

Durham's Partnership for Children

Family Engagement Action Plan

Year: 2020-2021

*****This guidance may be amended by DPfC and the NC PreK state office as needed in accordance with changes in trends related to COVID-19.*****

Mission of Agency

To ensure every child in Durham enters school ready to succeed, we lead community strategies for children birth to age 5 and their families that promote healthy development and learning and enhance access to high quality care.

Definition of Family Engagement

According to Durham's Partnership for Children, family engagement is a multifaceted approach. Family Engagement is a collaborative process where families, children, and early childhood professionals build positive relationships that honor family culture and fosters child success. Pre-K students are able to engage with other students, teachers, and their community in a fun environment. According to NC Pre-K Program Requirements & Guidance shaped by DCDEE and NC Pre-K,

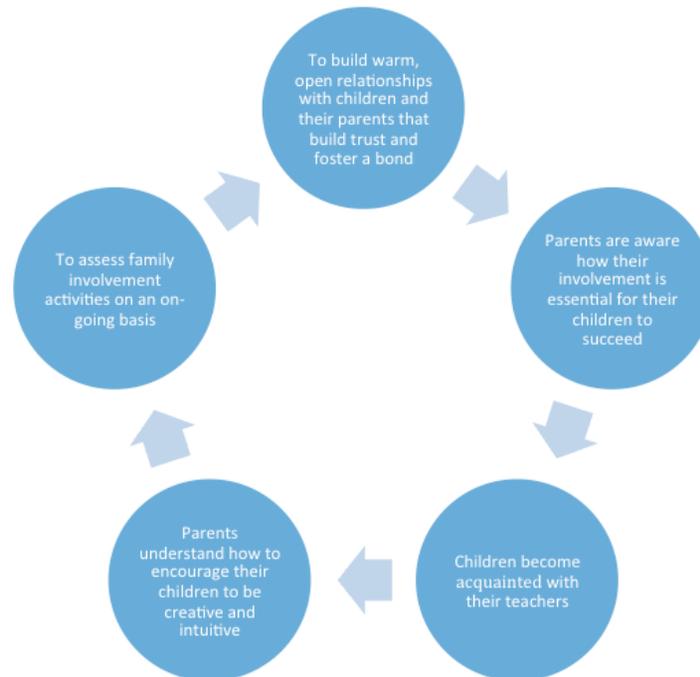
“Strategies should be designed to develop partnerships with families and build reciprocal relationships that promote shared decision making. The following are examples of meaningful opportunities for families to be engaged in their child's education:

- (1) Allowing NC Pre-K program teachers the opportunity for home visits;
- (2) Formal and informal parent/teacher conferences;
- (3) Classroom visits and options for parents and families to participate in classroom activities;
- (4) Parent education;
- (5) Allowing family members the opportunity for involvement in decision making about their own child and about their child's early childhood program; and
- (6) Opportunities to engage families outside of the regular school day”

Objective

Families, children, and early childhood professionals will feel more connected through the collaborative process of family engagement by building positive relationships that honor family culture and foster child success.

Family Engagement Goals/Outcomes



Positive Impacts of Family Engagement on the Child



Through the targeted Family Engagement Goals/Outcomes, DPfC has shaped its Family Engagement Action Plan based on 6 Components of Family Engagement: **Advocacy and Decision-Making, Communication, Community Collaboration, Parenting/Training, Student Learning, and Volunteering.**

DPfC'S SIX COMPONENTS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

COMPONENT 1: ADVOCACY AND DECISION-MAKING	COMPONENT 2: COMMUNICATION	COMPONENT 3: COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
Parents are full partners in decisions that affect children, parents have something critical to share at each developmental stage, use the behavior of the child as your language	Programs should reaffirm and strengthen the families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society	Be willing to discuss matters that go beyond your traditional role
Include families as participants in decision-making in curriculum, school decisions, governance, and advocacy through school councils, committees, action teams and other parent organizations	Must be regular, two-way, and meaningful, Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications	Coordinate resources/services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and to provide services to the community
Implement a comment box to ask questions, voice concerns, offer suggestions	Examples of welcoming environments (morning message board, diverse books/materials, interactive materials, teachers greet families, etc.), Sign-in sheets for parents and children	Help parents to address barriers to utilizing community services, such as transportation
	Letter sent home at beginning of school year to express importance/benefits of family engagement	Collaborate with early childhood partners
	Home visits (home visit report to determine skills that need work), Value and understand the relationship between the teacher and the parent	Encourage parents to share information about community resources and events

DPfC'S SIX COMPONENTS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT (CONT).

