

Focus on Families!

How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School



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Promising Practices to Engage Families



A multigenerational family from East Boston attends the Engaging Families Initiative Family Fun Night 2005. Photo courtesy of BOSTnet

This section presents four overarching strategies that after school programs can employ to engage families after school:

- Support families.
- Communicate and build trusting relationships with families.
- Hire and develop a family-focused staff.
- Build linkages across individuals and organizations.

Within each broad strategy, specific activities and ways of relating to families that programs can use to overcome challenges and boost family engagement are discussed and illustrated with examples from real-life practice. The strategies and examples presented in this section are based on information generated during HFRP field staff interviews and site visits to EFI-affiliated programs, a review of the HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database (www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html), a scan of the Promising Practices in Afterschool website (www.afterschool.org), and HFRP's Web-based resource, the Family Involvement Network of Educators (www.finetwork.org; see box on page 16).

To learn more about these agencies visit:



HFRP Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html

Promising Practices in After School
afterschool.org

Family Involvement Network of Educators
finetwork.org

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The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)

The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE; www.finenetwork.org) is a Harvard Family Research Project initiative to support people who have a common interest in strengthening partnerships among families, schools, and communities. Through a diverse offering of materials and tools on its website, FINE equips educators and other professionals to partner with families and informs families and communities about leading-edge approaches to full partnership with schools and community-based organizations.

Resources on the FINE website include:

- **Workshop materials** to incorporate into training and conference presentations
- **Research briefs, reports, and papers**
- **Bibliographies** of current family involvement research literature
- **Teaching cases** for teacher training with real-life narratives on difficult home–school–community situations
- ***FINE Forum* e-newsletter** that features promising practices and practitioner perspectives on themes of interest to the family involvement field
- **Member Insights** in which members exchange opinions and provocative ideas
- **Monthly email announcements** with updates on what's new in the field of family involvement and on the FINE website.

FINE membership is free—to join go to www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/joinfine.html.

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Professional standards also reinforce these positive strategies. The National AfterSchool Association (NAA) has issued quality standards for quality school-age care, and family engagement figures prominently in these standards (below).

Professional Standards for Family Engagement in After School

The National AfterSchool Association has developed six standards for quality school-age care.* Two standards, Human Relationships and Administration, offer keys to quality that support family engagement. One of the eight keys laid out in the Human Relationships standard is that “staff and families interact with each other in positive ways” (p.18). Specifically:

- Staff make families feel welcome and comfortable.
- Staff and families treat each other with respect.
- Staff share the languages and cultures of the families they serve and the communities they live in.
- Staff and families work together to make arrivals and departures between home and child care go smoothly.

Four keys in the Administration standard focus on families and communities. “The program builds links to the community” (p. 49), “program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families in the community” (p. 66), and “staff support families’ involvement in the program” (p. 45), such that:

- There is a policy that allows family members to visit any time throughout the day.
- Staff offer orientation sessions for new families.
- Staff keep families informed about the program.
- Staff encourage families to give input and to get involved with program events.

Furthermore, “staff, families, and schools share important information to support the well-being of children and youth” (p. 47), such that:

- Program policies require that staff and family members communicate about the child’s well-being.
- Staff, families, and schools work together as a team to set goals for each child, and they work with outside specialists when necessary.
- Staff and families share information about how to support children’s development.
- Staff and families join together to communicate and work with the schools.

*Roman, J. (1998). *The NSACA standards for quality school-age care*. Boston: National AfterSchool Association.

Promising Practices to Engage Families

Strategy 1: Support Families

Many of the programs described in this guide embody a philosophy of family support. They know that healthy child development requires strong nurturing families that in turn are nurtured and supported by individuals and institutions within the community.¹⁴ The field of family support has shown that efforts that are truly supportive view families from a strengths-based perspective, are responsive to their needs and interests, and empower parents to act on their own and their children's behalf.¹⁵ Program evaluations point to support and service provision as one way to engage families in their children's learning.¹⁶ Services and activities to support families include parenting workshops, adult education classes, and other support services such as health, housing, and financial support. Yet family support is more than meeting families' basic needs. After school stakeholders agree that programs need to support and build on the strengths of families. Specifically, programs can do the following:

How to Support Families

- Focus on families' assets.
- Consider the concerns and needs of the families and children served.
- Solicit family input.

