Family Engagement

Workshop Resources

Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten
Social and Emotional Learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning
Family Engagement

This booklet is a resource for Part One of the two-part SEL/APL Family Engagement workshop for family engagement professionals.

The SEL/APL Professional Development Project is a collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Collaborative for Educational Services. Professional Development opportunities and materials based on the *Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning* created through this project are intended to familiarize early educators from public schools and the mixed delivery system with the SEL/APL Standards and to assist educators to integrate them into their practice.

For more information about Professional Development opportunities provided by the Collaborative for Educational Services Early Childhood Department:

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### The Impact of Cultural Differences on SEL and APL

#### Cultural Understanding Works Wonders

Each person is a unique blend of cultural influences and will differ from others from the same cultural background. We need to be "cultural detectives" with each child and family to understand their unique culture.

Here is one example of a common difference between two cultural values and some ways this difference might affect SEL and APL. Remember, neither culture is superior or inferior. They are just different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualism is highly valued</th>
<th>Collectivism is highly valued</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prioritizes self-awareness and self-management</td>
<td>1. Prioritizes social awareness, relationship skills, empathy, and cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Encourages emotional expression</td>
<td>2. Discourages emotional expression (might disturb others)</td>
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<td>3. Eye contact a sign of self-confidence</td>
<td>3. Eye contact may be considered rude</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Encourages independence (e.g. initiative, self-direction) and equality</td>
<td>4. Encourages respect and obedience to authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Happiness comes from self-confidence and personal achievement</td>
<td>5. Happiness comes from a sense of belonging and others' happiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Motivated to pursue individual success</td>
<td>6. Motivated to avoid shame, especially for the family</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Belief that the individual has control over personal outcomes</td>
<td>7. Belief in destiny and/or family as responsible for personal outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Respect is communicated directly</td>
<td>8. Respect is communicated indirectly; may involve face-saving strategies for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Children learn to work well independently</td>
<td>10. Children learn to work well in groups</td>
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*Source: Adapted from Hecht, Michael L. and Shin, YoungJu, Culture and Social and Emotional Competencies, in Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning, 2015 pp.52 -61*

**Individualistic messages:** “Stand up for yourself” “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.”

**Collectivistic messages:** “Don’t hurt her feelings.” “Put the needs of others before your own.”
Selina is a 3.6 year old girl. She was adopted from Ethiopia by her two fathers at 9 months. She also has an older brother who was adopted in the US. Selina has just recently entered a family childcare and previously was cared for by one of her fathers. She has some difficulty separating from her parents at drop off, but usually recovers within 10 minutes. Her parents are very interested in how she is doing in the class and frequently talk to the teacher about this. Their older son has had a lot of behavioral difficulties and often tries to control Selina in the home. The parents want to minimize the impact of his behavior on Selina. They have asked the teachers to keep a log of any concerns and send home a daily communication log about how her day went.

Overall, Selina has been doing well with classroom routines and likes to be the early educator’s helper. When the group is getting ready for outside play, Selina helps the other children find jackets and hats. She also really enjoys dramatic play, which provides opportunities for her creativity to shine. Playing group games can be a challenge for Selina, however. She avoids working on projects with other students unless they will accept her help. She seems to have difficulty understanding that everyone does not need her help all of the time. When she is rebuffed by other children, she shuts down. When an early educator attempts to help her, she reacts angrily and resists comfort or help.
Christian is a 3.8 year old boy who lives with his mother, father and four older siblings. The family recently moved from Puerto Rico. The father is a businessman and the mother is a pediatrician. Christian was born 10 weeks early and was in and out of the hospital for his first year. The parents seem very anxious about Christian’s health and clearly were apprehensive about placing him in an early education program. In Puerto Rico, Christian stayed with his grandmother and aunt during the day.

When Christian entered the program, he seemed to be adjusting well. He quickly began using some English words and making relationships with other children. He is able to share and cooperate with other children and generally seems relaxed and easy going. He is curious about the wide variety of activities in the education setting, particularly the manipulatives and blocks. Within a few weeks however, the early educators noted that when Christian was unable to solve a problem on his own, his frustration interfered with his ability to continue. His frustration often escalated and he would need to spend up to 20 minutes in the ‘quiet’ area of the room before being able to rejoin the group. This was becoming more frequent, happening 3-4 times a day.

After a few weeks, the mother arrived in the classroom in the afternoon to talk about Christian’s progress. During her visit, the early educator and mother heard Christian become agitated because he could not get the puzzle pieces into the puzzle. He rushed over to his mother and started repeating “na-na” very insistently, then climbed onto her lap and put his hand down her blouse. She offered him a pacifier, which seemed to help him calm down.
Akio is a 5.9 year old boy who lives with his mother and father and older sister. At home the family speaks only Japanese, although they are all fluent in English. His mother owns a restaurant and his father is a nurse at a pediatrician’s office. Previous to coming to Kindergarten, he spent his time with his grandparents. He is new to a school setting this year.

Akio is happy to be at school. He has some difficulty transitioning from his mother in the mornings, but with a little distraction by the teachers he quickly engages in his day. Typically, he relies on teacher guidance to choose activities. The activities that he prefers tend to be solution focused, such as puzzles and matching games. He follows the routine of the day well and is able to transition from one activity to the next easily. He eats snacks and lunch with no difficulty. When his mother or father picks him up, he talks to them in Japanese. They report that he is very happy at school.