COMPONENT 4: PARENTING/TRAINING	COMPONENT 5: STUDENT LEARNING	COMPONENT 6: VOLUNTEERING
Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students	Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions	Improve recruitment, training, schedule to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs
Use opportunities to model healthy parenting skills, Provide parenting articles and resources	Provide list of books for families to read with children at home	Parents are welcome, their support is solicited, all parents have strengths
Share parenting tips and discuss parenting issues during conferences	Parents assist in learning, the parent is the expert on his/her child	Invite families to share cultural traditions/customs
Talk to/listen to your child, help them develop a questioning mind, make learning a positive experience	Provide summer calendar of activities	Include all types of families (fathers, grandparents, foster parents, etc.)
Support parents with children with special needs by connecting them with parenting materials and resources	Suggested websites to use at home	Survey families to find out skills they can share
Offer guidance for dealing with children's different behavioral stages		
Use effective consequences		

Family Engagement Action Plan Requirements (approved locally by School Readiness/NC Pre-K Committee)

****All programs must adhere by the following requirements (private centers, Head Start and DPS). Mandates from DCDEE will be streamlined with DPfC requirements. Please understand that the start of the school year may look different due to local, state, and federal health and safety measures. The form in which requirements are completed may look different this school year.****

Family Engagement will be implemented within the Pre-K program (private sites, Head Start, DPS) and also within the home to support the home-to-school and school-to-home learning exchange. Documentation of family engagement efforts will be kept at each Pre-K site including the date, activity completed, and number of families in attendance. Please see specific program requirements below that will assist in building positive relationships and fostering child success:

1. Sites are required to use **MyTeachingStrategies™**-an authentic, ongoing, observation-based assessment system that helps teachers and administrators focus on what matters most for children's success. **GOLD®** supports effective teaching and assessment, while providing you with more time to spend with the children in your program. Accessed through **MyTeachingStrategies™**, **GOLD®** automatically links teaching and assessment, making it easier to connect the dots across the most important aspects of high-quality early childhood education. With **GOLD®**, teachers can:

- Use a variety of online tools to gather and organize meaningful data quickly, including online portfolios where children's work can be stored;
- Create a developmental profile of each child to answer the questions, "What does this child know? What is he or she able to do?" that can be used to scaffold each child's learning; and
- Generate comprehensive reports that can be customized easily and shared with family members and other stakeholders.

2. Sites are required to complete at least **one** home visit per family **per school year**. All home visits must be completed by **Friday, September 4th**. Documentation of home visits must be completed.

3. Sites are required to complete **one** formal parent/guardian-teacher conference **per quarter** in alignment with TS Gold Checkpoints. Conferences may be conducted in lieu of required family engagement check-ins (see guidance below from DCDEE). **Sites are highly encouraged to utilize TS Gold to conduct conferences, however, the site may use their own template.** Please note that in the event that a parent/guardian declines the conference, it must be documented with parent/guardian signature.

● ~~Checkpoints: October 16, 2020, January 15, 2021, March 26, 2021~~

● ~~UPDATE 10/7/2020: For sites to maximize the use of TSG Checkpoint data, this deadline is EXTENDED. At this time, please disregard conference due dates listed.~~

● ~~UPDATE 1/15/2021: Remaining conference due dates are February 26, 2021 and April 23, 2021.~~

● **UPDATE 1/27/2021: Due to the recent change in TSG checkpoints, new conference deadlines are March 5, 2021 (Winter) and May 14, 2021 (Spring).**

4. Sites are required to complete at least **four** family engagement activities **per school year** with at least one activity outside of traditional work/school hours. At least **one** of the four activities must be focused on the transition to kindergarten. At minimum, **2 out of 4** activities should be completed by **mid-January**. At least **4 activities** should be completed by **April 30th**. Documentation of each family engagement activity must be completed.