Focus on families' assets.

Some programs' approaches to family engagement take a deficit perspective, aiming to "save" youth from the negative influences of families or to "cure" families by teaching them about societal and school norms.¹⁷ Although parents can benefit from adult learning opportunities, such as English, GED, and parenting classes, these classes should not be the sole focus of a family engagement program.¹⁸ In fact, some program coordinators have found the term "parenting classes" to be very unpopular with families.¹⁹ Perhaps it is because parents do not want to be perceived only as needing assistance but also as positive contributors to their children's development.

The Math and Parent Partnerships Program (MAPPS), which began in Phoenix, Arizona, takes a strengths-based approach to parent education. MAPPS offers workshops that address parents' desire to gain new math skills in order to help their children with schoolwork. Workshops simultaneously appreciate parents' knowledge base and offer them leadership opportunities. Specifically, parents' knowledge and lived experience with math are explored in the workshops. For example, building tables becomes a way to explore ideas of geometry while drawing on families' own expertise, such as construction and mosaic tile work. Parents are also supported to later lead the workshop for other parents.²⁰

Consider the concerns and needs of the families and children served, in addition to one's own programmatic needs and mission.²¹

This may be accomplished in part by offering a wide variety of opportunities for families to be engaged. For example, in the Greenwood Shalom After School Program profiled in section III, trips to museums and theaters appeal to parents seeking enrichment opportunities, while math and literacy workshops appeal to parents who want support for

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helping their children with homework. This range of activities and strategies helps the program reach more families.

Addressing families' most critical needs may also be of great value, even if it seems to be outside the scope of the program. Capital Kids is an after school initiative in Columbus, Ohio, serving 2,800 children in 35 sites. The four initial pilot sites serve children and families in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Many of the children come from female-headed, African American families living below the poverty level. Many are homeless. The program participates in a Take Home Grocery Program that engages parents and children in a fun learning activity while meeting families' critical needs. The Mid-Ohio FoodBank delivers a large supply of food to Capital Kids bimonthly. After the program allocates its share for daily snacks, enough groceries remain to send some home with every family. Families come to the after school site to pick up a box of groceries, and sorting and distributing the food becomes an interactive activity for children and parents.²² In an evaluation of the program, 95% of parents mentioned the food bank as a valuable service offered.²³

Solicit family feedback on current programming and implement their ideas for new programming.

Ideally, after school programs will ask families what they think about the program, how they can contribute to the program, and how they can be served in return. By including the ideas of families in programming and improving what families think could be better, after school program staff may see improved program outcomes.²⁴ Families' ideas and feedback can be sought regarding the services programs provide to parents, how the program operates, and the program curriculum and activities for children.²⁵ Such ideas can be gathered through surveys, focus group discussions, one-on-one meetings, and even suggestion boxes. This strategy allows families to feel that they can have a role in shaping program goals and activities.

Parent Services Project (PSP), a family support organization in San Rafael, California, worked with several local elementary schools to increase family engagement and leadership. PSP hosted a series of parent meetings to invite reflection and visioning about children's learning. Parents in one school identified safety and homework assistance as key issues and came up with the idea for a homework club to address these issues. Over the course of 3 years, with support from PSP, this group of parents shared their concerns, developed a vision, successfully applied for a grant, implemented a homework club, and gained valuable leadership skills. As parent Alma Martinez explained,

Easy Things You Can Do to Support Families

- Have a parent suggestion box.
- Conduct formal and informal surveys about the program on a regular basis.
- Host parent forums or discussion groups that allow parents to meet one another and discuss their concerns about child rearing and other family matters.
- Strike up conversations with parents that focus on them. Give them time to talk about themselves instead of their children.
- Work with the children to plan and host a family appreciation event.

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“Parents need this kind of [leadership] support to discover who they are and what they can do.”²⁶ This example shows how from program inception families can not only give feedback, but lead the design and implementation of after school opportunities for children.

How to Communicate and Build Trusting Relationships

- Communicate frequently and in positive ways.
- Be there for families.
- Provide leadership opportunities for families.

