Our mission is to coalesce, inspire and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Leading by Exemplar:
Family Engagement

This brief focuses on the practices of five exemplary Head Start programs from the Leading by Exemplar research project. Below you’ll find details on the family engagement strategies and processes used by each program. You’ll see that all programs strive to maintain a close connection between school and home and but may do so in different ways. NHSA shares this brief in order to share the findings of the Leading by Exemplar work and to support high-quality practice in the Head Start field.

Shine On, Families provides parents with specific activities that align with in-classroom experiences.

Acelero’s family engagement curriculum, Shine On, Families, intentionally connects their family engagement efforts and activities with children’s classroom experiences and includes activities for parents to do at home with their children. Acelero’s family advocates spend significant time in the classroom with children and families to reinforce the strong connection between home and school. This allows family advocates to understand more about the classroom’s curriculum and School Readiness Goals and allows the parents to build their family engagement capacity so teachers and family advocates collaborate across a common system to support individual families’ needs.

Having engagement staff spend time in the classroom allows for valuable coordination between engagement efforts and the classroom experience.

Educare Miami-Dade bases their family engagement efforts on two models: the Educare model and the Brazleton Touchpoints model. Educare Miami-Dade’s family engagement staff, who are all required to have bachelor’s degrees, are in classrooms observing children daily, which allows for a strong connection between the classroom and family experience. Family engagement staff and teachers meet regularly and rely heavily on data to strengthen the connection and progress of children and families both in the classroom and at home.

Even within a school system, it is possible to create a strong connection between family service staff and classroom teachers.

CAP Tulsa has two teams that are focused on families: the family engagement team and the family advancement team. The family engagement team creates a connection between home and the classroom through activities like family conferences, home visits, and monthly classes for parents. The family advancement team has unique job training and education opportunities for parents, including the CareerAdvance program, which helps parents earn qualifications to work in healthcare careers by covering tuition and fees, providing individual coaches, building peer support, providing child care, and providing transportation subsidies.

A half-day model can offer a unique opportunity to have the classroom experience and family engagement driven by the same staff member, making these activities inseparable.

For several years, Utah Community Action ran a unique model for family engagement: In half-day classrooms, teachers played the lead role in both the classroom and family engagement. This maximized the continuity in a child and family’s experience between the classroom and the home. Now that UCA has transitioned to full-day classrooms, they are back to having teachers and family advocates be separate roles, but they work hard to maintain a tight link between them.

Key Takeaway
Maintaining a close connection between school and home is essential, but different staff roles can execute this effort successfully.