Cultivating Connections: How Early Childhood Leaders Foster Community Engagement

PRESENTER INFORMATION HOLLY BARBER-GATLIN

Executive Director of Operations and Founder of The LUX Schools

DFPS/HHS Licensed Director of a TRS 4-Star Campus
(Formerly Director of a Catholic ECC)

Trained as Montessori Administrator (HMC)
and
FTCM -Formation Toward Christian Ministry

Texas Childcare Health Consultant

EC-4 Generalist/ESL/GT

TECPDS Registered Trainer

Cultivating Connections: How Early Childhood Leaders Foster Community Engagement is a dynamic training designed to empower administrators with practical strategies to build meaningful partnerships with families and community organizations. Using the Program Administration Scale (PAS) Family and Community Partnerships subscale, participants will assess their current engagement efforts and implement actionable improvements. Through collaboration, advocacy, and strategic outreach, leaders will enhance program quality, strengthen support networks, and create lasting community impact.

Session Description

By the end of this training, participants will identify and establish at least three potential community partners (e.g., local businesses, nonprofits, or cultural organizations) and outline a plan to initiate collaboration within the next three months.

Administrators will evaluate their current family and community engagement strategies and implement at least one new initiative, such as a community resource night or partnership-driven event, within six weeks of the training.

Participants will create a communication plan using at least two outreach methods (e.g., newsletters, social media, or town hall meetings) to enhance collaboration with families and community stakeholders within one month of training completion.

Within three months of the training, administrators will evaluate their community collaboration efforts using the Family and Community Partnerships subscale from the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and implement at least one improvement strategy based on their assessment results.

Session Goals:

ICE BREAKER

- Icebreaker Activity: "One Word, One Goal"

  - Ask each participant to think of one word that describes what strong family and community partnerships mean to them (e.g., "trust," "support," "collaboration").

  - Go around the room and have each person quickly share their word.

  - After everyone has shared, briefly discuss common themes and how they connect to the training's goals.

  - Wrap up by asking: What is one goal you have for improving community connections in your program?

Why Community Engagement Matter

Strong community partnerships provide children with enriched learning experiences, real-world connections, and expanded resources that support holistic development..

Engaging families in meaningful ways builds trust, fosters two-way communication, and promotes active participation in children's education.

Collaboration with local organizations, businesses, and civic groups provides funding opportunities, professional expertise, and shared resources to improve program effectiveness.

Community relationships connect families to vital social services, mentorship opportunities, and wraparound support that contribute to overall well-being.

Why Community Engagement Matter (Continued)

- Partnering with the community allows programs to embrace cultural diversity, celebrate different traditions, and create inclusive environments for all families.

- Active community engagement strengthens early childhood programs' ability to advocate for policies that support young children and families at local and state levels.

- Collaboration with community organizations and professional networks provides leadership opportunities, ongoing training, and mentorship for early childhood administrators and staff.

Building Effective Community Partnerships

- Establish partnerships with organizations that align with your program's mission, ensuring a mutual commitment to supporting young children and families.

- Maintain clear, ongoing dialogue with community partners through meetings, updates, and collaborative planning to strengthen relationships and accountability.

- Create meaningful partnerships by offering opportunities for shared resources, joint events, and mutual support that benefit both the early childhood program and the community.

- Regularly assess the effectiveness of partnerships, celebrate successes, and refine strategies to ensure long-term impact and continued engagement.

Strategies for Family & Community Engagement

- Establish advisory boards, parent committees, and regular surveys to ensure families have a say in policies, curriculum decisions, and program improvements.

- Offer multiple ways to connect, such as bilingual newsletters, text updates, home visits, and interactive parent portals to meet diverse family needs.

- Organize parent workshops, literacy nights, and community resource fairs that support child development while strengthening family-school connections.

- Collaborate with local businesses, libraries, health providers, and civic organizations to expand access to family resources and enrichment opportunities.

Communication and Advocacy in Partnerships

Maintain open, honest, and consistent communication with families, staff, and community partners. Clearly articulate goals, expectations, and shared responsibilities to foster collaboration and trust.

Align advocacy efforts with the needs and values of all stakeholders. Use data, personal stories, and community input to strengthen your message and create meaningful partnerships that drive positive change.

Program Administration Scale

The Program Administration Scale, Third Edition (PAS-3) is a nationally recognized tool used to assess leadership and management practices in early childhood programs. It provides a research-based framework for continuous improvement, with specific indicators—like Family and Community Partnerships—to guide administrators in strengthening program quality.

- The Program Administration Scale (PAS-3) assesses the extent to which early childhood programs foster meaningful family and community connections, ensuring alignment with best practices for engagement.

- PAS evaluates how programs facilitate two-way communication with families, provide resources, and establish partnerships with local organizations to strengthen community involvement.

- The assessment results help administrators identify strengths and areas for growth, allowing for strategic improvements in outreach efforts, family participation, and community collaboration.

