



# Engaging Families as Learning Partners

Building partnerships with families and engaging them in their children’s literacy learning can lead to a lifetime of benefits.



## A Culture of Collaboration

When families participate in their child’s literacy development, children have improved achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates (Segal & Martin-Chang, 2018). Begin building home-school literacy partnerships by working to initiate a culture of collaboration with families:

- Communicate early in the year with parents and caregivers and work to build trusting relationships so you can leverage their ongoing support.
- Focus initial communications on accomplishments and positive observations.
- Provide clear paths and options for family engagement that are sensitive to constraints families may be experiencing.
- Take into account local considerations and collaborate with families to make plans for connecting school to home that work for your community.

## The Role of Families

One of the most impactful practices is to encourage children’s parents and caregivers to think of themselves as educators. In addition to providing opportunities for families to become involved within the school day, we can partner with them to support their children beyond the classroom.

Share key practices with families to support their children’s literacy success:

- Inform parents and caregivers of the cumulative effect of missing school and intervene to support families facing challenges with **regular attendance**.
- Provide strategies for working with children to develop their **oral language**.
- Model how to interact with children while **reading together**.
- Send home ideas for **authentic reading and writing opportunities**.

### Professional Learning

#### RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

“The most important practice in any family engagement initiative is to link that initiative to student learning and development.”

—Thiers (2017)

## Let's Talk

Through conversations with their children, parents and caregivers help them understand word meanings, sentence structure, and social language. Strong oral language skills are critical for reading success.

Encourage families to support oral language development by:

- Playing with language, singing songs, and telling stories.
- Talking with their children throughout the day—on the way to school, at the grocery store, and during shared meals.
- Modeling the social aspects of language, such as greeting people, taking turns speaking, and speaking politely.

## Read It Again!

Reading together is a powerful mechanism for promoting literacy development. When parents and caregivers make shared reading time interactive and fun, children become successful, motivated readers.

Promote effective strategies for families to read together:

- Demonstrate fluent reading with prosody, expression, and enthusiasm. Show how to interact with children while reading together and sounding out words.
- Give family members ideas for types of questions to ask while reading.
- Provide ideas for types of books to read across genres, both for children to read independently and for families to read aloud. Reading aloud books two years above children's reading level exposes them to vocabulary and more complex syntax that they will need in later years and develops comprehension.

## Be a Bookworm

The amount that children read by themselves and with others strongly contributes to how well they read and how much they enjoy reading (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2014).

To promote reading volume:

- Ensure that families have access to an abundance of books during the school year and over the summer.
- Coach parents and caregivers on how to consider children's interests and allow them to select related texts, including magazines, graphic novels, and online resources.
- Encourage families to gradually stretch reading sessions over time.





# Communicating with Families

Keep families informed of their child’s progress and communicate ways you can work together to meet children’s learning needs throughout the year.

## A Great Start

For some children, starting a new school year can be both exciting and stressful. The first day of school can also be emotional for children’s families.

Consider these suggestions for welcoming new families into the school community:

- Mail a personal letter or post card to children and let them know you are looking forward to the first day of school.
- Call children’s parents or caregivers to introduce yourself and answer any questions they may have about the first week of school.
- Make sure to translate any communication or handouts and have translators available for meetings or conferences, if needed.

## Meet the Families

Use your time at back-to-school night to meet children’s family members and set the tone for the year.

- Let parents know how often they should expect to hear from you, and how and when they can reach you.
- Convey your homework policy, making sure to stress the importance of allowing for unstructured play, talking with children, reading together, spending family time together, and getting enough sleep.
- Display *Into Reading* or *¡Arriba la Lectura!* books for parents to browse, and explain the curriculum.
- Inform parents of volunteer opportunities and how they can get involved at the school or in the classroom throughout the year.

