

PRIORITY 4: FAMILIES ARE ENGAGED

Early childhood wellness begins at home. Young children learn how to take care of themselves by watching the adults in their lives take care of themselves. Parents who live healthy, active lives are likely to pass these values on to their children. Parents and caregivers are the decision-makers for what foods are purchased and how they are prepared. When families and ECE providers both value wellness, young children are surrounded by environments that support their health. For parents to be successful in creating this "culture of wellness," their communities must have the resources needed to achieve their best health. In Cuyahoga County, many parents have hectic schedules that force them to juggle providing for their child and engaging in their child's health. Financial responsibilities, lack of transportation and poor support networks often makes the healthy choice a difficult choice for many families.

*The problem.
Families are not engaged in early childhood health.*

When early care and education providers create opportunities for family engagement and involvement with the program, family background, parent education, and income play a large role in family participation (McWayne, 2014).

1 in 3 families of children ages 0-6 in Cuyahoga County live in poverty (Children, 2010).

Families with low income have high levels of emotional investment in their children, but do not always have the support to overcome the challenges of poverty (Bierman, 2017).

SYSTEMS CHANGE SUCCESS:

UPK family child care home providers, Robbie Willis and Cassandra Thompson, work together to provide resources that help their families thrive.



Cleveland Heights-based family child care providers, Cassandra Thompson and Robbie Willis are long-time experts in family engagement. They inspire EAHS to think big when it comes to reaching families.

Cassandra spends time getting to know families through Moms and Dads night out, and sharing important community resources with her families. One such resource, a friend at Towards Employment, led to a mom getting a degree and achieving their dream. Robbie has been a champion for EAHS since the beginning; doing healthy eating surveys so that parents can provide ideas and even taking family photos under the OHP banner at her summer family fun meeting!

At an EAHS meeting, Cassandra shared that she had benefited from the Cleveland Heights lead safe program in the past and was working to enroll more families of young children in the program. She invited Robbie to host their annual family engagement meeting for UPK and Step Up to Quality at the Cleveland Heights Library.

Staff from the City of Cleveland Heights spoke to the families about the many programs in place to help families remove lead from their homes and keep their kids safe. Robbie asked EAHS staff to share information about how healthy eating, and safe play away from windows can keep kids safe from lead hazards.

Cassandra and Robbie recognize that families who are struggling financially may have extra challenges when it comes to engaging with their kids. At the meeting, there was a speaker from Towards Employment who spoke about programs and services that range from getting families back on their feet, to helping parents achieve their career dreams. When it comes to getting families connected to resources, Cassandra says, "You have to open up your mouth and assist people. Help them out."

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT | OUR GOAL:

Early Ages Healthy Stages will support and elevate the role of early care and education providers and other direct service providers in engaging family's needs.

Objectives: By December 31st, 2020, Early Ages Healthy Stages Coalition will:

1. Encourage and empower early care and education providers as well as organizations that work with young children to create parent support programs.

- Collect information about wrap around resources and ensure that providers have the information and expertise for supporting parents.
- Modify and/or develop a checklist/toolkit for providers to feel more comfortable engaging with parents.
- Recruit providers to hold parent meetings either in person or online as a means for group support.
- Connect families to transportation options.

2. Engage community resources (schools, churches, parks, recreation centers, agencies) to partner in ongoing events and messaging for family engagement.

- Develop single focus, unified messaging for maximum impact and reach within multiple organizations and agencies.
- Encourage agencies to focus on a monthly message, saturating the messaging around that one topic throughout the community at one time.
- Ensure new themes around healthy living and early childhood wellness are adapted to fit the needs of the community and organizations.

3. Modify and/or develop a family engagement toolkit for early childhood education.

- Engage families about important issues through focus groups and surveys
- Modify and/or develop and pilot a series of 4-5 family engagement tool kits that early care and education providers can use that include short trainings, activities, handouts, bulletin boards, and newsletter templates.
- Develop and pilot toolkits.
- Make toolkits available to providers.