5. Sites are required to complete **Fall** and **Spring** Family Engagement surveys. **Failure to complete surveys by the deadline will be recorded by FES.**

****Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.****

Interim COVID-19 Reopening Policies for NC Pre-K Programs (published by DCDEE on 8/3/2020)

Mode of Classroom Instruction (Section 4)

A. The NC Pre-K program is built upon a developmentally appropriate, play-based, interactive instruction and classroom environments.

- DCDEE strongly encourages NC Pre-K programs to prioritize having students physically present in Pre-K classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year.
- If a school district, private child care facility, or Head Start program has buildings open for in-person instruction for any students or children, the NC Pre-K program must also offer Traditional/In-person or Hybrid instruction, unless any of the circumstances in Section 4B are met.
- If a school district, private child care facility, or Head Start program does not have buildings open for in-person instruction, the NC Pre-K program may still be offered in Traditional/In-Person or Hybrid instruction, unless any of the circumstances in Section 4B are met.
 - o Regardless of which plan a school district chooses to operate (Plan B/hybrid instruction or Plan C/remote instruction), school districts are strongly encouraged to prioritize having NC Pre-K students physically present in classrooms.
- NC Pre-K sites must select from the three learning modes in the table below and inform their Contracting Agency.
- Contracting Agencies must notify DCDEE regarding their sites' initial mode of instruction (traditional/in-person, hybrid, or remote learning) by Friday, September 4, 2020 at 5:00PM.
- The full remote learning option will be available to Pre-K sites through November 6, 2020 only. This option may be extended depending on COVID-19 metrics and future state directives.

<u>Traditional/In-Person</u>	<u>Hybrid</u>	<u>Full Remote Learning</u>
No children are learning remotely; all children are learning in the classroom. Even when selecting the Traditional/InPerson mode, a remote learning option must be available to students under certain circumstances (such as during necessary quarantine periods, if closure for deep cleaning is needed, for high-risk students)	Pre-K classroom/site is delivering a mix of in-person and remote learning to the same group of children – for example, if a school district is alternating days/weeks when students are in and out of school buildings or the classroom/site is providing some children with full-time in-person learning and other children with full-time remote learning.	No children are learning in the classroom; all children are learning remotely.

B. Circumstances When Remote Learning May Be Needed

- During the weeks prior to instruction starting on September 8th (e.g., home visits and orientation may be done remotely)
- If NCDHHS issues a directive that requires closure and/or reduced capacity to minimize the spread of COVID-19
- If a COVID-19 cluster (5 or more cases) occurs at an NC Pre-K site and the Local Health Department recommends that the site and/or classroom(s) should close temporarily for cleaning
- If a parent/family has requested remote learning due to the child and/or a household member being high-risk for severe illness due to COVID-19
 - o Information on who is at a higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 is available from the CDC and NCDHHS.
- If a parent/guardian requests remote learning due to concerns over their child's health or safety in a traditional/ in-person setting
- If a child is not able to attend for an extended amount of days due to the child and/or household member(s) being sick and/or quarantined due to COVID-19
- If the NC Pre-K teaching staff has requested to telework due to their own high-risk status
- If a school district (or Head Start program) chooses to operate exclusively under Plan C with no exceptions for NC Pre-K.

****Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.****

Remote Learning Requirements (Section 6)

There is limited evidence on best practices for remote learning for young children. DCDEE is committed to providing a thoughtful approach to accessing high-quality early learning for children/families who must participate remotely, due to circumstances outlined in Section 4B. The information in this section describes an innovative effort to align in-person and remote instruction to all children receiving the NC Pre-K program.

DCDEE will seek ongoing feedback from families, educators, and staff on their experiences participating in remote learning. DCDEE does not want access to technology to be a barrier or limiting factor for any family's participation in remote learning resources. Therefore, it is expected that teachers will take a proactive, flexible, and responsive approach to families' needs to ensure participation.

E. Family Engagement: 'Check-ins'

Family/Child Check-ins are opportunities for the lead teacher (with teacher assistant as an optional participant) and a child/family to connect live through two-way communication (the teacher communicates with the child/family, and the child/family communicates back) every week while the child/family is participating in remote learning. A Check-in could take place through a call, video conference, or through a socially-distanced in-person visit while everyone wears face coverings. A Check-in may be a brief conversation, or it could be a longer period of time depending on child/family need.

