From the Director's Desk - On Family Engagement
by Suzanne Bowers

Family Engagement is a hot topic right now and we all agree that it is important for the success of our children. The data shows that children whose families are engaged in their learning experiences in a positive way show improved performance through all grades, regardless of the age of the child or the family’s ethnicity, income or education level. But what does Family Engagement really mean and what does it really look like?

There are numerous definitions for “What is Family Engagement?” ranging from “a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development” (Dr. Heather Weiss), to “the collaboration between families and schools that drives student achievement” (The Flamboyan Foundation). There are also a large number of agencies who offer resources and materials for Family Engagement, including PEATC, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), and online websites such as the Live Strong Foundation.

In an ideal world, every parent would have the time and opportunity to volunteer at their children’s schools every day, be the PTA President, bake fresh cookies for the band bake sale, and make a home cooked meal for their family every night! But in the real world, parents are busy balancing all the demands of life and often think; I wish I could be doing more to participate in my child’s education. But before you give up on your “Parent of the Year” Award, take a breath and look at all that you ARE doing to participate in your child’s education and future.

Do you:
• Make sure your children get well-balanced meals (or take-out, if needed)?
• Read to your children?
• Hug your child (if they still let you)?
• Go to Parent-Teacher conferences?
• Tuck your child in at night or wake them up in the morning?
• Talk to your children about school, their friends, their dreams, what they like or don’t like?
• Help your child do homework or answer their questions when they ask?

Then pat yourself on the back, give yourself a break and realize that you ARE engaged in your child’s education. There are always ways we, as parents, can be more engaged, but give yourself credit for the work that you’re already doing. The essential thing for us to do is to practice what we preach about the importance of education to our children. But how can we do that without more hours in the day? Try to utilize your natural resources such as neighbors, friends, family, teachers, and counselors. Can you carpool? Spend time talking with your child and other parents to compare notes about what’s happening at school? Email the teachers to see how you can help from home or if there’s something that your child needs to work on?

There’s so much to do and so little time but don’t forget to ENJOY YOUR CHILD!
November is all about Family: Siblings, Family, and Family Engagement

Early Intervention Corner by Lakeshia Yancey

How to talk to your preschooler about their sibling’s special needs

In the world of parenting, dealing with sibling rivalry and jealousy is not uncommon. Kids love each other one minute, the next they are worst enemies, bickering, teasing, and even physically fighting. We’ve all heard the familiar complaints of, “you like him/her better”, “he/she is your favorite”, or “it’s not fair”. This can be challenging for any parent, but even more so when one of your children has special needs. There may be a larger amount of care and attention that is needed for a child with special needs and this can be difficult for a child to understand, especially one who is preschool age. If the child with special needs is the younger sibling, there may be some normal jealousy related to their being a "new baby". If the child is older, then the younger child may be feeling left out of “special” activities if the child attends therapy sessions or community activities that don't allow sibling involvement.

There are several ways that parents can help their children co-exist and to help them to become more understanding and even compassionate about the special needs of their sibling.

- Try to explain the situation in an age-appropriate manner
- Pay attention to their developmental and emotional needs
- Make sure you recognize their accomplishments
- Provide alone time with parents or time with their friends
- Ask your child’s preschool teacher to have it be a part of a class discussion when they have a unit on families

There are also many books that can help you find a way for your young child to understand what is going on and where they fit in your family. Here are a few that are geared for younger children:

My Brother is Autistic by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos

Just Because by Rebecca Elliott

My Sister, Alicia May by Nancy Tupper Ling

Transition Corner by Sherri Coles

Transition, Independent Living and the Family

All parents want the best life possible for their children, whether they have a disability or not. Schools exist to help give our children the knowledge and skills necessary to be able to function effectively in adult life—whether that includes college, technical school, getting a job, or being in a day program. Parents and educators are preparing the student for the rest of their lives.

We want our children to have choices, and to be able to make good choices. They also need to learn how to deal with the consequences of their choices.

What parent doesn’t dream of their child living in the community with the supports necessary for a successful and fulfilling life -- especially since we won’t be around forever? The child’s sibling(s) most likely will be around for most of their lives. Siblings may be concerned that they will be responsible for caring for the child with a disability once the parents are gone or no longer able to do so. This may frighten them. This should be addressed through family discussions. Everyone needs to feel comfortable expressing their feelings, and feel like they are being heard and understood. Meeting with an attorney experienced in these situations to prepare a plan, will or special needs trust may also be helpful. We need to continually ask ourselves if our child with disabilities is being prepared to have a real life, just as we do with our other children.

It takes both families and the school to prepare our children for life after school is finished. It is vital that both work together for the student’s benefit. If you don’t currently have the best relationship, please try to work on it now so that your child will benefit from that cooperation. The child is the loser when the school and home do not work well together. Remember, you both have the goal of preparing the student for life as an adult, so why not work together to accomplish this?

