of technology, family engagement and early childhood education. The report furnishes a variety of practical and innovative recommendations related to the use of technology for family engagement. The full report is available at the link below. A listing of recommended family engagement ideas also is included.

– **Resource Link:** [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR673z5.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR673z5.html)

#### RAND Corporation — Technology and Family Engagement Recommendations

- \* ECE providers need to learn how to use — and embrace the use of — all of the “new” communication channels through which parents can be reached. These include email, text messages and web-based communications tools. These tools provide opportunities for asynchronous communication between ECE providers and families that can be squeezed in whenever busy schedules allow.
- \* New online translation tools allow schools to translate written communications into a large number of languages fairly easily, thus overcoming language barriers between providers and families.
- \* Use of online portals, social media and automatic reminders of events via text message or email can help improve communication about opportunities for school-based involvement.
- \* Young children can communicate with their families about their daytime activities using cameras, microphones, email and other technology to record and transmit their experiences while they are in ECE settings, rather than trying to remember and talk about events after they occur.
- \* Online videos, content-based apps that give ideas for at-home activities and other resources — many of which are used by ECE providers themselves — model effective teaching practices and deliver other types of information that families could use to improve their skills or increase their self-confidence.

- **University of Minnesota Extension: Partnering for School Success Project** — Supported by University of Minnesota Extension, the Partnering for School Success Project provides a collection of related programs and resources intended to foster well-being and success in school. Such resources include the “Partnering for School Success” booklet (available in packets of 25). A variety of highly useful resources and examples on family engagement are available in the resource link. Specifically, a set of “take and teach” hour-long lessons focused on parent involvement and support of a child’s education is available via the second resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://extension.umn.edu/success-school/parent-school-partnerships>

– **Resource Link:** <https://extension.umn.edu/parent-school-partnerships/partnering-school-success-take-and-teach-lessons#access-the-resources-628010>

- **Virginia Commonwealth University: Center for Family Involvement** — The Center for Family Involvement at Virginia Commonwealth University is a hub that focuses on resources for people with disabilities and their families. A variety of useful resources is provided that address the needs of this particular population. Further, the Center for Family Involvement website is a useful example of a resource website that highlights family engagement and can be explored using the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://centerforfamilyinvolvement.vcu.edu/>

- **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: “Engaging with Families”** — A useful page on “Engaging with Families” is provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, which includes videos, handouts and other resources. The page emphasizes: “We need to shift the way we partner with families to help students learn from parent involvement to family engagement.”

– **Resource Link:** <https://dpi.wi.gov/engaging-families>



## ■ Other Recommendations on Family Engagement

### Various Family Engagement Recommendations

- \* “Parents as Partners” approach — offering information and support to foster family engagement.
- \* “Parent of the Month” Club — providing recognition of parent or family contributions to the school community.
- \* “Three for Me” Project — an approach in which parents pledge to volunteer three hours per year per child.
- \* “Watch Dogs” Mentoring Program — a male mentoring program that supports family engagement.
- \* “Man on the Move” — an approach for minority parents and students.
- \* “Parent Booster” Clubs — an approach to amplify parent support of school programs and activities.
- \* PTA or PTO Restaurant Nights — support of families and children through participation in shared meal nights at a local restaurant.
- \* Parent Learning Workshops — parent workshops held on how to support student learning in specific subject areas.
- \* Support for ELL Parents and Children — programs to encourage English language learner (ELL) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) parents to become and remain involved with their child’s education.
- \* Student Performance and Family Engagement — incorporation of student performances into family-oriented events.
- \* School Orientation Days — orientation day(s) before the first day of school and at back-to-school night (within the first month) to familiarize parents and children with the school setting.
- \* Family Meal Experiences — holding events or meetings at which supper, desserts, snacks and/or prizes are provided; children can display art or other projects.
- \* Parent Planning Sessions — planning sessions with parents to help them develop strategies for supporting their child’s success inside and outside of the classroom.
- \* Specialized Parent-Teacher Meetings — IEP meetings and other parent-teacher meetings that support parent and student participation.
- \* Tutoring Sessions — daily or weekly tutoring sessions in which parent volunteers assist children who need extra remediation in certain areas.