Assessing Community Engagement Using PAS

Hands-On Activity – Community Collaboration Action Plan

1. Each group will collaborate to define one specific goal for strengthening family and community partnerships in an early childhood program. Keep the goal clear and achievable.

2. Discuss and list two concrete actions that will help achieve the goal, and identify one key community partner (business, organization, or individual) that can support these efforts.

3. Brainstorm one potential challenge that could arise and work together to propose a practical solution to overcome it. Consider real-life barriers such as funding, participation, or communication gaps.

4. After completing the action plan, post it on the wall and participate in a *Gallery Walk* to review other groups' ideas. Each group will then share one key takeaway from their discussion.

Setting Meaningful Goals

Effective community engagement starts with clear, achievable goals that align with your program's values and the needs of families and partners.

How to Set a Goal:

Reflect: What is one area of family or community engagement you want to improve?

Be Specific: Make your goal focused and actionable (e.g., "Host a quarterly family literacy night" instead of "Do more with families").

Setting Meaningful Goals Continued

Make it **SMART**: Ensure your goal is -

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-bound

Connect: Consider how this goal will strengthen relationships, support child development, or promote shared leadership.

Setting a clear goal gives your action plan purpose and direction. Think big, but start small—every step counts.

Sample Action Plan: Strengthening Family & Community Partnerships

One Specific Goal: Increase family participation in early literacy activities by hosting monthly themed "Read Together Nights" at the center.

Two Concrete Actions:

1. Create bilingual invitations and reminders through text, email, and flyers to invite families.
2. Offer read-alouds, book giveaways, and activity stations during the events to encourage participation and engagement.

One Key Community Partner: Local public library — for guest readers, free books, and early literacy resources.

One Potential Challenge: Families may have limited availability due to work schedules or transportation barriers.

A Practical Solution: Offer the event at varying times (e.g., 5:30–7:00 p.m. and Saturday mornings) and provide light refreshments and a small raffle to encourage attendance. Coordinate with the library to offer a virtual or mobile story time option as an alternative.

Hands-On Activity – Community Collaboration Action Plan (Instructions)

1. Each group will collaborate to define one specific goal for strengthening family and community partnerships in an early childhood program. Keep the goal clear and achievable.

2. Discuss and list two concrete actions that will help achieve the goal, and identify one key community partner (business, organization, or individual) that can support these efforts.

3. Brainstorm one potential challenge that could arise and work together to propose a practical solution to overcome it. Consider real-life barriers such as funding, participation, or communication gaps.

4. After completing the action plan, post it on the wall and participate in a *Gallery Walk* to review other groups' ideas. Each group will then share one key takeaway from their discussion.
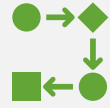
Community Collaboration Action Plan (Form)

Goal: What is one community partnership goal?

Action Steps: What are two actions to achieve it?

Key Partner: Who is one key community partner?

▶

Gallery Walk and Share

We will take some time to do a gallery walk. As you walk around and read the plans, discuss one takeaway with your team.

What did you see?

What did you learn?

2-3 groups to share their plans aloud

Overcoming Challenges

Establishing meaningful relationships with families and community partners requires time, transparency, and consistent efforts to foster trust and engagement.

Families may face obstacles such as language barriers, work schedules, or lack of transportation, making it essential to provide flexible, inclusive opportunities for involvement.

Maintaining strong community collaborations requires ongoing communication, shared goals, and adaptability to ensure continued mutual support and engagement.

Reflection and Next Steps

- Reflect on existing family and community partnerships to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

- Establish specific objectives for enhancing family involvement, strengthening community collaborations, and improving outreach efforts.

- Create strategies for maintaining consistent communication, increasing participation, and fostering long-term relationships with families and community partners.

- Regularly evaluate engagement efforts using tools like PAS-3, gather feedback from stakeholders, and adjust approaches to ensure meaningful and lasting impact.

WHAT WAS NEW LEARNING?

WHAT QUESTIONs, concerns or fears ARE LINGERING?

WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Access Key Resources for PAS-3 Administration & Training

🟦 Program Administration Scale (PAS) Book

Scan this code to access the full PAS-3 book online. This resource includes the PAS-3 items, definitions, scoring rubrics, and examples needed for administrators and evaluators to use the PAS effectively in early childhood program assessments.

📃 Ideal for:
- Directors
- Coaches
- Program administrators
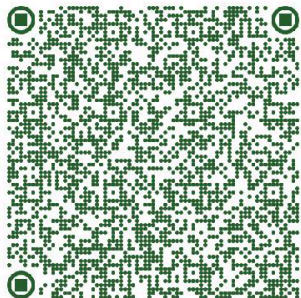- Anyone preparing for reliability or implementation

🟦 PAS-3 Reliability Training

Scan this code to begin official PAS-3 reliability training. This online training module helps users build inter-rater reliability for the PAS-3 tool. It includes guided practice, scoring examples, and calibration exercises.

📃 Ideal for:
- New assessors preparing for certification
- Staff seeking to strengthen accuracy and fidelity
- Coaches onboarding others to the PAS-3 process

RESOURCES