Strategy 2: Communicate and Build Trusting Relationships

Successful family engagement efforts depend in part on the level of trust families feel for program staff. Communication is a building block of family involvement in part because it can help build trust with families. Letting families know that they are welcome and keeping two-way lines of communication open are fundamental communication strategies.²⁷ Using a variety of communication strategies can help reach a larger group of parents, as well as allow parents to discuss whatever concerns they have, whether or

not they are program related. Many programs may never achieve 100% participation in workshops and events because of parents’ busy schedules, a common challenge. However, through telephone calls or letters, programs can send a general message that families are welcome. A communication log can help programs track and improve their communication efforts (see box on page 21 for a sample log).

Once basic communication has been established and families begin to feel more trust toward the program, staff can begin to foster deeper kinds of family engagement and parent leadership. The strategies below focus on basic communication as well as more elaborate practices to solicit families’ input regarding program governance and leadership.

Communicate frequently and in positive ways.

Program evaluations reveal that communication about program mission, goals, and strategies are one way to engage families. This information can be conveyed through orientations, open house events, newsletters, email, and participation in class activities. Communication can also happen more informally.²⁸

At the Hyde Square Task Force After School Program profiled in section III, staff members talk to parents about children’s progress at parent meetings, at pick-up time, and over the phone. Speaking to parents on a daily basis makes for a warm, welcoming environment. All EFI coordinators find that informal conversations and sharing good news about their children make parents feel valued and connected. Having gregarious staff who feel comfortable with parents can also help build staff–family relationships.

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Public School 253 in Brooklyn, New York, which serves a large immigrant population, offers an after school program with the support of the YMHA/YWHA. Language barriers prevented the administration and teachers from connecting with families. In response to the communication problem, the after school program hired staff who reflect the backgrounds of the students and relied on a variety of communication strategies, including flyers, telephone calls, and conversations during pick-up time. The program has an open door policy that allows parents to discuss any concerns with the coordinator. Program staff act as mediators when parents and school staff are having problems, and the staff teach parents how to advocate for themselves to the school. Staff are also trained on how to “smile and chat with parents to encourage openness.” The school now relies on the after school program to advertise events and communicate with families. Teachers go to program staff to learn more about children and their families, which teachers find particularly useful when they are addressing students’ challenging behavior.²⁹

Tracking Communication With Families

A communication log can help after school programs track their communications with families, especially as it promotes families’ involvement in the after school program and their child’s broader learning. Programs can use a log to assess how often they are reaching out to families, the nature of their interactions with families, and with whom they are communicating.

For example, program staff might log communications with families that meet the following criteria:

- Interactions that last over 5 minutes
- In-depth individual conversations (but not brief chats at pick-up)
- One-on-one meetings with families (but not group flyers or emails)
- Personal emails and phone calls (but not event reminders)
- Personal letters or notes (but not calls regarding attendance)

For each interaction meeting these criteria, program staff might provide the following information:

- Date of contact
- Name of child
- Family member contacted
- Staff member who contacted
- Type of contact
- Length of contact
- Reason of contact
- Nature of contact

Reasons for contact might include:

- Providing information about the child’s progress
- Asking for family’s opinion/feedback
- Discussing family strategies to support child’s learning/development at home
- Talking about child’s problems with behavior, academics, emotions, etc.
- Other reasons for communication not listed

The nature of contact might include what was shared or talked about during the contact, such as family issues at home or emotional problems that the child was experiencing. For confidentiality purposes, this information does not need to be very detailed in the log.*

*This sample communication log was adapted from the Engaging Families Initiative.

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Easy Things You Can Do to Communicate and Build Trusting Relationships

- Make a regular effort to share positive news with each parent about their child.
- Welcome parents. Greet them in the front of the room or building when they arrive. Always call parents by name and make a point of smiling.
- Offer informal social events or activities that are fun, such as craft nights, potluck dinners, and weekend trips to museums, theaters, and other cultural institutions.
- Conduct periodic family orientations to familiarize new families with the program. Ask current program family members to help you present the materials.

Be there for families.