If your child with disabilities has siblings, why not include them in transition planning? They can talk to their sibling about her dreams for the future. They could also take their sibling on community outings (with help, if needed), or you could go as a family to see opportunities in the community for involvement, employment, housing options, post-secondary education or other options and ideas about the future. The whole family could brainstorm about ideas for the future, and what supports need to be in place to make the future all that it can be.

It’s important to help siblings feel like they can assist their sibling with a disability when needed. This can help form a strong bond. But the child without a disability should not be made to feel totally responsible in caring for their sibling. Sometimes a close bond has not yet gelled. A sibling without a disability can sometimes feel like they are a little neglected because of all the extra care and help that their sibling with a disability needs. So try to enlist the sibling’s ideas and help in preparing him for adult life.
Family Engagement Corner by Artina Norris
Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships within any family dynamic can bring both challenges and rewards. These relationships tend to change over time, especially as the children grow and mature. Sibling interactions typically teach children how to relate to one another early in life. Many valuable life lessons are taught and learned in these relationships like bonding, sharing, communicating, problem solving and building trust. These connections usually last a lifetime, and as siblings grow, so do the dynamics of the relationship.

During adolescence the older sibling typically begins to distance themselves from their younger sibling, especially if there is an age difference between them. They seek to gain their own independence and identity through external relationships because they find they have more in common with their own peers. This can cause tension within the family setting if the siblings once shared a close bond. Strong family engagement and parental involvement can undergird strained sibling relationships during this time. Parents should teach their children at an early age that relationships often change over time, but there are always lessons we can learn and take away from.

Just as there are positive experiences and lessons to sibling relationships, there are also negative ones. However, negative encounters can always be viewed as opportunities for growth and development for each sibling. Let’s explore some of the not so pleasant experiences. Younger siblings may experience jealousy and even resentment towards the older sibling when they perceive the older sibling is receiving freedom and privileges that come with age and maturity. This can cause acting out, temper tantrums and sometimes rebellion. Another negative is when children are not getting their emotional needs met within their family relationships. They tend to compete for attention among themselves and strife and resentment builds. When this behavior manifests, parents can engage the entire family and create an open dialogue that addresses negative behavior in a positive manner. Establishing “family time” and making it a priority is critical and can aid in strengthening sibling relationships. This gives both individuals something to look forward to and will help ease the emotions of change within the sibling relationship.

Sibling relationships are best understood in the context of the family. Efforts to improve sibling relationships should take into account not just the siblings, but the family as a whole. Family engagement at any age is the most powerful force of change and reinforcement.

PEATC On Demand and In the Spotlight: "Dreams for Kids DC" by Leslie Edwards

During this month’s On Demand Spotlight, we would like to bring your attention to Dreams for Kids DC. Dreams for Kids DC organizes life-changing activities that empower children with physical and developmental disabilities to unite with their peers and realize their full potential.

One of the characteristics of Dreams for Kids DC that makes the program so unique, is that it gives children with disabilities a chance to integrate with their non-disabled peers and siblings in an adaptive physical setting. Amidst the stresses of everyday life it is important for siblings to bond and enjoy activities together. Families that have a member with a disability are no exception! Dreams for Kids DC can give siblings the opportunity to share the age-old joys of recreation together in an environment that is specifically suited to their needs.

Please paste this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZy3sEKvVic> into your internet browser to hear Glenda Fu, Dreams for Kids DC Executive Director, discuss more about the program and to learn how you and your family can get involved.
Latino Corner by Daniela Ancalle

Interacción Entre Hermanos

El tema de este mes son los hermanos y familia. Los hermanos son amigos, personas con quienes los niños pueden jugar y aprender. Ellos son personas con quienes se puede hablar y compartir historias o experiencias. Aunque los hermanos disfrutan de la amistad que se tienen, también puede existir rivalidad. Los hermanos pueden pelearse por la atención de los padres. Los hermanos de niños con necesidades especiales pueden llegar a sentirse celosos, solos y sentir resentimiento por la atención que sus hermanos reciben de sus padres. Todos los niños son diferentes (personalidades y necesidades) y no serán tratados de la misma manera. Es importante explicar al niño de las necesidades de su hermano y animarle a que comparta las cosas que le pueden estar molestando. También dedique tiempo a solas con su niño haciendo actividades que le gustan. Los siguientes son artículos adicionales con más lectura sobre cómo entender más sobre las relaciones entre hermanos.

Interaction between Siblings

The topic for this month is siblings and family. Siblings are friends, people with whom you can play and learn. They are people who you can talk to and share stories and experiences. Even though siblings enjoy the friendship they have for each other, there is also rivalry. Siblings can fight for their parents’ attention. Siblings of children with special needs can feel jealousy, loneliness and resentment for the attention their parents give their sibling. All children are different (personality and needs), and they will not be treated all the same way. It is important to explain to the child about their sibling’s needs and encourage him to share with you things that may be bothering him. Additionally, make sure to dedicate time alone with your child doing activities he likes. The following are additional articles with more information about how to understand more the relationships between siblings.