## Programmatic Resources for Family Engagement

Programmatic resources are examples of resources that can be used by parents, early childhood professionals or others and consist of programmatic offerings that are designed to facilitate family engagement opportunities. Some specific examples of such programmatic resources are highlighted in this section.

■ **Minnesota Department of Education and Partner Agencies: Help Me Grow Minnesota** — The Help Me Grow Minnesota program, offered via the Minnesota Department of Education and other partner agencies, focuses on providing parents and others with resources on children’s development and assessment of their progress. Confidential screenings of a child’s development, as well as a variety of useful educational resources, are available. For information on this program, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/index.html>

■ **Minnesota Department of Human Services: Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Child Care Provider Guide** — The Minnesota Department of Human Services operates a child care assistance program that extends information and support to child-care providers. A key useful resource that provides much information on supporting and serving children and families is the Child Care Provider Guide. For information on this program and resource, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-5260-ENG>

- **Moorhead Area Public Schools, Early Learning Center: Jump Start Preschool** — The Jump Start Preschool is a family engagement and school readiness program offered by Moorhead (Minnesota) Area Public Schools. It offers age-appropriate activities, curriculum and assessment for 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children living in the school district. Jump Start classes also include circle time, snack, art, gym and learning centers. This is a collaborative venture with early intervention services. Children working on special areas of development participate with typically developing peers. Licensed early childhood teachers are supported by classroom assistants and early intervention services teachers. For information on this program, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.moorheadschoools.org/schools/early-childhood-schools/school-readiness-and-jump-start-preschool/>
  
- **National Home Visiting Coalition: Home Visiting Programs** — A variety of excellent home visiting programs that make a substantial difference in the lives of children and their families is available. The National Home Visiting Coalition provides support for such programs and resources that enable interested parties to learn more and access resources on home visiting programs. An example provided here is the Family Home Visiting Program used in Minnesota. For information on such programs, which are known and used widely, access the resource links.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://nationalhomevisitingcoalition.org/>
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.health.state.mn.us/fhv>
  
- **North Dakota Department of Human Services: Right Track Program** — The Right Track Program, offered via the North Dakota Department of Human Services, is a free program for all North Dakota children birth to 3 years of age. Consultants can meet with individuals in the privacy of their residence and provide developmental screenings for young children, ideas and activities for stimulating a child's development and learning, and information and referrals to local, state or other resources. For information on this program, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/disabilities/earlyintervention/parent-info/right-track.html>
  
- **NDSU Extension and North Dakota Parent Education Network: Basic Beginnings Parent Education Program** — The Basic Beginnings Program, developed by NDSU Extension and offered typically via the North Dakota Parent Education Network, is a research-based parent education program focused on raising young children from the prenatal period through 3 years of age. The curriculum supports parents and family members in learning about topics including brain development, adverse experiences, child and parent stress, parent-child attachment, prenatal and early childhood health, and social and emotional development and support. For information on this program, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/basicbeginnings>
  
- **NDSU Extension: Gearing Up for Kindergarten Program** — The Gearing Up for Kindergarten Program, developed by NDSU Extension and offered typically via local school systems or other providers, is a prevention-focused parent and family education program designed to facilitate child development, school readiness and healthy parenting. The program focuses on engaging families with a child entering kindergarten in the next one to two years. For information on this program, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.gearingupnd.org>
  
- **Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program** — Parents as Teachers is a program that began in Missouri and evolved into a national project. Parents as Teachers (PAT) develops curricula and approaches that support a parent's role in promoting school readiness and healthy development of children. It is focused on learning experiences that are relevant and customized for the individual needs of each family and child. The program uses a home visiting model and also provides resources, training and other useful materials for parents and early childhood professionals. The program operates in all 50 states and multiple foreign countries. For information on this program, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://parentsasteachers.org/>

## Organizational Resources for Family Engagement

Organizational resources are examples of resources that can be used by parents, early childhood professionals or others and consist of organizations or groups that can be accessed for support relative to family engagement. This listing is not exhaustive but provides examples of such organizations.

