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Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings in North Dakota: An Infographic Exploration

In 2024, North Dakota gathered feedback and reviewed opportunities, challenges and preferences related to family engagement for families with children ages birth to 5 years old. This brief report shares highlights and key findings from this investigation of family engagement.

Definition

“Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer.

Family engagement means doing with – not doing to or for – families.”¹



Family Engagement Matters!

For children ages birth to 5, the best development occurs as families and early childhood professionals share understanding about best practices in nurturing young children. Family engagement matters! Shared activities improve mutual understanding and promote children’s healthy development.



Fun Facts on Family Engagement

- The most accurate predictor of student achievement in school is **family involvement**, not income or social status!²
- **Shared goals** for a child = **easier transitions** to child care, school or other settings.
- Engagement by family members increases child enthusiasm and positive outcomes.

North Dakota Family Engagement Review

337

parents completed family engagement survey

7

focus groups with parents and early childhood professionals

1

review of family engagement resources

¹Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, 2011.
²Glenn W. Olsen and Mary Lou Fuller. (2011). *Home and School Relations: Teachers and Parents Working Together* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Higher Education.

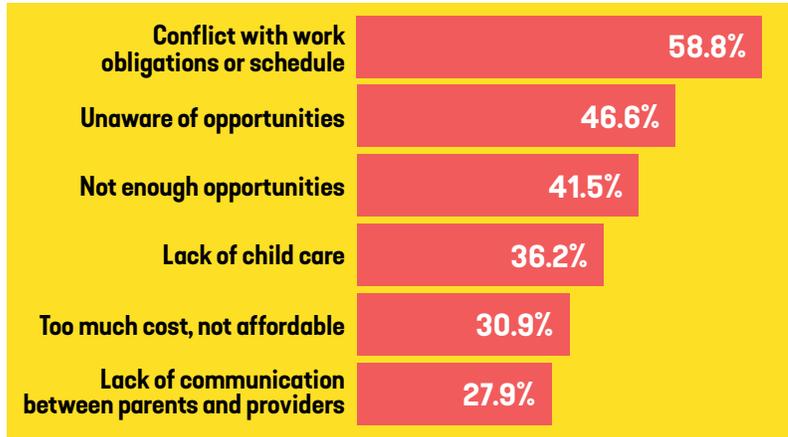
Parents Are Not Alone!

Barriers and Opportunities in Family Engagement

Some families may experience obstacles to their family engagement due to a variety of issues. However, North Dakota parents and professionals also shared a range of meaningful opportunities for families with children ages birth to 5.

Identifying Challenges to Family Engagement

Parents and early childhood professionals provided survey feedback on challenges that may limit family engagement in a child's early years. The top six challenges noted were the following:



"I think time is a major factor for everybody. ... I think there's different opportunities that do get presented to engage, but whether you have the time to do them or the ability to make the time can be so hard."
(participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

Focus group participants also identified other consistent challenges to family engagement, including the following:

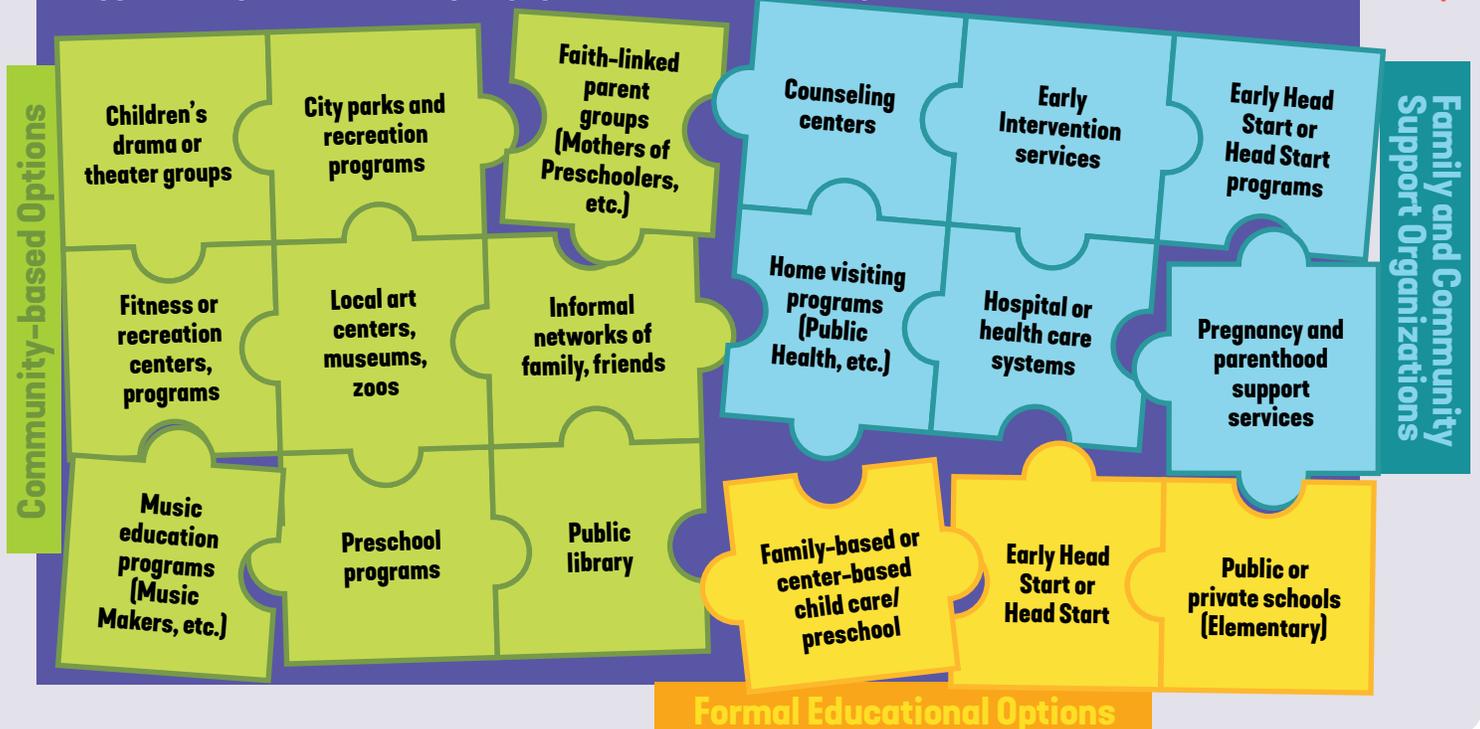
- **Attitude** – uncertainty, fear or stigma
- **Awareness** – limited knowledge of options
- **Availability** – few community options
- **Access** – difficult policies or systems
- **Family challenges** – health, work schedules, time, cost
- **Community challenges** – shortage of staff, time and distance