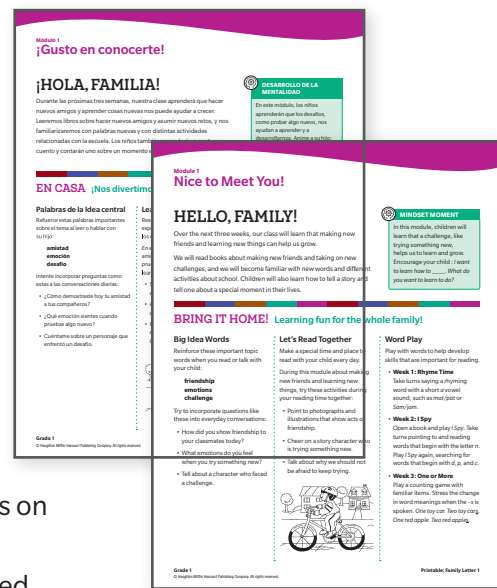
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← **TO TEACHER**  
From the Classroom

“ I have each child write a letter or draw a picture for their parents to read at Back to School Night, and I encourage parents to write a letter back to their child. The class is thrilled to come in and find their parents’ responses the next day!”

## Foster Ongoing Outreach

Communicating to families that they can be active participants in their child's learning and identifying specific ways for them to participate help families understand expectations and feel confident about their role.

- Send home the Printable: **Family Letter** at the beginning of each module to inform family members about what their children are learning and to offer practical ideas for reinforcing skills.
- Post family letters and other communications on a board outside or just inside the classroom door.
- Work with other teachers to host family workshops that focus on specific aspects of support for children at home, such as social-emotional learning, oral language development, shared reading strategies, writing opportunities, and summer learning.
- With appropriate permission, take photos or videos of children and their work to share with parents through text, email, or on a secure class website.
- Invite families to special events where they can view children's projects and watch their performances!



## Share Progress

Hold conferences with parents or caregivers to share observations about children's development and discuss strategies for working together.

- Start with the positive, focusing on the child's particular strengths or progress since your last meeting.
- Share the child's reading and writing goals.
- Review the child's portfolio with classwork that shows growth and includes samples of children's work.
- Share assessment scores and individual reports, making sure to explain where the data come from and what they mean.
- Print a copy of the **Student Growth Report** to point out and discuss the child's growth in reading ability.
- Print a copy of the **Standards Report** to discuss the child's proficiency in areas such as listening comprehension, decoding, and recognizing high-frequency words.
- Provide specific strategies and resources for family members to support their child's learning outside of school.
- Keep a log to record important notes about parent communications and areas that require follow-up.





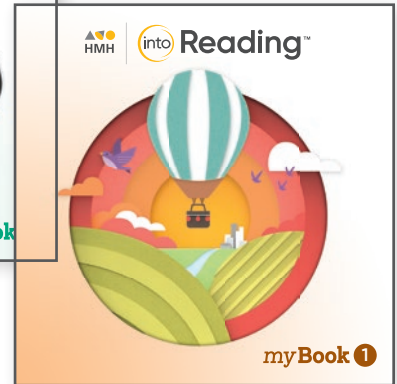
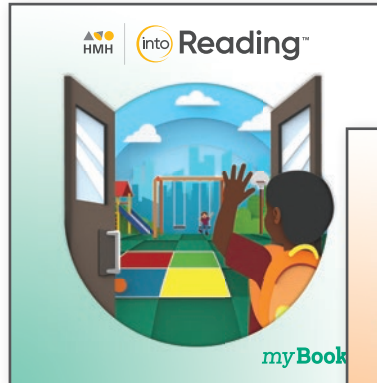
# Learning Beyond the Classroom

Provide resources for parents and caregivers to engage in rich and rewarding literacy experiences beyond the classroom.



## myBook

The write-in, consumable format of **myBook** provides a convenient opportunity to strengthen home-school connections and also to build each child's home library. You may want to have children take home and share literature from their **myBook** after you have completed a volume in class.



## Online Resources

Provide parents, caregivers, and after-school staff with login information so children can access online resources to support their learning. Make sure to be sensitive to Internet safety and access issues, working with caregivers to provide resources that work in their personal circumstances.

### Online Ed eBooks

Provide access to a library of eBooks where children can listen to and read along with the **Read Aloud Books**, **myBook** texts, Grade 1 **Big Books**, and **Start Right Readers** they are using in class.



### Online Ed iRead

Encourage families and caregivers to access **iRead** outside of school so children can practice foundational reading skills at their "just right" level.