- **Child Care Aware: North Dakota** — Child Care Aware is a national organization with state efforts within each state that focus on providing information, support and services to those working in the field of child care. Child Care Aware lists child-care licensing within the state and links to resources for children with special needs or other circumstances. It is an organization that can be contacted for information about child care availability, child support, health care for families, available resources for families and family engagement options. For information on this organization, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.childcareaware.org/state/north-dakota/>
  
- **Head Start and Early Head Start: Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)** — Head Start and Early Head Start are programs serving families with children ages 0 to 6 and are supported via federal agencies that provide funding, training and technical assistance, and support. The Office of Head Start (OHS) and partner organizations seek to support Head Start and Early Head Start sites throughout North Dakota. These local sites offer a wide range of family-supportive activities as part of their focus on families with children in the early years. In addition, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center furnishes a wealth of helpful resources, training and other supports to parents, early childhood professionals and community leaders. Also, the North Dakota Head Start Association provides a focal point for these efforts in North Dakota. For information on these organizations and resources, access the resource links.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs>
  - **Resource Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>
  - **Resource Link:** <http://www.ndheadstart.com/>
  
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** — The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the premier national association dedicated to providing children, their families and early childhood professionals with the resources needed for early learning and success. NAEYC supports children, families and professionals through educational resources and activities, technical training and assistance, and a variety of other supportive efforts. Also, the organizations offers a specific set of recommendations and resources on the topic of family engagement. For information on this organization and its resources, access the resource links.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/>
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement>
  
- **North Dakota Parent Education Network and Regional Parent and Family Resource Centers** — The North Dakota Parent Education Network is a statewide network of regional Parent and Family Resource Centers (PFRC) that serves the citizens and communities of North Dakota. The mission of the North Dakota Parent Education Network is to provide research-based parent and family education to North Dakota parents and family members. Each regional Parent and Family Resource Center is led by a coordinator and offers parent and family education opportunities, resources and supports. The statewide network is further supported by NDSU Extension. A wide range of parent education programs and family engagement opportunities is made available through the North Dakota Parent Education Network. For information on this organization and the regional Parent and Family Resource Centers, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pen>

■ **NDSU Extension** — NDSU Extension is a statewide educational network that is the outreach educational arm of North Dakota State University. The purpose of NDSU Extension is to create learning partnerships that help children, youth and adults enhance their lives and communities. NDSU Extension offers a variety of research-based educational resources and programs to assist people in the areas of human development, family life, aging and wellness, and personal and family finances. For information on this organization and its educational resources, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** [https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/children\\_families\\_finances](https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/children_families_finances)

■ **Pathfinder Services of ND** — Pathfinder Services of ND is a nonprofit organization that provides information, training, individual assistance and resources related to healthy parenting and family life. Based out of Minot, N.D., the organization works statewide and focuses specifically on serving North Dakota children and youth who have special needs, their families and others who support them. The organization offers educational resources, training and partnerships designed to facilitate support for children and families, including family engagement. For information on this organization, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <http://www.pathfinder-nd.org/>

■ **Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota (PCAND)** — Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota is a nonprofit organization that works to advocate for a broad variety of services and engages in active support for healthy, nurturing families and communities. The organization focuses on primary prevention efforts to support nurturing and prevent abuse by educating parents, caregivers and community professionals on how to support children and families. It engages in support of children and families through prevention activities and programs, training, capacity building, systems change, collaboration, advocacy and related efforts. For information on this organization, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://www.pcand.org/>

## Framework Resources for Family Engagement

Framework resources are examples of broad frameworks related to the topic of family engagement that can be useful for envisioning ways to allocate resources, priorities or strategies in facilitating family engagement. A variety of resources that can be used by parents or early childhood professionals exist and several frameworks have emerged that focus on differing approaches to family engagement. An illustrative list of several framework resources for family engagement is included in this section.