"I think families view engagement as important. ... We all want to be the best parents we can possibly be; everybody wants that same goal. I think that being respectful of our time, with being working parents or stay-at-home parents or whatever it is, people are busy, but they want to find opportunities to be with their kids and to do family-oriented things."
(participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

Opportunities for Supporting Family Engagement

Supportive settings for family engagement include community-based options, family and community support organizations, and formal educational options. Find the piece of the puzzle that fits your needs.

Supportive Options for Family Engagement With Children Ages 0-5.



Supporting Children and Families

Preferences for Family Engagement

While many family engagement options are available, parents and early childhood professionals shared their preferences for family engagement. Preferred family engagement options based on the survey and related examples are shared here.

Preferred Family Engagement Options for Parents of Children Ages Birth to 5



82% - FAMILY EVENTS

Play groups; program family nights (meal and games); monthly parent meeting



65.6% - TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS

Texting; email; online social media groups; apps (SeeSaw, etc.)



54.3% - PERSONAL CONTACT

Home visit; parent-teacher conference; personal connections; phone call



44% - PARENT EDUCATION CLASSES

Parent support group; parent workshop; etc.



36% - PRINTED INFORMATION

Family engagement calendar; parent newsletter; flyers

"I love West Dakota Parent and Family Resource Center. I went to the director with my child and said, 'We need a parent support group. We need to just get together, meaning parents who have hyperactive kids, we need to get together and talk and learn.' A lot of parents, when you have a child like that, you wonder what to do and how to handle situations. After visiting with the Parent Resource Center, we decided to start these 'lunch and learn' sessions and it was awesome. I love this place because even if they don't have it, if you come as a parent to them with an issue, they will figure out how to help." (participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

"When my oldest was younger, we were enrolled in Right Track, so that was one thing as first-time parents we found helpful, having somebody assure us that things were right or when things were different and some ways to help with that ... It's great to have people who have seen so many different kids and many different ways that kids develop, and be able to give you some of that advice." (participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

Pathways to Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings

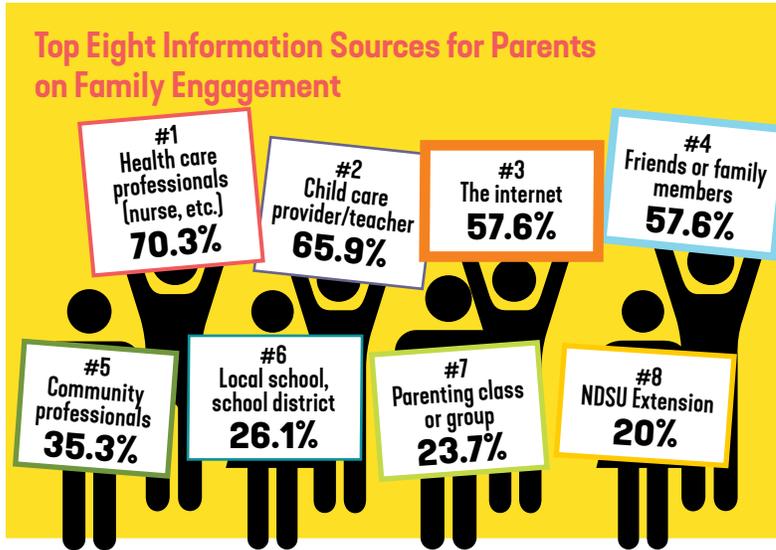
Families with young children and early childhood professionals described some key strategies for facilitating engagement in early childhood settings.