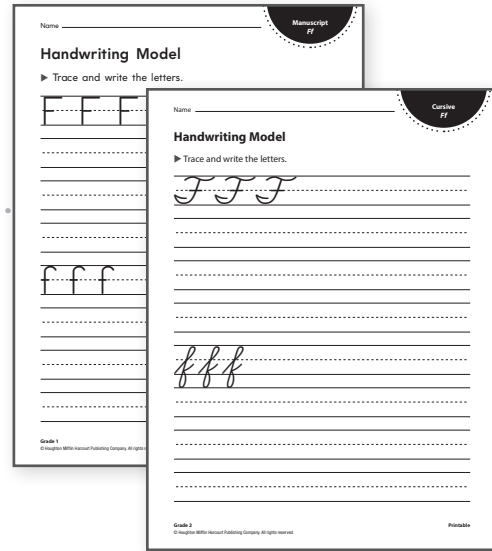


## Printable Resources

Based on children’s individual needs, email or provide copies of Printable Resources available online for family members to use outside of school.

### Handwriting Practice

Support letter formation with the **Handwriting Practice** printables. Use assessment data to target specific letters for children who need to practice.



### Start Right Readers

Share printable versions of **Start Right Readers** available online for children to take home to practice decoding and fluent reading.

- Encourage children to read the texts to different family members, favorite dolls or stuffed animals, or family pets.
- Share the focus sound-spellings and High-Frequency Words with families so they can reinforce them while reading.
- Have children do the activities on the pages that precede and follow each **Start Right Reader** text with a family member to review foundational and comprehension skills.

### Word Lists

Give family members the weekly printable list of **High-Frequency Words** and **Spelling Words** available online, and highlight particular words for the child to practice. Provide ideas for working with the words. For example:

- Play games using the words, such as Tic-Tac-Toe and Go Fish.
- Make a word ring or flashcards to practice reading and spelling the words.
- Have children practice writing the words and writing sentences that use the words.

High-Frequency Words	Spelling Words	
	Basic	Review
close	doze	hum
cold	nose	shut
come	use	frog
done	rose	job
fire	pole	
front	close	
life	June	
name	woke	
small	rule	
times	rode	
		Challenge
	role	wrote
	tune	flute

# Celebrating Success

Communicate children’s successes to their families and celebrate their efforts throughout the year.



## Reach Out to Families

Consider your children’s family members and caregivers when choosing the best strategies for keeping them informed of their children’s successes at school.

- During drop-off or pick-up time, make a brief connection to verbally share targeted feedback.
- Designate a board near the classroom to display children’s writing, projects, or other work for families to view.
- Make a call or send a text, email, or note.
- Share pictures or videos of children’s work via text, email, or a secure class website, making sure that you have appropriate permissions.

## Share Accomplishments

Create or print certificates and send them home to share children’s accomplishments with their families. Use Printable: [Learning Mindset Certificate](#) to recognize children who demonstrate the learning mindset focus for each module. Additional possibilities for certificates include:

- Remarkable Reader
- Word Wizard
- Wonderful Wordsmith
- Handwriting Hero
- Special Speller



“ I try to visit each of my students’ homes at least once during the school year. It’s usually just a quick check-in, but it strengthens my relationship with the entire family and helps me better understand the whole child. ”

# Supporting Summer Learning

At the end of the school year, offer families strategies and resources to keep children’s growing minds active during the summer.

## Beat the Summer Slide

Give families ideas and resources to support children’s literacy development over the summer.

- Encourage families to visit the local library to sign children up for library cards, browse books, and participate in summer reading programs.
- Provide a summer reading list with suggested titles across a variety of genres for families and children to read together.
- Give families a list of questions to ask children before, during, and after reading fiction and nonfiction books.
- Send home printable **Start Right Readers** that focus on sound-spellings children need to practice more.
- Share login information for appropriate literacy apps that children can access.
- Inform families of literacy games they can play together.

## Professional Learning

### RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

“During the summer months, young children lose literacy gains made during the school year, a phenomenon known as “summer slide.” The most important thing teachers can do to reverse this trend is to help families adopt family literacy routines and promote opportunities for families to talk, read, and write together throughout the school year.”