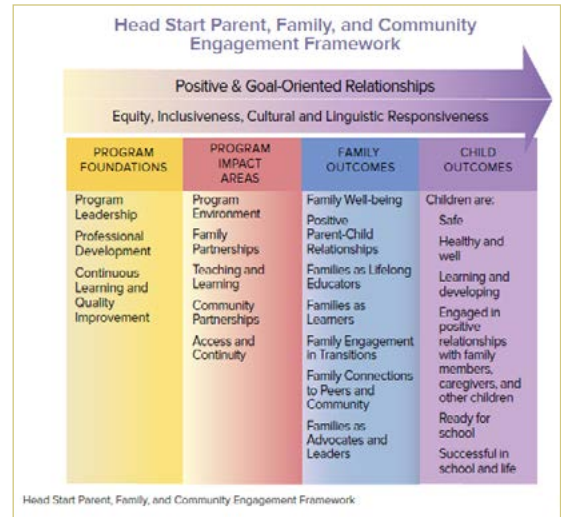
■ **Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education: The Family Engagement Project** — The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education sponsors a framework for supporting family engagement in that state through its Family Engagement Project. The Family Engagement Project offers technical assistance in the development of individualized family engagement plans for specific sites in the state. The goal of The Family Engagement Project is for family engagement coaches and early care and education programs to work in collaboration to create individualized plans designed to increase parent engagement, parent awareness and community partnerships. A graphic that displays the framework is provided. For information on this framework, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://children.alabama.gov/family-engagement-project/>



■ **Head Start: Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework** — The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework provides programs with a research-based, organizational guide for implementing Head Start Program Performance Standards for parent, family and community engagement. Explore the PFCE Interactive Framework to find key resources, research and the Head Start Program Performance Standards associated with each of the framework elements. A graphic that displays the framework is provided. For information on this framework, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-parent-family-community-engagement-framework>



■ **National Center for Healthy Safe Children: Safe Schools/Healthy Students Framework** — The National Center for Healthy Safe Children provides a framework identified as the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Framework. This tool allows schools and their partners to understand and plan a comprehensive approach to mental health promotion and youth violence prevention. The framework was developed from evaluation findings and work with project grantees across the nation. A graphic that displays the framework is provided. For information on this framework, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://healthysafechildren.org/sshs-framework>



■ **Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program: Evidence-based Home Visiting Model** — Parents as Teachers is a program that began in Missouri and evolved into a national project. Parents as Teachers (PAT) develops curricula and approaches that support a parent’s role in promoting school readiness and healthy development of children. Using a home-based visiting model, Parents as Teachers has developed an evidence-based logic model for home visiting that encompasses different aspects of family engagement. For information on this framework, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** [http://www.parentpossible.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PAT\\_EBHVM.pdf](http://www.parentpossible.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PAT_EBHVM.pdf)

■ **Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program: Parent Engagement During Home Visit** — Parents as Teachers is a program that began in Missouri and evolved into a national project. Parents as Teachers (PAT) develops curricula and approaches that support a parent’s role in promoting school readiness and healthy development of children. Using a home-based visiting model, Parents as Teachers has developed a framework for assessing parent engagement during a home visiting experience with families. A graphic that displays the framework is provided. For information on this framework, access the resource link.

– **Resource Link:** <https://parentsasteachers.org/>

Parent Engagement During Home Visit						
Inadequate 1	2	Adequate 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7
<b>Parent:</b>						
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not indicate interest in material or activities		<input type="checkbox"/> Is available for interaction with home visitor and child		<input type="checkbox"/> Appears interested in activities of home visit		<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently initiates discussions on child's development or family
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not initiate activities or conversations with child or home visitor		<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally participates in activities		<input type="checkbox"/> Initiates topics or asks questions		<input type="checkbox"/> Engages in play and learning activities with child during visits
<input type="checkbox"/> Positions self away from home visitor and child		<input type="checkbox"/> Is in proximity to home visitor and child during most of the visit		<input type="checkbox"/> Is an active participant with the child and home visitor		<input type="checkbox"/> Asks questions or provides information related to discussion
<input type="checkbox"/> Is distracted, disinterested, physically distant, or involved in another activity		<input type="checkbox"/> Shows some interest in material or activities				<input type="checkbox"/> Stays in proximity to child and home visitor throughout visit
		<input type="checkbox"/> Answers questions but does not elaborate				<input type="checkbox"/> Shows enjoyment of visit activities



- **University of Minnesota Extension: Four Models of Parent Involvement** — Associated with work by the University of Minnesota Extension on success in school and parent-school partnerships, the Four Models of Parent Involvement addresses different models of parent involvement. Also, it includes a checklist to look at each of these different models briefly. For more information on this framework, access the resource link.
  - **Resource Link:** <https://extension.umn.edu/parent-school-partnerships/four-models-parent-involvement>



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