

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES TO WATCH

## Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center

### Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center (ChesMRC)

**Urbanicity:** Rural

**Location:** Easton, Maryland

**Grades:** 1-5

**21st CCLC Enrollment:** 136

**Percentage of All Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch:** 96%

**Demographics:** Hispanic: 70%, Asian: 2%, African American: 15%, Two or more races: 7%, White: 6%

**Hours of 21st CCLC Program Operation:** Monday through Thursday, 3:30-6:00 p.m.

### Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships Opportunity Conditions Addressed

**Process Conditions:**

Linked to Learning

Relational

Interactive

**Organizational Conditions:**

Sustained

## Circle Around Families with Literacy, Long-Term Services, and Supports

For ChesMRC, a program that serves mostly immigrant families in rural Maryland, stories are the bedrock of family engagement. Staff listen to and learn from a family's stories in order to build relationships. Staff find that families want to talk about their lives.

ChesMRC Director, Matthew Peters, believes family engagement is essential to everything the organization does.

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### Real-Time to Real-Time Issues

Staff resist making assumptions about families and instead craft solutions based on parents' real-time needs. "Because the majority of parents are immigrants, some might assume that learning English would be their top priority. But that's rarely been the case," he said. Often, parents identify more pressing needs, such as obtaining identification or understanding a rental contract.

*"We really want to listen to what their problems are, then see what we can do to help, instead of thinking we know what they need," says Peters.*

Just providing a referral and a phone number isn't enough for ChesMRC. Staff have knowledge of each family's needs and capacity. This allows for customized support, especially because each family's situation is often complex.

### Family Database

In order to provide individualized attention and ensure families' needs are met, ChesMRC needed an internal tracking, reporting, and communication system. As a result, ChesMRC created a family database to ensure no family's needs went unmet. This database enables staff to provide consistency in services across staff members and throughout time because the database tracks communication with families and includes key details about their stories. The database helps staff collect a range of information including the level of help each family needs (intensive, moderate, or minimum) so interventions can be tailored. For example, some families might need in-person assistance when applying for a state-issued identification. Other families may need help completing an application, and some families might simply need an application to complete on their own.

The database serves as a clearinghouse to guide ChesMRC's extensive outreach and partnerships with other organizations and agencies and helps staff connect families with needed services. For example, ChesMRC reached out to the Maryland Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) about families' needs and discussed ways to help guide families through the process of obtaining identification. As a result, the state DMV created courses on "How to Get a Drivers' License" and "How to Get a Maryland ID."

The database captures aggregate data, revealing common issues and concerns among ChesMRC families. This information can inform efforts to remove hurdles with local schools, social service agencies, and others. ChesMRC's 21st CCLC anticipates using its family database to better understand and demonstrate how its services impact positive outcomes for its children and families, including understanding if there is an increase in a family's income through ongoing work with ChesMRC.

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*“We need to give accurate information to families. These are incredibly important issues: safety, health, income, trauma. If we keep giving them a number for an agency, that’s not enough. That’s why we initially set up the family database, to make sure these issues get resolved.”*  
—Matthew Peters, ChesMRC Director.

### Family Literacy Groups

Family literacy groups meet while children are in the 21st CCLC STEM-based afterschool program. They meet regularly but have flexible times and expectations. In the groups, parents learn to navigate report cards, learn about their children’s reading levels, and learn what is expected of their children beyond positive behavior.

It is common for parents to be nervous or not want to communicate with teachers. The literacy groups help parents practice communicating with teachers, help parents understand the questions to ask about their children’s learning, and provide parents with a better understanding of the trajectory of their child’s education and what to expect each step of the way. Parents also become more confident in their roles as advocates for their children’s education. In addition, the groups help parents improve basic English proficiency.

### TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Family Database**
  - o Capture the right data from the beginning.
  - o Understand the issues that impact your families.
  - o Vet and know your partner organizations for the database.
  - o Train all staff members about how to use the database and regularly input family updates.

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- **Literacy Groups**
  - o Keep literacy groups small. Be flexible with scheduling to accommodate parents.
  - o Focus on issues that will resonate with parents so they can better understand their children's education.
  - o Provide practical learning experiences. For example, consider visiting the library as a group, practice communication with teachers through role plays, and regularly review report cards.
  - o Use the group to help parents know what to expect for their children's education in the years ahead.
  - o Celebrate parents' achievements in their literacy development and their engagement in their children's education.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- **Challenge assumptions about families.** Even when you think you know what families need, remember to really ask and really listen instead.
- **Get to know each family's story.** Invest in family engagement by training staff to not just get to know families, but learn about their stories. No two families are exactly alike, and immigrant families often endure many challenges in their journeys.
- **Developing strong organizational partnerships requires continual work.** Recognize what your program and organization can and cannot do. Conduct regular outreach, especially toward organizations that can fill gaps in your program. Consider mapping organizational partnerships.

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