Programs can be in a position to offer families' personal support and need not limit their communication with families to program matters or children's progress. At the Greenwood Shalom After School Program described in section III, parents talk about their personal concerns and life challenges, such as relationship problems, immigration troubles, and financial concerns, knowing that staff will listen, provide advice if appropriate, or direct them to the proper resources. Likewise, the Beacons community centers in New York City provide formal support groups and counseling for parents in addition to their programs for youth.³⁰

Camp Success is a multisite after school program in inner-city Huntsville, Alabama. The program partners with Second Mile, a family engagement organization, to support family events and activities. Camp Success offers a variety of classes, including a GED program and presentations on nutrition, drug awareness, and social services. In addition to their adult-education approach to family outreach, parents attend a Family Night Share

Talk at each site to share experiences and discuss topics such as first-time home purchasing. Later in the evening, children and parents eat dinner together and participate in a family activity.³¹

Provide leadership opportunities for parents in order to build community.

Parents are likely to feel more investment in and ownership of a program if given the chance to participate in decision making. Parent councils and governing boards can provide mechanisms for this kind of participation. However, not all programs feel ready to implement these kinds of partnerships with families, and several programs have yet to realize parent leadership goals. Many EFI program coordinators, for example, want to form parent councils but cite competing time demands as barriers to realizing this more advanced type of family engagement.

The Bob Lanier Center for Educational, Physical and Cultural Development has partnered with Poplar Academy in Buffalo to serve 200 students, predominantly African American, in an after school program. All parents must sign on to the program's board, and 10 parents are recruited to form the Core Members Committee. The core

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members serve as the liaison to the board and schedule monthly meetings to discuss important issues. Core members have several responsibilities, including finding parent volunteers and scheduling speakers. The inception of this after school board has spurred many other positive changes: The school itself has formed a parent–teacher organization, teachers report that a higher percentage of parents are attending parent–teacher conferences, and students’ behavioral problems have decreased.³²

Strategy 3: Hire and Develop a Family-Focused Staff

Staffing is a critical component of any program; without positive family–staff relationships, even the best-intentioned program will not succeed. Increased involvement, engagement, and leadership of families depends on the initiative and approach of staff. Welcoming families requires staff sensitivity toward families developed through staff’s prior experience or professional development and often someone who will make a deliberate effort to connect with families.³⁴

Designate a staff member who has, as part of his or her duties, responsibility for engaging families in the program.

A study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers found that programs with a designated family involvement staff member were more likely to encourage families’ support in students’ learning, offer services and classes to families, and have families contributing to program governance and leadership, compared to other programs.³⁵ However, Donna Walker James and Glenda Partee warn that a dedicated staff member should not serve as an excuse for other staff to not work with families.³⁶

Understanding that engaging families requires time and planning, EFI allocated funds for programs to have staff time dedicated to working with families. An Outreach Specialist line item was created midway in program budgets so that sites could compensate staff for conducting family outreach, assessing family needs, and planning for family social activities and learning opportunities. The goal of these concrete changes was to enable after school program staff to be more intentional in their work with families. Programs could either create a part-time position for a parent to reach out to families or increase hours for part-time staff members to do this work, which in turn helps reduce staff turnover.

Hire staff with family engagement experience.

When hiring staff, ask if they have experience working with families. At the Hyde Square Task Force After School Program, one tutor, who has extensive experience in family empowerment training, also serves as the parent liaison. She tutors children, but when staff need to discuss concerns with parents, she also offers her assistance.

How to Hire and Develop a Family-Focused Staff

- Designate a staff member with family engagement responsibility.
- Hire staff with family engagement experience.
- Hire staff who share parents’ experiences and backgrounds.
- Foster professional development.

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Easy Things You Can Do to Develop a Family-Focused Staff

- When interviewing potential staff, consider candidates' experiences working with families and ask them how after school programs can engage families.
- Invite a family engagement expert from a local K-12 school, university, family support agency, or guidance center to speak to staff.
- Offer programs, such as exercise classes, first aid courses, and art workshops, for both parents and staff.

