



Family Engagement

Family Engagement through Annual Events A Collaborative Effort!

Begin With Us, Child Care and Preschool, Inc. has many family engagement activities throughout the year. As the Pennsylvania Standards for Early Learning state: "The school experience consists of much more than the academic content that teachers share with students every day. School success is also dependent on children's ability to learn, their interest in learning, and the connections between schools, community agencies and **families** that enable the child to learn in a way that supports his or her own learning style, needs and home experience." The Big Idea for PA Standard 20.1 is one of our main focus points in family engagement initiatives: "The relationship between the family and school personnel is a critical foundation to children's success in school." We believe that children are motivated to learn and succeed when they see positive participation by family members.

At our centers, one new family activity that has been recently added to our list of events is the "Family Yard Sale". Through a survey and group e-mail dialog, parents told us that they would appreciate the use of our space to hold this event. We used our parking lot on a Saturday for the sale. We offered a space and tables to parents and other community agencies to participate. We provided free advertising for the event in our local newspaper and distributed fliers within the community and via e-mail. Twenty families participated and we had a great turn out of purchasers from the community. Many parents were thankful, as it was a great way to give and get children's items. We also had a table with Pre-K Counts information and applications available. As part of the family event we asked everyone to donate an item for a bake sale and we sold lunch items for the event. All food proceeds from the food sales were donated to the Upper Nile Institute for Appropriate Technology (UNIFAT) for their children's school in Uganda, Africa! The day was fun and many people benefitted from the group event.

Another important annual tradition that we hold for our Pre-K and Preschool parents at the beginning of each school year to engage our families is "Parent and Child Day". Parents and children are encouraged to come and explore their new classroom, meet the teachers, and participate in learning center activities together. This day is a wonderful opportunity for parents and children to meet and greet fellow students and their parents. Families are also asked to bring in family photos to be displayed in the classroom scrapbook. The open door to parents helps to ease the transition for the children and their parents, especially due to the fact that children see their parents accepting the environment firsthand. And, their family pictures that are placed in the classroom scrapbook bring everyone together as one big family. This year we had approximately 100 parents attend our "Parent Child Day". What a wonderful way to welcome parents and students to the start of an exciting new school year!

Photos from "Parent Child Day"



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Begin with Us
Blair County

*Submitted by Donita Hord,
director*

In order to keep the parents involved, **Begin With Us** plans at least one family engagement activity a month, which include: Pre-K classroom field trips to the farm, circus, and local theatre performances, which parents are encouraged to chaperone. We also hold classroom parties, such as an Apple Party, Harvest Party, Thanksgiving Feast, Valentines Day Party, Shamrock Party, Spring Party/Egg Hunt, End of the Year Party and many more! **Begin With Us** participates in our local Hollidaysburg Halloween Parade, where families are invited to walk along in the parade or ride on our Great Pumpkin float! During the "Week Of the Young Child", we hold an event at our local ice skating rink, which is open to our parents and the community to enjoy a free day of skating and lessons! During our annual "Winter Holiday Party", the children sing ethnic holiday songs for their families, and they enjoy an evening filled with seasonal activities. A new family event we are holding is "Sundae Monday" where parents can join along with the class in making ice cream sundaes when they arrive to pick up their child at the end of the day.

We host three yearly morning events, "Grandparent's Breakfast", "Muffins for Moms", and "Donuts for Dads". Parents and grandparents can attend the breakfast before work, so it's a great way to start their special day and make a fun, memorable craft signifying their relationship. In closing the school year, we hold "Pre-Kindergarten Graduation", and a fun filled "Family Picnic" at Delgrosso's Amusement Park! The focus of each event is to bring families together in order to create a strong connection to our school, other families, and our teaching staff. Parents get to know each other well, support their young learners, and bond with our teachers. We end up creating a learning community which follows our students through their lifetime of learning. As a result, not only are families brought closer together in our classrooms and community, but teachers gain a better understanding of the entire family context, the children are extremely comfortable with their learning environment, and friendships and memories are created that truly last a lifetime!



Field Trip to the Mishler Theatre



Galactic Ice Skate Party



Breakfast for Grandparents



Donuts for Dads

In closing, none of the events that we offer are costly but they involve our entire staff from administration to teaching staff to maintenance working together creatively to make them happen. We share our ideas and talents as we plan most of the events and activities before the start of each school year and then run with the yearlong plan. Although most are annual, we tweak and add as families tell us through surveys and dialog what their desires are for their children. We've learned that it's important to really listen and then plan, plan, plan. We always discuss the details and assignments for upcoming events at our monthly Management Meetings and then at monthly Teaching Staff Meetings. Also, over the years we have gotten to know which events are successful by the number of people that participate and their feedback. Feedback afterwards is just as important as during the planning stages. Feedback helps fine tune each event. We want nothing more than for everyone to feel welcome and to grow during their days spent with us. Looking back over the years, we have noticed how much our extra efforts have made a difference in our community. There's no better feeling than when children and parents have gone through the program and then tell stories years later of a special moment that we helped make happen!

A great beginning never ends!