




# Group Connections: A Powerful Way to Support and Engage Families

State Parent Advisory Council (SPAC) Conference  
July 14, 2015



## Objectives

- recognize how group connections can provide families the opportunity to:
  - build social connections
  - engage in parent-child interaction
  - increase their knowledge of child development
- recognize the importance of planning and preparing group connections
- develop group connection plans through group activities

## Why Group Connections?

- Build social connections
- Engage in parent-child interaction
- Increase parent knowledge of child development

Other benefits?



## Why Group Connections?

Gathering as a group helps families:

- Develop friendships
- Form new support networks
- Share common experiences
- Discover new ideas for addressing the day-to-day challenges of parenting




## Why Group Connections?

Opportunities to share information about parenting issues and child development

- Parents learn from and support each other
- Observe their children with other children
- Practice parenting skills with the encouragement of parent educators


Group connections provide valuable ways for parents to become better observers of their child's development and increase understanding of their role in their child's development



## Why Group Connections?

Build patterns of parent involvement during their children's education

- Parent involvement in early education is just as essential as in elementary school
- Children whose parents are involved have a more positive attitude about school and attendance



## Social Capital

Social Capital - a family's network of other parents and caregivers in the community

- The more community and family relationships a family has, the less isolated they feel
- Networking within group connections can foster parental resilience – the ability to withstand moments of crisis



## Considerations for Planning

- Community Collaboration
- Format
- Topics and Learning Activities
- Facilitation
- Organization
- Publicity
- Documentation and Evaluation

## Community Collaboration

Group Connections can help build:

- Community awareness
- Community buy-in
- Recruitment of parents



When collaborating with other community agencies, you present a streamlined approach

## Format

- Family activity
- Presentation
- Ongoing group
- Community event
- Parent café



## Topics and Learning Activities

Selecting Topics:

- Parent input
- Current trends



Learning Activities:

- Active
  - Group discussions, brainstorming, role-playing, homework, games, panels, hands-on activities, music and movement
- Passive
  - Presentations, videos, written materials, visual aids, demonstrations

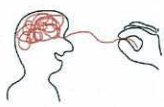
## Parent/Child Interaction

Strategies to engage parents and children together

- Offering activities that accommodate multiple users simultaneously and are accessible by both children and adults
- Appealing to different learning styles, levels of knowledge, and sensory needs
- Including activities that require adults to participate
- Creating labels and signs that are invitational and/or explanatory

*Goal: Provide information and resources that help families extend their learning beyond the group connection*

## Facilitation



Facilitation of groups can:

- Promote experiential learning
- Address the needs of diverse individuals
- Guide groups through different stages of development
- Foster an inclusive and non-hierarchical approach to the educational process

Strategies for group leadership:

- Use open-ended questions to spur discussion
- Invite parents to share information, ideas, opinions, experiences, observations, and feelings
- Use active listening

## Organization

- Daytime/Evening/Weekend
- Convenient locations
- Review attendance data from previous events
- Childcare
- Refreshments or a meal
- Incentives



## Publicity

Publicity should explain what families will be able to experience and gain from the group connection

- Family-friendly title
- If offering incentives or refreshments, communicate it


Ways to publicize:

- Personal invitations from parent educators
- Family to family invitations
- Newsletters
- Fliers
- Texts
- Signage
- Emails
- Phone Calls
- Social Media

## Documentation and Evaluation

- Participant feedback
- Planning committee feedback
- School personnel feedback

Evaluation of group connections allows planning members to process the strengths and challenges of the offering and to plan for successful group experiences in the future



## Preparation Checklist

**Preparation**

> Review:

- Previous group connection plans and records related to this format and topic
- Participant feedback and surveys
- Budgets
- Attendance records
- Program requirements

> Consider:

- Venue requirements, restrictions, and availability for setting up
- Family involvement factors such as schedule conflicts, refreshments, incentives, transportation, accessibility, and child care
- Time frames for purchasing and coordinating materials and refreshments
- Content of publicity and channels for getting the word out
- Facilitation materials that support the format and intended audience
- Supplies for participants and presenters (microphones, projectors, pens, craft materials, and so on)

## Planning Guide and Record

**GROUP CONNECTION**  
*planning guide and record*

Parent Educators: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Family activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Community need: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent call: \_\_\_\_\_

Formal check at first event:  Informal check:  Orientation:  Family activity:  Community need:  Parent call:

One: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Targeted age of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of families expected: \_\_\_\_\_

Budget: \_\_\_\_\_

Child care: \_\_\_\_\_

Refreshments: \_\_\_\_\_

Incentives: \_\_\_\_\_

Activities, presentations, discussions, or events

Areas of emphasis (check all that apply):

Parent-child interaction  Development-oriented parenting  Family well-being

Notes: What will we focus on at this group connection?

Topics and key points from parent educator resources and other sources:

Prompts and questions for sharing observations, questions, or reactions:

Learning activities (attach additional sheets as needed):

## Family Feedback

### Group Connection Feedback

Your evaluation of the group connection helps us build on its strengths and make plans to meet families' needs in the future.

Page of this group connection: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mark the box that best matches your response.

	Not at all	No	Somewhat	Yes	Yes, I totally agree
1. I learned new information about child development and parenting.					
2. I plan to use the information in my daily life.					
3. I feel more confident about parenting.					
4. I feel my own personal knowledge was respected.					
5. The group facilitators helped us learn from each other.					
6. I feel more connected to other parents.					
7. I would recommend this group connection to a friend.					

The thing I liked best was \_\_\_\_\_

The thing I'd like to change is \_\_\_\_\_

What I'm very interested in a group connection on these topics \_\_\_\_\_

## Time to Share

For events you've helped plan:

- How have you welcomed families or made them feel comfortable?
- What format did you use?
- What topics have you focused on?
- Have you offered ice breaker activities?
- How have you helped families build social connections?
- Has the parent participation made your program or school stronger?
- Have families become more empowered?

## Activity Suggestions

- PINGO Game Card
  - Parent Involvement Nurtures Great Opportunities
- Back-to-School Conference Questions
- Back-to-School Scavenger Hunt



*It is vital that the overall experience of the group connection reinforce its name by helping parents feel connected both to other parents and to the program as well*

A photograph showing a group of approximately ten diverse parents of various ethnicities and ages, all smiling and looking towards the camera. They are dressed in casual clothing.

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A photograph of a herd of elephants in a savanna setting, with one elephant in the foreground looking towards the camera.