

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool Family and Community Partnerships Plan

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool offers families opportunities and support for growth to enable them to identify strengths, needs, interests, and solutions. The objective is to support families as they identify and meet their goals, nurture the development of their children, and advocate for support of family and children within the local community. With this goal in mind, the program will promote parental involvement through trainings, family activities, parent committees, parenting classes, policy committee, volunteering, and becoming involved in their child's educational experience. The partnership between family and school is an ongoing relationship between staff and family.

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool staff strive to identify family concerns, goals, strengths, as well as necessary services and support. The Family Services and teaching staff will assist the family in its own efforts to meet family goals and improve the condition and quality of family life. This partnership is an on-going process of relationship-building between staff and family, with staff assisting each family in assuming an active and confident role in providing the optimum environment for each child's growth and improving the condition and quality of family life.

Bringing awareness to the community at large, regarding the needs of the families is critical. We strive to create greater understanding by involving community agencies and businesses with our program. The staff work as advocates in the process and have established a system to engage in collaborative partnership-building with the parents and community stakeholders.

For monitoring purposes, documentation will be kept on all parent activities. In order to provide an effective program for children, staff and parents will work together to establish a communication system for sharing information. Support is provided to families entering and leaving the Preschool.

Community Assessment:

The community assessment defines the basis for determining which families the program serves, how and what services are delivered, hours and location of services, and community advocacy issues.

Information gathered for the community assessment is used to provide demographic data on low income families and to determine education, health, nutrition, social service, and child care needs, as well as available community resources and service gaps in the community. Information gained from Preschool families through their development of goals and the family partnership agreement will also be used to supplement the data that is collected.

To the extent that resources allow, program design options will be driven by the identified needs in the community assessment. Selection criteria may change based

on the finding from the community assessment.

The community assessment is updated annually with a full review done every three years.

Communication:

In order to provide an effective program for children, staff and parents must work cooperatively to establish a communication system for sharing information.

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool staff provides information to parents regarding program policy and operations on a regular basis through:

- Preschool website
- Preschool meetings and events
- Home visits/ parent conferences
- Parent training
- Newsletters
- Policy Committee
- Surveys
- Results of Health and Dental screenings
- Telephone calls
- Written notices
- Open door policy
- Primary language communication when possible

The Family Services staff and teaching staff keep documentation of contact with Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool families on file.

In addition to the above-mentioned means of communication with families, the Family Services office in conjunction with administrative staff creates a Parent Handbook for each child. This handbook is a thorough review of policies, procedures, practices, and resources of the ORS Preschool. In addition, the handbook details community agencies and resources that pertain to preschool-aged children. This handbook is updated annually.

Parent Orientation:

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool conducts a Parent Orientation during the first thirty days of school. During this meeting:

- Administrative staff meets with the families to discuss how the program operates.
- Parent questions and concerns are addressed
- Parents are encouraged to meet other parents and begin those connections worth other preschool parents.

Parents who do not attend the Parent Orientation are provided with an agenda and

asked to call or email staff if they have questions or concerns. Parents whose child enrolls after Parent Orientation receive their orientation at the first home visit with the teacher.

ORS Preschool also conducts an Open House for parents to visit the classroom, talk to teaching staff and other faculty about their child's educational program. This is done during the first quarter of the school year.

Parent Participation:

The Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool provides many opportunities for parents to become involved in the decision making component of the program.

- Parent meetings are conducted throughout the school year in a variety of ways; Breakfast Club, trainings, and family events.
- Families are encouraged to volunteer to help plan and carry out activities during special family events.
- Parent meetings and events are held at different times during the day to ensure all parents have the opportunity to participate.
- Parent trainings are offered throughout the school year. Family Services staff plans and makes arrangements for the training.
- The Preschool elects a Policy Committee from parents who attend the Orientation meeting at the beginning of the year. The Preschool Policy Committee is made up of at least 51% Head Start Parents. This committee is also the parent decision-making body for the Preschool.
- Parents of ORS Preschool are informed yearly about the School-Home Connection program where they are provided activities that are pre-packaged to do with their child at home. These "backpack" programs are provided in both English and Spanish.
- The Preschool also has representation of parents on review committees such as the annual self-assessment, SACS accreditation, and the TSIPP review team.
- The Preschool Policy Committee elects one member and one alternate to attend the Anderson County Policy Council, which is the primary parent decision-making body for the total Head Start grant. The council shares overall responsibility for policy making with the grantee, which is the Anderson County Board of Education (ACBOE).
- The Preschool elects a representative.

Parent Input:

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool parents are provided the opportunity and encouraged to give input into activities to be used in the classroom.

- ORS Preschool parents are invited to attend two parent-teacher conferences at their child's school. These usually occur in the fall and the spring of each year. This practice helps instill the importance of having open communication with the child's teacher and school employees. A parent may request a parent-teacher conference whenever the need arises.
- ORS Preschool staff makes at least two home visits per year. The first home visit is to meet with the family before the child comes to school. The second home-visit is to report on the child's progress, check in with the family, and keep the communication lines open between home and school.
- During home visits, parent conferences, and parent meetings, parents are given an opportunity to make suggestions on activities for preschool children. The Preschool curriculum is discussed and results of the formal assessment; the Brigance Early Learning Profile (given three times per year) and formative assessments given throughout the year.
- Parents have the opportunity for contact with preschool staff at any time.
- Each family signs a Permissions form at the beginning of the school year that specifically asks them what they want their child to learn during the school year. The classroom teacher uses this information to plan the individual program for the child and to develop a conversation with the family about education. This is also updated at every conference and parents are encouraged to communicate to the teacher what they feel are educational needs at any time throughout the year.

Parent Training:

- The Family Services staff organizes parent training with the intent to educate parents in order to improve parenting skills. Other community agencies are involved in presenting, when beneficial. Parent training events are designed to meet the needs expressed by these groups and from information gathered from parents, in the Parent Interest Inventory.
- Training classes are arranged by the Family Services staff. Information gathered from the parent interest inventory is used to determine the type of trainings to be offered. The purpose of these workshops is built around the knowledge that parents already possess a wealth of experiences and skills. Community resources are used for their expertise in different fields to enhance the parents learning experience. The goal is that parents increase their knowledge and skills.
- The Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool offers parents opportunities to participate in family literacy programs by attending parent trainings on the topic. Parents are encouraged to enroll their child in the Dollywood Imagination Library to receive free books.

- Families are given information about health and educational programs through:
 - Newsletter
 - Parent information boards
 - Preschool parent meetings
 - Parent training
 - Family Services staff
- Parent meetings and Policy Committee functions/meetings are other ways that parents can acquire skills. By serving on a policy making board parents learn how a federal program operates from program planning to final budget approval.
- Parents are provided information about available health, nutrition, dental and mental health resources through home-visits, parent meetings, newsletters, and correspondence.
- Family Services staff partner with families to make referrals to community agencies when needed and explain how to access resources. Family Services follows up with family to make sure the service was adequate to meet the needs and to determine effectiveness of said agency.
- The program understands the importance of fathers being involved in their children's lives as well as their educational experiences. Our program provides opportunities for fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives by providing events, including Dad's Night Out once a year.

Oak Ridge Schools' Preschool believes that family involvement in the education of their child is crucial to the educational success of their child. Often ORS Preschool is the first experience parents have with being involved in an educational setting in a non-threatening way, and it is our goal to create a positive partnership with the family that will continue throughout their child's educational career.