Más Recursos/More Resources:

7 Consejos para Ayudar a sus Hijos a que Desarrollen Relaciones Sólidas/7 Ways to Help Your Kids Build a Strong Relationship
https://www.understood.org/es-mx/family/siblings/rivalries/7-ways-to-help-your-kids-build-a-strong-relationship

La Rivalidad Entre Hermanos/Sibling Rivalry
https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/supporting/resources/hermanos.cfm

La Rivalidad Entre Los Hermanos/Sibling Rivalry Among Older Children

Acerca de la Rivalidad Entre Hermanos/About Sibling Rivalry

Cuando la Gente Mira a un Hermano o Hermana/ When People Stare at a Brother or Sister
PEATC Trainings and Events - November 2014

Saturday, November 8, 2014 – “How to Talk” workshop IN SPANISH ONLY, time TBA, at the “Circle of Support” Conference Hylton High School, 14051 SPRIGGS RD, WOODBRIDGE, VA 22193. For more information, please go to: http://arcgwp.org/event-view/the-20th-circle-of-support-conference.

Saturday, November 8, 2014 – “Understanding Special Education” workshop during the 2014 APFED EOS Connection Summary Virginia Conference, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm; Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, 2924 Brook Road, Richmond, VA 23220. Conference registration REQUIRED: http://www.eventbrite.com/e/2014-eosconnection-summary-site-virginia-tickets-12429626347.

Wednesday, November 12, 2014 – “Supporting Siblings in the Family with ADHD Children” Webinar, 11:00 am - 12 noon, Sponsored by PEATC/NoVaDC CHADD, Presented by Catherine Adams of C. Adams Consulting and Parenting by Heart founder Rachel Bailey. To access this webinar, please register at: https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/s/registrations/new/?cid=jqaup5xevu7e.

Saturday, November 15, 2014 – “The Journey to Adulthood: Puberty and Sexuality” workshop during the 2014 Pathways to the Future Conference, 8:30 am -4:00 pm; Chancellor High, 6300 Harrison Road, Fredericksburg, VA 22407. FREE conference registration REQUIRED: www.surveymonkey.com/s/Pathways-11-15-2014-REGISTRATION.

Saturday, November 15, 2014 – “Understanding Special Education” workshop at the Live & Learn Conference and Resource Fair, 9:00 am - 2:00 pm, Ivy Creek School, 227 Lambs Lane, Charlottesville, VA 22901. Sponsored by The Piedmont Regional Education Program (PREP). To register or for more information, please contact Deborah Anama at 434-975-9400 x 68032 or danama@k12albemarle.org.

Saturday, November 15, 2014 – “Individualized Education Program (IEP) Informational Meeting”, PEATC will participate in an IEP dialogue and presentation hosted by Supervisor John C. Cook, Braddock District, 9:30am -12:00pm, Burke United Methodist Church Preschool, 6200 Burke Centre Parkway, Burke, VA 22015. Please contact Supervisor John Cook's office for more information at 703-425-9300 or braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Tuesday, November 18, 2014 – Pláticas ¡¡¡Póngalos por escrito! Preparándonos para la reuniones IEP/Put it in Writing! Preparing for IEP Meetings”, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm, Location: PEATC Offices, 100 N. Washington Street, Suite 234, Falls Church, VA 22046. Please register at 703-923-0010 or partners@peatc.org, or join us online at: https://cc.readytalk.com/r/j9nbf8ej0k5j&com.

Tuesday, November 18, 2014 – "Understanding Special Education” workshop, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm, Monelison Middle School, 257 Trojan Road, Madison Heights, VA 24572. To register, please contact Jim Gallagher at 434-946-9341 or jgallagher@amherst.k12.va.us.

Thursday, November 20, 2014 – "Is your child a target of bullying?" workshop, 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm, Lynchburg, VA. To reserve your spot and confirm workshop location, please contact PEATC at 703-923-0010 or partners@peatc.org.

Thursday, November 20, 2014 – “Friendship Building Strategies” workshop, 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm, Colonial Heights Public Schools’ Technical Center, 3451 Conduit Road, Colonial Heights, VA 23834. For more information, please contact Tracy Lee at 804-524-3445 or Tracy_Lee@colonialhhs.net.

Saturday, November 22, 2014 – “The Big Step: Transitioning into Preschool” workshop, Down Syndrome Association Of Northern Virginia (DSANV), 2755 Hartland Road, Suite 200, Falls Church, VA 22043; time TBA. To register, please contact Heather Trammell at heathert@dsanv.org or (703) 621-7129.