Hire staff who share parents' perspectives and back-

grounds. Having one or more staff members who are parents themselves can bring a valuable perspective to family outreach and communication efforts. Recruiting parents as regular volunteers can send a similarly positive signal to other families. Consider one parent at the Greenwood Shalom After School Program who makes use of her accounting background to volunteer as the program bookkeeper. She describes the program as “a family” and plans to continue volunteering even after her son stops attending. Her lasting commitment to the program is obvious and appreciated by staff. Likewise, hiring staff who share families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can foster cultural congruence and remove language barriers.

The Somali Community Services of Seattle's Child Development Program is an after school and weekend tutoring and family support program specifically

targeting children and families from Somalia. Though recruiting teachers from the community is a challenge, Somali teachers are central to the program's strength. Parents feel that the Somali staff understand the challenges their children face in a new educational system. The teachers help parents overcome language barriers by linking families to schools. During Saturday education classes, parents learn how to use resources provided by schools, such as counselors and health care. The program also invites speakers to talk about immigration services and other relevant topics.³⁷

Foster professional development through a network of after school programs committed to

family engagement. After school programs can serve as a resource for one another as they foster family engagement in learning and development after school. Through regular meetings and conversations, programs can share success stories and offer suggestions for overcoming obstacles to family engagement.

The Parents and Communities for Kids (PACK) initiative of New Haven, Connecticut, has brought together community organizations to promote children's and families' learning at home and in the community. Participating organizations include museums, parks, libraries, and recreational centers. Key staff and volunteers, including parents, hold meetings every other month to discuss best practices and ways to improve learning programs.³⁸

Promising Practices to Engage Families

How to Link With Individuals and Organizations

- Collaborate with local organizations.
- Act as a liaison between families and schools.
- Help parents develop advocacy skills.

Strategy 4: Build Linkages Across Individuals and Organizations

As the complementary learning concept proposes, partnering with community organizations and working with schools benefits a program's relationships with families and fosters meaningful engagement. Program coordinators who meet with school administrators and teachers can better express school concerns and children's academic needs to parents. Program coordinators can also accompany families to school meetings, serving as advocates, mediators, or transla-

tors. Programs can connect with community organizations to build a strong network of community supports for children and families. Janyce A. Justice, former program director at the Twelfth Baptist Church After School Program, states that the program has been able "to expose our families to opportunities that they wouldn't necessarily participate in as a family" through linkages with the community.

Collaborate with local organizations to boost family engagement.

Programs can partner with local cultural institutions to plan family outings and field trips. Other community organizations can provide resources and ideas programs need to engage families. For programs that work with an ethnically diverse population, seeking information and advice from community organizations serving ethnic populations can help program staff connect with families.³⁹ Also, if a program does not have the capacity to sponsor family workshops, they can refer families to organizations that welcome community members to events. Many programs benefit from community partnerships to improve programming.⁴⁰

At Kimball Elementary School in Seattle, one parent initiated a relationship with Jack Straw Productions, an audio arts center. The school serves a bilingual population, and with the help of Jack Straw, families created an after school project integrating oral histories and technology. Students and their parents wrote family stories in English and Spanish and posted them on a website with audio accompaniment. The final product is a bright and celebratory collection of the children and their families' cultural backgrounds.⁴¹

Act as a liaison between families and schools.

After school program staff can accompany families to school meetings to strengthen the linkages between home, school, and program. At a Capital Kids program site, the director escorts children from their school classrooms to the community-based after school program a block away. She uses the opportunity to check in with classroom teachers about children's homework, school progress, and any specific concerns. This allows her to better articulate school and after school experiences to parents who are unable to go to the school due to their work schedules.⁴²

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The Transition to Success Pilot Project (TSPP) in Boston provided after school programming for elementary and middle school students who did not perform well on standardized tests, and emphasized family involvement in education. The TSPP Program Coordinator facilitated communication among each child's teachers, parents, and after school staff. A large majority of the parents felt that the program improved their child's schoolwork and understanding of basic skills. Parents reported greater involvement in their child's school, increased communication with teachers, and better understanding of their child's schoolwork due to the program.⁴³

Help parents develop skills to advocate for themselves and their children at school.

After school programs are in a unique position to help families navigate schools and develop parents' self-advocacy skills. First, program staff may see parents more often than classroom teachers do and, as a result, develop close relationships with parents. Second, after school programs can serve as a neutral ground where families learn how to deal with the troubles they encounter in school systems.