Building a strong relationship through frequent, quality interactions with families is always important – but even more important when providing remote learning. Families also need to be kept informed of changes in schedule or protocols.

Lead Teachers are **required** to:

- Offer at least one Check-in every week to each child/family participating in remote learning
- Prepare for and document every Check-in in writing
- Make every reasonable effort to communicate with the family in an accessible manner, such as:
 - Adjust the timing of a Check-in given family feedback on scheduling
 - Attempt to contact a family member through multiple formats (text message, phone call, in-person socially-distanced visit with all people wearing face coverings) if other avenues are unsuccessful
 - For non-English dominant families, provide communication through an interpreter (e.g. staff, family member, etc.)

It is **recommended** that Lead Teachers:

- Provide applicable technical resources and support to families to participate in Check-ins (e.g. downloading the Teaching Strategies family application)
- Utilize weekly Check-in time to:
 - Provide updates on procedures related to the school or site's response to COVID-19
 - Share ongoing information on the child's developmental progress using evidence-based observations
 - Provide individualized recommendations for activities and engagement opportunities for the family to best be able to support their child
- Encourage families to bring questions, concerns, ideas, and evidence of learning at home (e.g., pictures of activities)
- Encourage the child to be an active participant in the Check-in

****Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.****

F. Daily Instruction in Hybrid Learning Classrooms

Teachers are **required** to:

- Align the pacing/content of in-person and remote learning (e.g., utilize Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum online resources and aligned family activities to create in-person lesson plans and remote activities on the same topics)
- Provide the families of remote learners a consistent schedule of Remote Moments for families to opt into throughout the week
- Provide Teaching Strategies family engagement resources every day to children and their families, and supplement with any additional, relevant resources as needed
- Highlight opportunities for families to submit evidence of learning remotely through the Teaching Strategies platform or through other methods (e.g., sharing pictures of completed activities, sharing videos of the child engaging in the activity)
- Coordinate at least one (1) 'Check-in' per week for each remote learner/family

Teachers are **not** required to provide instruction outside a typical in-person teaching schedule. For example: an assistant teacher could monitor the children in-person during nap time, while the lead teacher conducts a Remote Moment in another room for virtual learners and families.

G. Daily Instruction for Classrooms with Remote Learners Only (Entirely remote classrooms with at least one NC Pre-K child and no in-person instruction)

Teachers are **required** to:

- Plan for and deliver five (5) discrete Remote Moments with different activities throughout the week utilizing Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution resources
 - Each daily Remote Moment's content must be repeated twice at different times of day (e.g., offered once in the morning and once in the afternoon) to increase families' ability to attend the session
- Throughout the week, Remote Moments must align to the developmental domains: Approaches to Play and Learning, Emotional and Social Development, Health and Physical Development, Language Development and Communication, and Cognitive Development
- Provide the families of remote learners a consistent schedule of Remote Moments for families to opt into throughout the week
- Provide Teaching Strategies family engagement resources every day to children and their families
- Highlight opportunities for families to submit evidence of learning remotely through the Teaching Strategies platform or through other methods (e.g., sharing pictures of completed activities, sharing videos of the child engaging in the activity)
- Coordinate and provide at least two (2) 'Check-ins' per week for each remote learner/family. In a Full Remote Learning environment, it is essential that children/families remain in contact with their teacher; Therefore, the requirement is two (2) Check-ins as opposed to one (1).

H. Attendance in Hybrid or Full Remote Instruction

A child/family's attendance and participation in remote learning is defined as participating in weekly check-ins (either 1 or 2 depending on the mode of instruction). While participation in Remote Moments is beneficial for children/families, it will likely be more reliable for teachers to document ongoing participation in Check-ins as a way to track attendance.

****Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.****

Family Engagement Monitoring *(approved locally by School Readiness/NC Pre-K Committee)*

Please note the Family Engagement Specialist will complete formal site visits twice a year to ensure the adherence of program requirements, share site assessments results, share parent survey results, and to provide an opportunity for Directors to express concerns/ask questions. Unscheduled family engagement visits may also occur. The Family Engagement Site Monitoring Tool will be used during visits. Formal site visits will be completed during:

- October 1st-October 31st
- April 1st-April 30th

A web-based scheduling tool, such as Doodle Poll or SignUpGenius, will be sent to directors via email in September and March to sign up for a 1-hr slot.

