



Family Engagement Month

# Parents' Pages

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## It's Family Engagement Month!

Family Engagement Month is a time to celebrate the vital role parents and families play in their child's education. Active family engagement is an important part of a child's education. Family participation helps build strong relationships, open communication and a vital bond between families and their child's educational teams. When families engage in their child's education, students thrive academically and socially.

### What is Family Engagement?

Families are engaged when they partner with early learning programs to promote their child's development, learning and wellness. Positive relationships between families and staff in early learning programs are the foundation for family engagement.

Here are a few ways to actively participate with your child's school and support your child's learning and development:

- During enrollment, discuss your child's likes and dislikes with the early learning teacher and provider.
- Ask your early learning provider how you can get involved at your child's school and then get involved as much as you can. For example, try to spend at least one hour volunteering every month in your child's classroom. You could be a guest reader and read a story to your child's class.
- Share pictures of yourself actively supporting your child's early learning program. Share them using #Empowerfamilies on your favorite social media platform.
- Inquire about workshops or family nights to attend.
- Schedule a parent-teacher conference to discuss child development skills and goals to continue learning at home.
- For older children in your family, check the school's website for more information on how you can get involved, and consider joining the parent-teacher association.

## Enroll in a Workshop and Learn that

### IT'S OKAY TO PLAY IN VPK!

Did you know that the Division of Early Learning (DEL) has trained educators across the state ready to help families learn the importance of play, especially in a child's earliest years? **It's Okay to Play in VPK! for Families** workshop trainers share vital information on the importance of play at home as well as in preschool programs.

Children learn best when happily interacting with other children in an age-appropriate setting where skills such as sharing, communicating and getting along with others are developed. DEL's workshop trainers provide interactive presentations, videos and hands-on activities on how developmentally appropriate learning opportunities in a fun and playful setting expand a child's ability to learn.

The message of **It's Okay to Play in VPK!** is true for all ages and these workshops are a great way for families to learn how to support their children at home in a fun and loving way.

Contact your local [early learning coalition](#) for more information about the **It's Okay to Play in VPK! for Families** workshops.

## Get a Head Start on Effective Communication with Infants and Toddlers

Babies are born ready to learn. Parents and caregivers can connect with their children in meaningful ways from birth. Engaging with your child has long-term beneficial impacts on their readiness for school and academic success. Early Head Start programs support the development of infants and toddlers and empower parents to be their child's best first teacher. One powerful way to connect and engage with your infant or toddler is communication.

A great way to show your infant or toddler you are engaged with them is through verbal and non-verbal communication. You can communicate with your infant or toddler non-verbally by making eye contact or smiling and verbally by laughing, talking or singing. Infants and toddlers communicate through their behaviors such as crying or having a tantrum. When we hold them and comfort them, we are communicating a sense of safety and trust, which are the building blocks of all relationships.

Some tangible ways to effectively communicate with infants and toddlers are:

1. Read daily, pointing to pictures and saying the words.
2. Visit the library often to check out some favorite books to read.
3. Practice serve and return, which is back and forth communication between parent and child. Your baby laughs and you laugh. This continues as your child learns that communication is two-way.
4. Expand your child's language. If your toddler says "cat," expand on it by saying, "That is a furry, brown cat."
5. Sing songs and read books that rhyme often. Infants and toddlers remember these familiar songs and they can teach numbers, colors, letters and more.

Enjoy this window of time with your child. Know that your presence is priceless and that you are the most important person in their world.

Florida  
VPK



## Importance of Talking and Reading to Babies

As early as the beginning stages of pregnancy, talking and reading to babies in the womb helps them learn to recognize their parents' voices while starting to build a foundation for early literacy. Consistently talking and reading to infants and toddlers enhances their early literacy and vocabulary development. Infants and toddlers whose parents talk and read to them often know more words by age two than children whose parents do not. Reading about numbers and shapes lays the foundation for math and geometry.

Asking babies questions while you read a story provides opportunities for them to use their imagination and expressive language to answer. Posing simple challenges and helping babies find ways around them helps develop their problem-solving skills. In conversation, use expressive tones and use metaphors such as "you are a busy bee" or idioms like "sleeping like a baby" then pause for reactions. It is also beneficial to sit at the eye level of an infant or toddler when interacting and speaking with them.

These types of exercises expand their vocabulary and allow them to explore new words. Babies' vocabularies build slowly, and nouns are used first, such as "kitty," "puppy" and "cracker." Gradually, they add verbs and adjectives, forming partial sentences like "want big book."

It is fascinating how much infants and toddlers learn in the first few years of their lives! From the very beginning, simple conversations and reading to children lay the foundation for language development. By the time they reach third grade, children should be able to fluently read words and comprehend what they are reading, which is a milestone in their literacy journey.

Early childhood education is the foundation of child development and a very important time in children's lives.



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## Family Fun Activities

Stack blocks and count how many blocks are in each tower.

Sort by size, color and shape.

Count and chart how many of each there are.

Make a pattern. Start with simple patterns and then challenge them to make new ones.

Write a simple math problem and model it with the blocks.



**Manny Diaz, Jr.**  
Commissioner of Education



**Cari Miller**  
Chancellor of Early Learning



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