Easy Things You Can Do to Link With Individuals and Organizations

- Encourage parent leadership by inviting parents to help you locate resources in the community to support program activities, whether they be field trip sites, philanthropic organizations, or support services for families.
- Ask a classroom teacher to talk to parents about grade-level expectations and developmentally appropriate activities for children in different subject areas.
- Invite a family advocate to offer workshops on how parents can obtain the services their children need and how they can develop relationships with schools.
- Offer to attend parent-teacher conferences with families who feel that they need support in discussing their concerns and asking teachers questions.

The Children's Aid Society's After School Program at Public School 5 in New York City has made great efforts to reach out to families, most of whom are Spanish-speaking. Many of the parents have great respect for education but often felt unwelcome by the school. The program has implemented initiatives to help after school parents become advocates for their children's education, including Parent Day visits to the program and regular school-day classrooms. The program has also hosted an Expo Night—a biannual exhibition of students' art and enrichment work. Also, parent leadership workshops led by the program have taught parents about the school system, academic standards, and how to become involved in school leadership. Parents have told staff members that they now feel more empowered to advocate for their children.⁴⁴



Using Evaluation to Improve Family Engagement Efforts

Evaluation is an essential process for any program that would like to improve or assess its program strategies. Evaluation provides a systematic self-assessment of family engagement practices that can serve to strengthen and improve the program's connection with families. However, like most other program aspects, there is no one best way to evaluate family engagement. After school programs should select an evaluation approach that helps them to answer their most pressing questions, based on the information needed to make program improvements and meet funders' requirements. For example, an after school program whose mission includes a goal to build support and promote communication with families might document the frequency and type of communication its staff has with family members, as well as the opportunities the program provides for informal dialogue with family members (see sample communication log on page 21). Similarly, a program aiming to strengthen family-school-youth relationships might interview school staff, families, and youth to determine the degree of continuity these stakeholders perceive among the home, school, and after school programs.

Despite the variation in how after school programs are evaluating family involvement practices, there are some basic evaluation approaches that can help programs collect information to better understand how to serve and engage the families of the youth that participate in their programs. While a program's information needs will determine the evaluation approach it chooses, thinking carefully about each of the four strategies for family engagement laid out in this guide allows the program to broaden its scope of inquiry and study those aspects of family involvement that are most relevant to its programming.

Drawing on HFRP's previous work in after school program evaluation, this section of the guide offers some basic evaluation advice for programs interested in better understanding their families' engagement levels and interests and in reflecting on their current family engagement practices.⁴⁵ First, information on conducting a needs assessment is provided. Next, the guide describes how to document program services in each of the four key family engagement strategies. This section ends with an evaluation tool that can be adapted to individual program needs.

Needs Assessment

In the context of a needs assessment, *need* is defined as "the gap between the problem and the existing efforts, resources, and programs to deal with the need."⁴⁶ When assessing needs, a program must acknowledge the services already available and identify those that could potentially be of help if provided to the youth and families

Using Evaluation to Improve Family Engagement Efforts

participating in the after school program. It is equally important to identify the strengths of the families and communities the program serves and assess the ways in which these strengths can be capitalized on for maximum benefit to program participants. A needs assessment to better understand the needs of families could inform four areas:

1. How are families already engaged in their children's after school program?
2. How are families' needs being met through the after school program?
3. How could families' and youth's needs be addressed by engaging families in after school programs or, more broadly, in children's out-of-school time?
4. What are the strengths of families and the community and how can these strengths be harnessed?

After school programs can use several methods to carry out a needs assessment, including interviewing and surveying families about how they want to be engaged in their children's time outside of school. Programs can also interview and survey other community members, businesses, cultural organizations, and religious associations. Furthermore, other youth-serving organizations may provide valuable information about how they engage families and what they perceive the community needs. Although needs assessments are commonly associated with programs just starting to serve youth and their families, they can be conducted at any time in a program's development when staff members want to step back and assess the evolving needs and capabilities of participants and their families. Families can also be involved in continuous assessment and improvement of program offerings.

