

## Early Learning Family Gatherings

(a) *Establishing parent committees.* A program must establish a parent committee comprised exclusively of **parents** of currently enrolled children as early in the program year as possible. This committee must be established at the center level for center-based programs and at the local program level for other program options. When a program operates more than one option, parents may choose to have a separate committee for each option or combine membership. A program must ensure that parents of currently enrolled children understand the process for elections to the policy council or policy committee and other leadership opportunities.

(b) *Requirements of parent committees.* Within the parent committee structure, a program may determine the best methods to engage families using strategies that are most effective in their community, as long as the program ensures the parent committee carries out the following minimum responsibilities:

- (1) Advise staff in developing and implementing local program policies, activities, and services to ensure they meet the needs of children and families;
- (2) Have a process for communication with the policy council and policy committee; and
- (3) Within the guidelines established by the governing body, policy council or policy committee, participate in the recruitment and screening of Early Head Start and Head Start employees

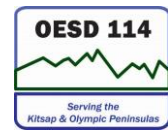
F-206 Family Engagement Contractors must provide a variety of opportunities for ECEAP families to volunteer, connect with other families, learn about parenting, and grow leadership skills. Opportunities offered must include voluntary participation in classroom, site, community, family, committee, and leadership activities.

Contractors must provide written materials to parents, such as a parent handbook or calendar, to inform parents of program opportunities and policies.

Contractors must write and implement a plan to encourage involvement from all families, including but not limited to:

- Families whose primary or home language is not English.
- Parents or guardians working full time.
- Fathers or father figures.
- Family members who are not living at home, including deployed or incarcerated parents or guardians.
- Other underrepresented families as applicable.

Contractors must ensure that participation in family engagement opportunities is encouraged, but is not a condition of a child's enrollment



Parent Committees (Family Gatherings) builds community among families offering parents opportunities to plan events and activities that enhance their own adult learning, and support their child's school readiness by increasing their knowledge in the development, education, health and nutrition of their children. Every parent and guardian of children enrolled in your program are part of your Family Gatherings.

Each center based and family childcare options will conduct their first Family Gatherings as early in the year as possible. Center based and family child care staff must provide no less than four Family Gatherings per year. Opportunities for parents to meet may be offered throughout the year more frequently as needed or identified by the families. It is important for staff to ensure that opportunities are offered at times that meet the needs of all families attending the site. For example: an evening Family Gathering might meet the needs of the majority of the families. Staff will work with their supervisor to flex their time from an evening event.

There are several purposes for Family Gatherings. The first is to engage families in their child's school readiness and participation on Policy Council. Family Gatherings provide parents with leadership opportunities. Families are informed of Policy Council as well as the process for elections for Policy Council early in their participation in the program. Another purpose of a Parent Committee is to provide developmentally appropriate activities for children and their families to participate in together. Each Head Start Center may elect two Policy Council Reps to participate in monthly Policy Council meetings. ECEAP centers may elect one Policy Council Rep. Center Policy Council Reps can report to other enrolled families Policy Council information and any other information during Family Gatherings.

These representatives can provide Policy Council reports during Socialization time to other families regarding Policy Council information.

Each time a Family Gathering occurs, parents, with support of staff must complete the Family Gathering form. It is important to document family ideas, events, activities, trainings etc. Interpreters can be scheduled during Family Gatherings (follow Interpretive Procedure).

Documentation may include any of the following:

- Minutes showing evidence of Policy Council reporting
- Minutes which show decisions made
- Program recruitment materials distribution
- Minutes showing evidence that parents have had input into planning for future Family Gatherings.