

2015-2017 High-Quality Prekindergarten Grant Program

Liberty-Eylau Pre-Kindergarten Center (LEA) will develop and implement a parent and family engagement plan to achieve and maintain high levels of parent and family involvement and positive family attitudes toward education.

Prior to school beginning, the LEA will send home a parent survey to determine the needs of parents and community members. After gathering data from the survey, the LEA will develop and implement a parent and family engagement plan. At the end of the year, another survey will be completed to help determine the effectiveness of the parent and family engagement plan.

I. Facilitate family-to-family support

The LEA will embrace the individuality and uniqueness of families. At open house, the LEA will partner with someone who speaks Spanish and someone who signs to recognize the diversity of the population we serve. Throughout the year, to encourage the use of home-educational resources, our school website will list free educational apps and programs which parents can use with their children. Each homeroom will have a family backpack which will rotate being sent home for a family to use and document through photos and a journal with their child. These photo journals will be returned at the end of the year to help illustrate the child's progress during the year. Specifically for children who have behavioral needs, Sandbox Learning (a website with social stories which can be individualized with a child's own name) will be used to create a book which can be sent home for a child as a gift after being read with the teacher or counselor allowing parents to reinforce what has been taught at school.

Special events will also be organized and held during the school year to recognize, celebrate, and respect the uniqueness of our students and their families. For instance, the LEA's book fair lists specific days for mothers, fathers, and grandparents to come to the book fair with their children.

A variety of experiences and activities are provided throughout the year to meet the needs and interests of the population the LEA serves. Examples are curriculum nights, fun days, book fairs, holiday programs, and monthly recognition programs such as the "Star Student" classroom programs which allow individual students to showcase their background including family.

In order to better understand and work with our diverse population, our staff receives professional development enhancing their understanding of how to better communicate with our families and recognize their strengths and uniqueness. Some of our past training has included Ruby Payne's, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," and "Hear Our Cry: Boys in Crisis," by Paul Slocumb.

II. Establish a network of community resources

One component of the LEA's family engagement plan will be to create a foundation for collaboration of mutual partners. Specifically the LEA will work to create a partnership with parents, high school student volunteers, local churches, community leaders, local business, and civic organizations.

Parents and teachers are encouraged to join the Parent Teacher Association which organizes several activities throughout the year, such as "Donuts for Dads," "Muffins for Moms," "Grandparents' Day," and Teacher Appreciation Week. Besides joining the PTA, at open house, the LEA will encourage parents to sign up as volunteers for the school to enhance the understanding of the school's needs as well as ways parents can assist with those needs. Flyers will be handed out explaining how parents can be better advocates for their children in and out of the classroom. Parents will also be asked to schedule a half day to come and be a "teacher-helper" for the day. This will allow teachers to model teaching strategies which the parent can then utilize at home with his or her child.

In addition to partnering with parents, the LEA will continue to partner with local churches. This partnership allows us to better advertise upcoming school events and identify needs which the local churches can help the LEA meet. In the past, local churches have helped our LEA by provided clothing for our clothing closet and giving information about when families can seek help at the churches' food pantries.

We partner with local businesses to help meet each other's needs. For instance, local businesses often donate food for special events at our school. In return, we attempt to patronize those businesses.

Civic organizations are also our partners. The Junior League helps our students with their "Shoes for the Souls" program, and the Rotary Club recognizes our teachers of the year at an annual banquet. As an attempt to provide our students with inspiration, we often ask local community leaders (such as members of Leadership Texarkana) to come and read to our "Little Leopards" on a monthly basis. Not to be overlooked, we take our students to "volunteer" by singing to local senior citizen groups. We want our babies to understand the importance of giving back.

III. Increase family participation in decision making

Parents will be asked to participate on school committees such as the Parental Involvement Committee, the Campus Improvement Plan Committee, and as the Parent Liaison Member of the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee. Another partnership which will aid parents ability to participate in activities such as curriculum nights will be high school leadership class volunteers to help supervise/babysit children while parents are learning resources and strategies they can use with their children.

IV. Equip families with tools to enhance and extend learning

The LEA promotes a culture of learning that is child-centered and family driven. The year begins with pre-registration. When entering our school, parents and students see a bulletin board showcasing positive family examples (i.e., parents reading to students, parents and students showing affection through hugs, parents eating with students in the cafeteria, students waving bye to parents in the car line, etc.) Parents are given information on how to help children get off to a good start in school. During the summer, in a welcome letter, parents are introduced to the teacher for the student. At open house, parents are introduced to the principal and counselor. The importance of communication with the school is stressed whether for attendance problems, academic struggles, behavioral challenges, or emotional needs. The idea that simply knowing the family is going through some sort of crisis will help teachers be more aware, understanding, and sensitive to a child's needs during that special time can help comfort families. Our LEA partners with the local head start and Opportunities to smoothly transition students from early learning childhood settings through meetings and opportunities for visits. All this leads to orientation and the beginning of school.

Using newsletters, our school website, teacher webpages, designated parental emails and text-messages, phone calls, progress reports and report cards, teachers share learning activities, progress, and concerns with parents. Monthly counseling newsletters explain the monthly guidance topic (supporting social, emotional, and behavioral skills) to parents and encourage reinforcement of the topic at home while providing parents with age-appropriate developmental expectations for children.

Throughout the year, the LEA reinforces the idea that our school is the first step to college graduation. Our students learn which year they will be the high school graduating class. They take photos of themselves wearing a cap and gown and even

costumes of potential careers of their choosing. The last month of the school year, our students take a tour of the next school they will attend. Then the last week of the school year, high school seniors walk the halls of the LEA wearing their caps and gowns to the cheers of our young students.

V. Provide ongoing professional development

The LEA establishes and articulates expectations. Utilizing the parental and community survey from the beginning of the year, the LEA will provide parenting workshops for topics identified as needed. Specific presenters will be asked to come to our LEA and speak with parents. For instance, a nutritionist can provide information to parents on what healthy snacks can be bought with WIC and easily prepared. A pediatrician might come and discuss physical needs children have (i.e., hours of needed sleep), developmental expectations, and what to do or who to contact in case of any “red flags.”

Besides workshops, courses can be taught on the LEA campus. In partnership with adult education from a local college and collaborating with area businesses (i.e., Texarkana Employment Office, local industry such as Cooper Tire and the two area paper mills, the Chamber of Commerce, and area hospitals), courses can be offered on the LEA campus to meet needs identified by these businesses and our students’ parents. An additional resource the LEA can utilize to help parents is the availability of one of our district’s technology specialists. The technology specialists will offer technology workshops for which parents can sign up to take. Regardless whether it is a technology workshop or an adult education class, audience members will be asked to provide feedback using a survey to identify how improvement can be made. These evening and daytime workshops will be offered to provide families with evidence-based and data-driven training as needed. These workshops will be an ongoing means to build positive relationships between families and school.

The LEA’s library will have open library times for parents to come choose books to check out or to utilize a computer.

VI. Evaluate family engagement efforts

The LEA evaluates and improves family engagement efforts. During teacher orientation, teachers will be provided a parental contact log to maintain throughout the year. The idea that parents should be contacted not just to express concerns but to acknowledge praise will be stressed. Teachers will also be trained at the beginning of the year on how to best utilize their teacher webpages to keep parents informed. At open house, parents will be encouraged to sign-up for the teacher’s group e-mail.

At the end of the year, the parents and community will again be surveyed to identify needs met, additional concerns, progress made, and ways to improve to further engage families in the educational process. This “Parent and Family Engagement Plan” will be an integral part of our Campus Improvement Plan.