

X. Family Participation

A. Early Intervention in Massachusetts is a family-centered system. EI services are provided in a collaborative manner with families and EI service providers working as partners. Family members are encouraged to be active participants in every component of the Early Intervention service system. On an individual level family members are involved in determining and participating in services for their child and family. On the program level, families are encouraged to advise and participate in the development and monitoring of policies, procedures and practices. Family members may choose to participate in these advisory functions as a group or as individuals.

B. To ensure comprehensive family participation, all members of the EI service team share responsibility for providing an environment in which such participation can occur. Early Intervention programs provide multiple and varied opportunities for family participation that ensure responsiveness to the diverse needs and interests of the families in the service population and enhance the collaborative nature of service delivery.

C. In order to support family participation throughout the Early Intervention system, a program shall be able to demonstrate its efforts in the following activities:

1. Ensure that families understand the core values (see Section I of these standards) and range of individualized options, service delivery and supports.
2. Establish a mechanism to share information about services, supports and opportunities with all families on a regular basis, not only on the first visit.
3. Develop ongoing mechanisms that seek input from a diverse and representative number of families and incorporate the mechanisms into its policy and procedure/operations manual as part of its administrative organizational plan.

4. Ensure that all families are aware of the existence of and have access to the program's policy/procedure/operations manual. The program will assume the cost of copying specific policies on request.
5. Ensure that a diverse and representative number of families are invited to participate in the program's annual evaluation which should include areas such as:
 - a. Feedback on staff performance
 - b. Evaluation of program services
 - c. Review of the IFSP process
 - d. Options of family participation
 - e. Review of transition procedures
6. Respond to written suggestions and evaluations offered by families within 7 days. Families who have difficulty in producing written documentation may request assistance.
7. Families and program staff will work together to develop an action plan to address concerns.
8. Include a diverse and representative number of families in any ongoing program development initiatives, such as the development of goals and objectives for the annual plan, service delivery task groups, modifications/updates to the policies and procedures, etc.
9. Develop mechanisms to share information about the EI statewide system and opportunities for family participation including but not limited to the following:
 - make the Parent Leadership Project website available to families (www.eiplp.org)
 - distribute *Parent Perspective* newsletter
 - invite a parent to accompany EI staff to an ICC (Interagency Coordinating Council) related activity
 - sponsor a parent to attend the MEIC (Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium) Conference
 - inform families of statewide trainings

- encourage family participation on working committees

D. To assist in the above efforts, the program shall:

1. Designate a Staff Liaison (an EI staff member) to facilitate the involvement of a diverse and representative number of families and serve as a link between the staff and families
2. Invite and support a parent currently receiving EI services to be the contact person for the EI Parent Leadership Project; this parent contact will share information with the Parent Leadership Project and may also share information with program staff and families enrolled in the program.
3. Notify the Parent Leadership Project of the names of both the designated EI staff member and the current parent contact by calling 1-877-35-EI-PLP.
4. Invite a Parent Leadership Project Coordinator Team Member to attend at least one EI staff meeting annually.
5. Cover reasonable administrative expenses such as copying and distribution of information requested by families

E. Family Involvement Activities

1. Family members enrolled in Early Intervention programs may choose to participate in a variety of family involvement activities or join together in a formal group, called a PAC (Parent Advisory Council), in order to meet the diverse needs and interests of families in the program.

The program will ensure that families are informed that they have the option to form a PAC if one is not already established. Information and support is available to programs and families through the Parent Leadership Project (PLP).

2. The program has the responsibility to support a PAC or other family involvement activities by:

- a. Ensuring information regarding activities is communicated to all enrolled families

- b. Encouraging activities that are responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the program
- c. Designating an EI staff member who will be a link between the staff and the PAC
- d. Covering reasonable administrative expenses
- e. Copying and postage distribution expenses for family involvement activities or a PAC newsletter, if published
- f. Assisting family members to problem solve solutions to overcome barriers to family involvement
- g. Assisting with the management of funds raised