FES will complete visits at the following sites:

- Private child care centers
- Head Start locations
- Durham Public Schools

FES will provide a review of visit, specific resources and suggestions as a follow-up within two weeks of the visit.

Durham's Partnership for Children Family Engagement Site Monitoring Tool is a checklist used to monitor site information biannually for all programs. This tool should serve as a summary of all family engagement requirements for NC Pre-K and/or DPK classrooms located at each site. At least half (50%) of each classroom will be reviewed. Regular, systematic and focused supervision of NC Pre-K and DPK programs, through use of the Family Engagement Site Monitoring Tool, will ensure that sound, high-quality and appropriate services are implemented and maintained for the Universal Pre-K Program.

Results from the DPfC Family Engagement Site Monitoring Tool and site visits should be used to ensure uniformity across programs. The NC Pre-K Program Requirements (policy/guidance), in addition to Durham's Partnership for Children Family Engagement Action Plan are used by the Family Engagement Specialist to guide DPfC and the NCPK/SR Committee about appropriate operating practices.

When program requirements have not been met, a written Action Plan will be established to meet compliance that includes documentation defining who is responsible for accomplishing the task, a timeline and other information to indicate progress toward meeting the requirement. Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.

By October 31st of each program year, the FES or designee should complete the Site Monitoring Tool and send a copy of the completed Site Monitoring Tool (Action Plans for items not met must be attached) to the site.

By April 30th of each program year, the FES or designee should complete the Site Monitoring Tool and send a copy of the completed Site Monitoring Tool (Action Plans for items not met must be attached) to the site.

[CLICK HERE: FALL MONITORING TOOL](#)

[CLICK HERE: SPRING MONITORING TOOL](#)

Interim COVID-19 Reopening Policies for NC Pre-K Programs (published by DCDEE on 8/3/2020)

Reporting Requirements (Section 8)

A. NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies are required to provide ongoing, regular reports on their respective sites to DCDEE in the following areas:

- Mode of instruction provided (traditional/in-person, hybrid, or full remote learning) at each of the sites
- Number of teachers/TAs providing traditional/in-person and/or full remote learning
- Number of children enrolled/placed in traditional/in-person and/or full remote learning
- Number of children attending traditional/in-person, hybrid and/or full remote learning (refer to Section 6H for note about attendance in hybrid or full remote learning)
- Number of enrolled children who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past reporting period
- Number of staff who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past reporting period
- For programs conducting traditional/in-person instruction, whether there were any closures in the past reporting period, and how many days was the site closed

B. Frequency of reporting:

- **Initial Mode of Instruction (Due Friday, September 4, 2020, 5:00PM)**
 - o Contracting Agencies are required to report:
 - 1) The initial mode of instruction (Traditional/In-Person, Hybrid, or Remote Learning) that each of their sites will be using for the first nine (9) weeks of instruction; and
 - 2) Why the sites are selecting this mode of instruction
- **Ongoing Reporting: September 8th through end of school year**
 - o NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies are required to submit a report on the regular items outlined above every other Tuesday at 5:00PM.
 - o The dates and reporting periods are as follows:

Report Due Date	Reporting Period
September 22, 2020	September 8, 2020 - September 18, 2020
October 6, 2020	September 21, 2020 – October 2, 2020
October 20, 2020	October 5, 2020 – October 16, 2020
November 3, 2020	October 19, 2020 – October 30, 2020
November 17, 2020	November 2, 2020 – November 13, 2020
December 1, 2020	November 16, 2020 – November 27, 2020

December 15, 2020	November 30, 2020 – December 11, 2020
December 29, 2020	December 14, 2020 – December 25, 2020
January 12, 2021	December 28, 2020 – January 8 2021
January 26, 2021	January 11, 2021 – January 22, 2021
February 9, 2021	January 25, 2021 – February 5, 2021
February 23, 2021	February 8, 2021 – February 19, 2021
March 9, 2021	February 22, 2021 – March 5, 2021
March 23, 2021	March 8, 2021 – March 19, 2021
April 6, 2021	March 21, 2021 – April 2, 2021
April 20, 2021	April 5, 2021 – April 16, 2021
May 4, 2021	April 19, 2021 – April 30, 2021
May 18, 2021	May 3, 2021 – May 14, 2021
June 1, 2021	May 17, 2021 – May 28, 2021
June 15, 2021	May 31, 2021 – June 11, 2021
June 29, 2021	June 14, 2021 – June 25, 2021

