



Ideal Learning: Elevating Family Voices

A Workbook



Guiding community participation in the implementation of Ideal Learning.¹

In seeking to develop early learning goals aligned with the Principles of Ideal Learning, it is critical to include family engagement. Input is especially important from those most impacted by systemic inequities resulting from race and ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and ability.²

This workbook is intended to support meaningful community participation in planning for ideal learning environments for young children. It should prompt self-reflection, ensure effective conversations with families, and identify existing inequities in access to high-quality early learning environments.

Who should use this workbook?

Local leaders (e.g., superintendents, early childhood council members, program administrators) who are working to support and/or implement ideal learning approaches in early childhood education.

How should this workbook be used?

Use the questions and prompts below to deliberately plan for community engagement. Revisit this workbook periodically during planning and implementation efforts. If possible, include community members in the use of this workbook itself. Inclusive community partnerships and input should be an ongoing process so that children and families served continue to be involved in decision-making. You may find that some sections are more useful to you than others — pick and choose to suit your needs and goals.

Note: The workbook is built to work for short-term, targeted engagement (e.g., input over one summer to plan a new playground) or sustained engagement (e.g., developing a monthly parent-focused engagement event).

¹ This tool was adapted from the State of Colorado's Community Partnership Checklist and informed by community partnership principles and best practices described in the state's [Community Partnership Principles Guide](#), a guide developed by the Community Engagement Subcommittee of the Colorado Equity Alliance.

² Inequities may also result from other factors (e.g., immigration status). Consider the scope of family perspectives and experiences in your community.

Who is currently involved in the design and implementation of our early learning goals and programs? Who else needs to be involved?

Name of early learning provider(s) (i.e., school district, child care center, other publicly-funded entity).

Name(s) of parents, family members, or guardians currently engaged with design and implementation.

Names of local councils or organizations currently engaged with design and implementation.

Name of family liaison to coordinate engagement.

Who else should be involved in discussions about creating ideal learning environments? (Consider other community organizations, providers, local officials, etc.)

Who are the families that are currently served?

DEMOGRAPHICS DATA OF FAMILIES & STUDENTS				
RACES	ETHNICITIES	LANGUAGES	DISABILITIES	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Share a short qualitative introduction of the families in our community that goes beyond demographic data. What makes our community unique?



What desired outcomes and decisions are guiding our community engagement processes? What barriers can we anticipate?

What are our goals and desired outcomes for this engagement effort?

What decisions need to be made before implementing the Principles of Ideal Learning?
Who will lead those decisions?

What barriers will we face in engaging community members, and how will we navigate them?



How will we engage families in our community?

What is our existing relationship with families, particularly those from historically marginalized or harder-to-reach populations?

How will we engage families (e.g., coffee hours after school, surveys, one-on-ones)?

What is our timeline for engagement?

How will we communicate engagement goals to participating families and ensure that they find this process valuable?

Do families have decision-making roles in this timeline, and if so, when and how?

What information do we need from families, and what information should we provide to them?

What kinds of information are we requesting from families?

How will we help families understand more about the Principles of Ideal Learning and our interest in implementing them (i.e., what is happening at the classroom level, why changes are happening, how these practices might extend to the home environment)?

How will we communicate and execute engagement opportunities for families who speak languages other than English, based on our community's unique language needs?

How will we record and store information for families to access/reference, including for families who speak diverse languages?

How will the implementation team promote equity and engagement with historically marginalized families?

Based on our community demographics, what topics should we consider in advance related to institutional and/or systemic racism (i.e., disciplinary practices, organizational structures, etc.) that could improve family engagement?

How will we facilitate equity and inclusion in information sharing, discussions, and decisions? Who will be responsible for this, and do we need external support?



What resources are needed to engage families?

What resources and accommodations do we need to engage families effectively and equitably, including financial resources (e.g., accessibility, child care, times/dates, space, technology, language translation and interpretation, etc.)?

What are our personnel needs (facilitators, staff, etc.) for conducting effective and equitable engagement? Do we need additional resources to compensate personnel?

What are the existing skills and cultural knowledge of the facilitator(s) who can be leveraged in the family engagement process? If there is a need to further develop these skills, how will we strengthen our capacity and knowledge?

How will we evaluate the success of the engagement process?

What measures will we use to evaluate whether we are meeting the goals of our engagement process?

Sample measures for evaluating the effectiveness of engagement processes:

- Number of project staff hours spent on community engagement planning, implementation, and evaluation
- Percent of community members who agree or strongly agree on having a clearly defined role (self-report Likert scale from families and other community participants)
- Number of times the project staff share the evaluation results of community engagement efforts with families and community partners
- Percent of project staff who indicate that it is a routine practice to inform families, community leaders, and/or community-based organizations about changes or decisions made as a result of their input
- Percent of project staff who agree that the school or other entity has clear expectations for how to work with families and the community
- Reading level of information and number of languages in which information is provided
- Balance quantitative data with qualitative data to measure the perspective and experience of community members