The teacher has noted that Akio has developed a close relationship with Tiana, a 5.1 year old girl in the classroom. He always chooses her as a partner and can become upset when they are not paired together. He needs to be encouraged to play with other children because he has a strong preference for Tiana. The only other person that Akio seems particularly interested in is the student teacher, Becca. He sits with her and often wants to hold her hand. When they sit as a group, he will try to sit in her lap. When the class does an activity during which the children need to make independent choices, Akio will often become easily frustrated and will ask Becca for help with choices and solutions. He will often hold his project out to Becca and say, “you do, you do.”
Mariah is a 5.4 year old little girl who started Kindergarten in the fall. She has been in early education and care settings since she was 6 weeks old. She and her mother lived with her maternal grandmother for the first two years of her life, until her grandmother passed away. Her mother has mental health issues and had child welfare (DCF) involvement for most of Mariah’s life. After Mariah’s grandmother passed away and they lost their home, Mariah and her mother moved in with her father. She was exposed to severe domestic violence between her parents, with her mother being the primary aggressor. She was removed from her parents’ care and placed in 4 foster homes over the course of 2 years. Mariah was recently returned to her mother’s care after her mother’s successful treatment for domestic violence, and the stabilization of her mental health.

In the classroom, Mariah is very attentive to every direction her teacher gives. She is able to remember multiple-step directions and will advise other children about the steps and what they should be doing. She completes assignments quickly and will try different ways to solve a problem. Mariah loves to draw and write stories. She will sit for 10-15 minutes drawing and writing. She can write her name and all the letters in the alphabet.

Because she is so attentive to her teacher, she becomes easily frustrated when other children are not listening or following directions. She has frequent conflicts with other students and is rarely able to resolve the situation without becoming physical or yelling. Her peer relations are strained and the teacher has had difficulty finding students to pair with her for projects. When the teacher speaks with her, she often blames the other student but then will say, “I don’t have friends.” Despite being such a diligent student, Mariah has a very limited emotional vocabulary.
Five Family Engagement Tips

1. Start where the family is and work at the family’s pace.

2. Identify and build on the family’s strengths and resources.

3. Seek out family members’ ideas and concerns and listen. Empower parents to set the goals for your work together.

4. Tailor your communication to fit the family’s language, culture, abilities and preferences. Do not expect the family to adopt your values or communication style.

5. Using skills and strategies with family members that are similar to those you use to build social-emotional and approaches to play and learning skills with children will lead to successful partnerships.
Successful Community Referrals

A successful community referral is one that is made to the right service at the right time and includes the support the family needs to overcome emotional and logistical barriers like distrust, transportation and scheduling challenges, etc. The family is gently encouraged to try out a new service, then actively chooses to continue with the service because their needs are being met and services are strengths-based and helpful.

Characteristics

**Timing:** Referral is made when the family is ready. Not a "yes or no" proposition, but a process of gradually building readiness over time by exploring and addressing the family’s concerns and reservations as they arise. Can be a lengthy process.

**Information:** Early educator describes the service in detail and offers written materials, if available at an appropriate literacy level. Encourages family members to share their reactions and concerns and provides linkages for the family to get their questions answered.

**Built on relationships:** A “warm handoff” is used; early educator becomes a bridge between the family and the new provider by introducing a carefully chosen person to the family who can discuss logistics, answer questions and address concerns.

**Barriers anticipated/addressed:** Are they emotional, relational, logistical? E.g. transportation/babysitting challenges, poor fit, fear of strangers, discomfort with new people coming to the home etc. Make back-up plans whenever possible.

**Trouble-shooting:** Initially, have frequent contact with the family and provider to understand and address difficulties and offer help with logistics, misunderstandings etc.

What to do?

Gather detailed information about the array of services available from colleagues, other families, resource guides and collaboration meetings. Collect brochures. Make a relationship with someone at each agency who seems helpful and non-judgmental and able to engage with reluctant families. Introduce them to the family in person whenever possible. Stay in frequent touch until the family has engaged.

Tips for success:

- When the family seems interested but is unsure, encourage them to have one exploratory meeting with the provider, and decide afterwards about enrollment.
- When referring to voluntary services, stress to the family that services are voluntary and that they can change their minds if they’re not satisfied after giving it a try.
- Normalize whenever possible, explaining the ways in which people you’ve known have found the service helpful.
- Offer solutions to potential barriers during early discussions about the referral, e.g. “I know transportation can be a challenge for you; this service will come to your home.”
- Prepare the service provider for the “warm handoff” by sharing insights into family dynamics and brainstorming ways to overcome potential barriers to engaging with the service.
- Hold the “warm handoff” meeting at the place most comfortable for the family and plan to stay for all or part of the intake if the family needs continued support and reassurance to engage.
Resources and References

Classroom Practices and Approaches that Support SEL/APL

**CASEL Guide**
www.casel.org/guide

**Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning**
csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html
csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/booklist.pdf

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**
www.naeyc.org/blogs/social-skills-are-news-how-support-them-dap
www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap

**Boston Public Schools, Focus on K2**
bpsearlychildhood.weebly.com/materials-and-resources.html

**Reggio-Emilia Approach**
reggioalliance.org/resources
www.reggiochildren.it/identita/reggio-emilia-approach/?lang=en

**The Project Approach**
projectapproach.org/about/project-approach

**SCSC Child Welfare Toolkit for Early Educators**
collaborative.org/sites/default/files/SCSC-Toolkit_EC-Statewide.pdf
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