C. Method of Reporting:

Each NC Pre-K Contracting Agency will be emailed a personalized Excel workbook that is prepopulated with their NC Pre-K sites (based on the information in the NC Pre-K Plan database). Each workbook contains one worksheet for reporting each site's mode of classroom instruction (due September 4th) as well as separate, identical worksheets for each two-week reporting period. Contracting Agencies will complete the relevant worksheets and email the workbooks to Patricia McCarter, NC Pre-K Coordinator at patricia.mccarter@dhhs.nc.gov by the specified due date.

****DPfC is required to report to DCDEE on a biweekly basis, however, all sites are required by DPfC to track and report family engagement check-ins on a weekly basis. Guidance on this process will be provided by DPfC. Failure to comply with requirements may directly affect a site's slot allocation for the following school year.****

Site Surveys

Pre-K Family Engagement Fall Site Survey- *A survey that evaluates the six components of family engagement. This survey is a requirement for Directors and Lead Teachers.*

- Timeline: Completed by September 30th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC
- Method: Via Google Form or SurveyMonkey

Pre-K Family Engagement Spring Site Survey- *A survey that evaluates the six components of family engagement. This survey is a requirement for Directors and Lead Teachers.*

- Timeline: Completed by March 30th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC
- Method: Via Google Form or SurveyMonkey

End of Year Survey- *A survey to receive feedback from all sites regarding support and services received.*This survey is voluntary and will be distributed to all Pre-K staff.**

- Timeline: Completed by June 4th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC
- Method: Via Google Form or SurveyMonkey

Parent/Guardian Surveys

Application Survey- *A survey designed to describe a family's application experience. All families will be surveyed.*

- Timeline: After completion of Pre-K application
- Responsible Agency: Administered by CCSA
- Method: Via Google Form, SurveyMonkey or phone

Pre-K Family Engagement Fall Parent/Guardian Survey- *A survey that evaluates the six components of family engagement and placement experience. All families will be surveyed.*

- Timeline: Completed by September 30th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC
- Method: Via Google Form or SurveyMonkey

Pre-K Family Engagement Spring Parent/Guardian Survey- *A survey that evaluates the six components of family engagement. All families will be surveyed.*

- Timeline: Completed by March 30th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC & CCSA
- Method: Via Google Form, SurveyMonkey or phone

Program Satisfaction Survey- *A survey to receive feedback from families regarding support and services received. All families will be surveyed.*

- Timeline: Completed by June 4th
- Responsible Agency: Administered by DPfC
- Method: Via Google Form or SurveyMonkey

Family Engagement Resources (*underline indicates hyperlink*)

- ❑ Family Engagement Welcome Packet- *packet created by DPfC to welcome families to Pre-K*
- ❑ [Family Engagement Toolkit](#)- *requirements and resource reference guide for sites*
- ❑ Family Engagement Newsletters- *sent quarterly to sites and families with program updates*
- ❑ [Photo/Video Release](#)- *consent form completed by parents/guardians to use photos and/or videos to promote Universal Pre-K and for remote learning*
- ❑ [Pre-K Child Introduction Questionnaire](#)- *form that introduces the child to the Pre-K staff. It addresses a child's interests, child's strengths, allergies, learning styles, and preferred method of parental involvement. ***Can be used for home visits; available in English and Spanish.***
- ❑ [Pre-K Child Profile](#)- *form used to capture demographic information, best way to contact parent, family participation, child's progress, suggested development strategies, etc; may also assist in parent/guardian-teacher conference dialogue. ***Can be used for conferences.***
- ❑ [Home Visit Request Form](#)- *form used to assist sites in scheduling home visits*
- ❑ [Home Visiting Practices/Resources](#)- *resource document created for sites to reference when planning home visits*
- ❑ FE Teacher Check-ins- *PD sessions to share FE ideas, strategies and best practices*
- ❑ FE Family Check-ins- *virtual sessions to make contact with families*
- ❑ [TSG/Creative Curriculum Letters to Families](#)- *letters embedded within TS Gold used to communicate with families about curriculum (Available in English and Spanish)*
- ❑ Take Care Tuesday Wellness Cafe- *open space for parents/guardians*
- ❑ Monthly contact- *resources will include DPfC events, community events, free resources, FE tips/tricks, etc.*
- ❑ [NC Pre-K Reopening Guidance](#)- *Interim COVID-19 Reopening Policies for NC Pre-K Programs*
- ❑ Additional resources as needed or by request