School and Community Supports for Family Engagement

Information Sources on Family Engagement

To get information on family engagement options, parents and caregivers use a variety of preferred sources. Based on our survey, the top eight options identified in North Dakota are shared below.



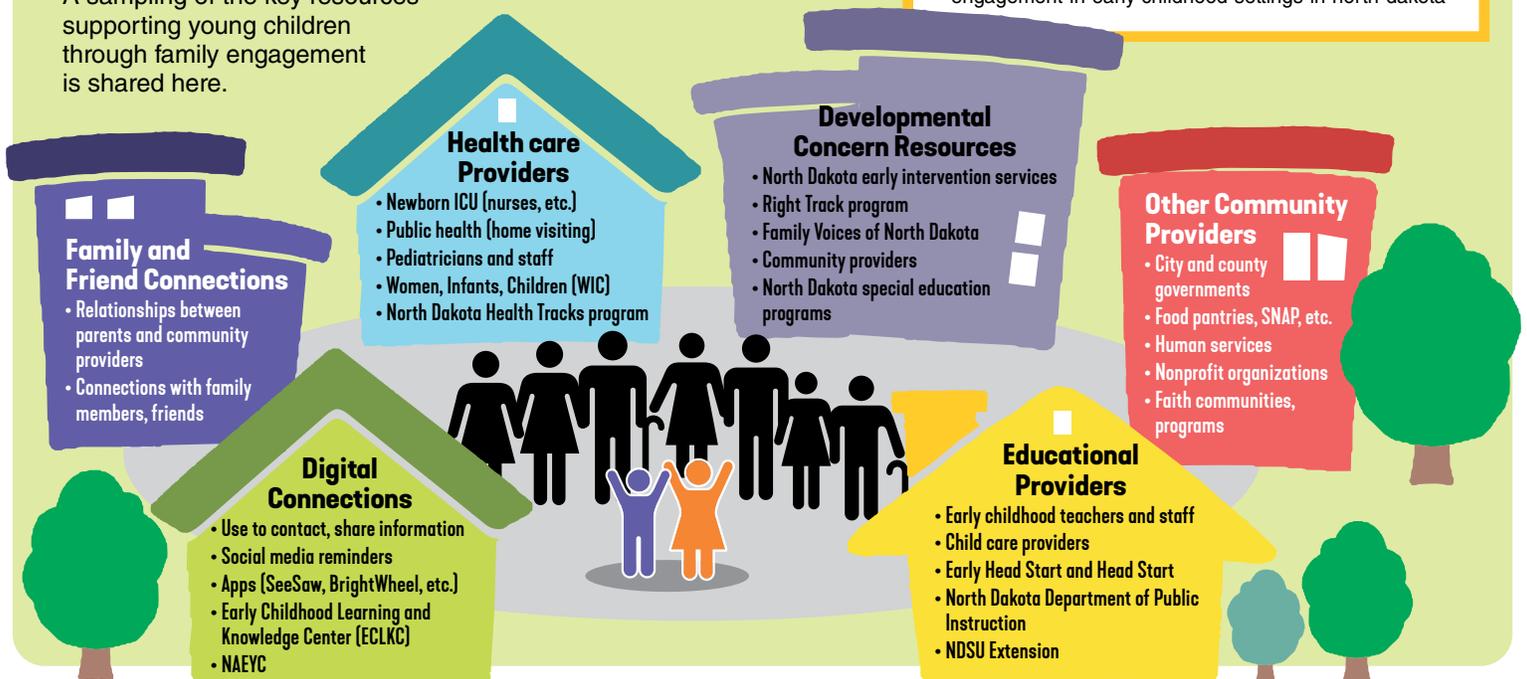
"In Head Start, we're always trying to involve the parents to come into the classroom. ... We try and get them to come in and visit, spend time with their children. For some of our parents, school readiness comes naturally and they have no problems understanding those concepts, but for some of our parents, all of that is kind of new and they don't quite know all those pieces. So we find it helpful to bring them into the classroom so they can see the teachers interacting with the kids age-appropriately and doing activities that hopefully they could do at home as well." (participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

"For us with the [public] schools, family engagement is something that we are looking at more closely and what is the growth opportunity for us, but we are wondering what it should look like for educators in the school setting. We've talked about the challenge of getting families in. ... So I think family engagement is on our mind and something that we are looking for a role in, but we don't have all the answers for what we want that to look like."

(participant, North Dakota focus group on family engagement)

Community Resources and Family Engagement

It has been said, "It takes a village to raise a child." The community "village" includes a child's family, friends, teachers, health care providers and other community supports. This village forms a network of support and connection focused on furthering a child's optimal development. A sampling of the key resources supporting young children through family engagement is shared here.



For Further Information

Find opportunities in North Dakota near you!

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction:
www.nd.gov/dpi/parentscommunity/parents/family-engagement

Link for further information:

www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/family-engagement-in-early-childhood-settings-in-north-dakota

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