Service Documentation

After school programs may document their services to gather valuable information about the frequency, content, and quality of program activities offered in each of the four dimensions of family engagement. Programs can then report these data to multiple stakeholders, such as program staff, funders, parents, and community members. Many funders, including the U.S. Department of Education through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, require that after school programs provide documentation of services. However, even programs whose funders have no such requirement can benefit from systematically assessing and describing the services they offer. Family involvement services and activities may be documented and measured as part of a larger effort to document all after school services.

The questions that after school programs can use to guide the documentation of their family engagement services relate to the kind of family involvement that the program practices. On the following pages are some service documentation questions to guide after school programs in documenting their family engagement services in each of the four areas outlined in section II. Note that the items preceded by an arrow indicate examples of the types of responses.

Using Evaluation to Improve Family Engagement Efforts

1. Support Families

a. Support Services

- What types of services do you offer to support families?
 - Assistance with parenting
 - GED classes
 - Counseling services
 - Food sent home with children
- What are the attendance rates for these supports, and do they vary by activity?

b. Program/Staff Accessibility to Parents

- What opportunities are provided to families to give program feedback?
 - Parent satisfaction surveys
- Are parents provided opportunities for leadership/decision-making roles?
 - Parent advisory boards
- How do program staff make themselves available/accessible so that families feel comfortable approaching them with questions/concerns?
 - For programs serving non-English speakers, efforts made to provide program communication in families' native language

2. Communicate and Build Trusting Relationships With Families

a. Events/Activities to Engage Families

- What type of family events/activities do you host to engage parents with the program?
 - Family dinners
 - Youth presentations of their work/accomplishments
 - Program orientation
 - Meetings
 - Open houses
 - Family math or science nights
- How many of these events/activities do you host each year?
- What are the attendance rates at these events/activities on average?

b. Program Communication With Parents

- How often do program staff communicate with parents about:
 - Their child's needs, interests, or progress?
 - Parents' own needs or interests?
 - Program mission, goals, and strategies?
 - Program activities and updates?

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- How do staff communicate with parents?
 - Phone calls to parents
 - Face-to-face contact when parents pick up children
 - Flyers, newsletters, and bulletins sent home with children
 - Email

3. Hire and Train a Family-Focused Staff

a. Hiring Practices

- Is experience with family engagement taken into consideration in staff selection?
- Does the program make an effort to hire staff of the same cultural and linguistic background as the families served?
- Do parents work as program staff or volunteers?

b. Job Functions/Responsibilities

- Do staff job descriptions include family engagement as one of their responsibilities?
- Does the program employ a staff member whose main duty is to engage families?
 - Parent liaison

c. Professional Development

- Are staff provided with training/professional development on how to better engage families?

4. Building Linkages Across Individuals and Organizations

a. Partnerships

- How is your organization partnering with schools and/or other organizations to boost family engagement?
 - Accompany parents to school meetings
 - Meet with school staff to represent school concerns/academic needs to parents
 - Work with community organizations to plan family activities

b. Parent Advocacy

- How are you working with parents to help them develop skills to advocate for themselves and their children?
 - Provide parent leadership workshops

Based on the questions in the section above, the worksheet on page 40 is designed to help after school programs assess the ways in which they engage families in after school time hours and to develop new ideas and strategies for strengthening this component of your work.

Using Evaluation to Improve Family Engagement Efforts

Improving Family Engagement After School: A Tool for Self-Reflection and Learning

Strategy 1. Support Families	What are you doing now?	In what ways can you be more effective?
a. Support Services		
b. Program/Staff Accessibility to Parents		
Other:		
Strategy 2. Communicate and Build Trusting Relationships With Families	What are you doing now?	In what ways can you be more effective?
a. Events/Activities to Engage Families		
b. Program Communication With Parents		
Other:		
Strategy 3. Hire and Train a Family-Focused Staff	What are you doing now?	In what ways can you be more effective?
a. Hiring Practices		
b. Job Functions/ Responsibilities		
c. Professional Development		
Other:		
Strategy 4. Building Linkages Across Individuals and Organizations	What are you doing now?	In what ways can you be more effective?
a. Partnerships		
b. Parent Advocacy		
Other:		
Other Strategies:	What are you doing now?	In what ways can you be more effective?