Family Involvement and Engagement

Decades of research consistently links family involvement and engagement to higher student achievement, better attitudes toward school, lower dropout rates, and increased community support. Several practices that schools should do to foster school-family connections:

- Create a welcoming environment that fosters family-school relationships and transcends context, culture, and language
- Identify misconceptions that teachers and families hold about the motivation, practices, or beliefs of each other that lead to mistrust
- Direct resources and programmatic efforts to help families adopt effective strategies to support student learning
- Understand the effect of home context on student performance, including home culture, parenting practices, home crises, or significant events
- Create structures-policy, leadership, procedures, processes, and aligned resources-that encourage family involvement
- Understand the effect that beliefs, self-efficacy, knowledge, perceived abilities, and previous experience have on the roles families create and use to support their children's education

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It plays a role not only in communication and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. It provides a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically. Not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities. "Culturally responsive" appears to refer to a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture. By observing students in their home/community environment, teachers are able to include aspects of the students' cultural environment in the organization and instruction of the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching can be seen as a beginning step for bridging the gap between home and school. Teachers must be prepared with a thorough understanding of the specific cultures of the students they teach; how that culture affects student learning behaviors; and how they can change classroom interactions and instruction to embrace the differences. This can be carried out by doing each of these actions:

- Require each teacher to obtain proper certification, training, and professional development
- Increase teacher motivation to recognize diverse learners' strengths, as well as their needs
- Decrease dependence on packaged instructional materials and increase implementation of strategies and techniques targeted to the needs of specific student groups
- Integrate the use of technology into instructional practice to bridge the generational divide
- Recruit and retain high-quality teachers for schools in rural and remote areas

Teachers Creating an Equitable Classroom Climate

The National School Climate Council defines school climate as “the quality and character of school life” that is based on “patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, and interpersonal relationships, teaching, and learning practices, and organizational structures.” Key aspects of a positive school climate include safety (social, emotional, and physical), respect, and engagement. Teachers must be intentional about eliminating bias and creating a culturally responsive classroom climate. Six strategies that teachers should implement to create an environment in which all children have equitable opportunities to learn:

Teachers acknowledge their own biases and inequitable actions when they:

- Improve their communication skills by listening and adjusting to the communication style of others, continually checking for understanding, respecting differences, and using language that builds trust and positive relationships
- Participate in professional development on harassment and equity issues

Teachers make an effort to learn about their students’ cultural backgrounds when they:

- Include activities such as family history projects, selecting readings about the cultures of students in their classroom
- Plan family nights or cultural events that encourage discussion and learning about others in their school

Teachers examine curriculum and learning materials for bias when they ask:

- Does the curriculum provide for a balanced study of world cultures?
- Do classroom displays and instructional materials include positive representations of diverse international and domestic cultures?

Teachers build relationships with families and communities when they:

- Build partnerships with community members, youth organizations, and other service providers
- Invite local community groups to make presentations and conduct workshops for teachers and students

Teachers build caring, cooperative classroom environments when they:

- Immediately confront any biased or discriminatory behavior in the classroom or school
- Teach students how to treat each other with respect

Teachers identify curricular bias by looking for these practices:

- Invisibility**-*overlooking certain groups that implies they are less valuable or important*
- Stereotyping**-*limiting the opportunities for a certain group on rigid perceptions of their ability or potential*
- Imbalance or selectivity**-*providing one viewpoint or selective information that leads to misinterpretation or an incomplete understanding of an event, situation, or group of people*
- Fragmentation or isolation**-*placing information about people of color, women, or other protected groups in a box or chapter that is separate from the main body of the text*
- Linguistic bias**-*using masculine words such as he and mankind exclusively, or using patronizing terms such as needy or less fortunate to describe a group of people*