— Hoisington (2017)

## Get Out and About

With sensitivity to families’ circumstances, suggest accessible experiences and local events that will support children to build knowledge, language, and literacy over the summer.

- Participate in story time or other events at the library or in a bookstore.
- Grow a garden or cook a family recipe together.
- Take a walk around the neighborhood, explore a local park, or join a community garden.
- Visit an art or science museum, the zoo, or an aquarium.
- Attend a concert, play, or performance for children.
- Look out for announcements from the local library or department of parks and recreation for more recommendations for events and activities in your area.







# Connecting with the Community

Connect children and their families to the larger community to make learning meaningful, teach important skills, and access resources.

## Take a Trip

Field trips can bring learning to life and provide some of the most memorable learning experiences from the year. Remember that field trips don't have to involve big expenses. There are often destinations within walking distance that allow children to learn more about the community around them. Make the most of a field trip:

- Prepare by reading books, asking questions, and planning focused activities.
- Invite family members to chaperone: to observe their child in a new context, connect with classmates and teachers, and learn about community resources.
- Take photos during field trips to share on a class website or in a family newsletter.
- Reflect after the trip by writing, drawing, and discussing what was learned.

## Invite Classroom Visitors

Reach out to children's family members and other community members to share resources or discuss their expertise. For example, the local librarian can visit to tell children about summer reading programs, or firefighters can visit to answer questions about fire safety. When logistics make a visit unfeasible, set up a video chat to bring the community to the classroom.

Brainstorm questions to ask visitors, take photos, and record what you learn. If visitors wear a uniform or use special tools in their work, invite them to share these items or do a hands-on demonstration of their work for the class.



## Give Back to the Community

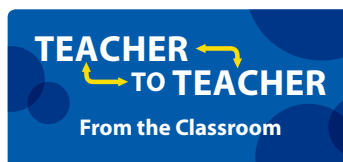
Engage children in service projects to develop social awareness, responsibility, and citizenship. The community can also be a powerful audience. For example, children can do the following:

- Share books at a local preschool or write cards to people at a senior center.
- Write letters to local representatives or their favorite authors.
- Display writing or art at the local library, bookstore, or grocery store.
- Send thank you notes to classroom visitors or field trip coordinators.
- Draft emails to expert sources for research writing and projects.

## Community Connections

Consider these ideas to plan meaningful experiences with the community beyond school.

CLASSROOM VISITORS	FIELD TRIPS
School workers, such as a principal, crossing guard, custodian, nurse, or cafeteria worker, can talk about their role in the school community.	Tour the different areas of school to help children understand the various jobs that people do there.
Family members can share photos and stories or read their child’s favorite book.	Arrange a class picnic at a local park with children’s families.
Local community heroes, such as police officers, sanitation workers, or artists can answer questions about their important jobs and the tools they use.	Take a walk to tour a local fire station, post office, police station, or library.
A dentist, doctor, nurse, P. E. teacher, or nutritionist can answer questions about dental hygiene, eating right, exercising, and staying healthy.	Plan a “get fit” day on the schoolyard or at a local park with fitness activities and healthful snacks.
A person living with a disability can discuss overcoming challenges, or former students who are now in high school or college can come back to tell children about their successes.	Visit the local library where the librarian can help children sign up for a library card, engage them in selecting and reading books, and tell them about available resources.
Local leaders can talk about their work in the community and address children’s questions or concerns.	Plan a visit to a local historical landmark or attend a local sports team’s game.
A scientist, detective, or anyone whose work involves looking closely can share discoveries that came from close examination.	Explore the schoolyard or nearby park with a focus on learning through looking closely.
A farmer or gardener can share how they grow plants for food.	Walk to a local grocery store, farmer’s market, or community garden.
A zoologist or biologist can discuss habitats and ecosystems and answer questions about things animals need to survive.	Take a nature walk to a nearby stream, pond, or city park to observe local wildlife habitats.



“At Back-to-School Night, I survey children’s families to ask if they have a job or hobby related to the topics we’re going to study. My students are so motivated to learn when family members visit!”