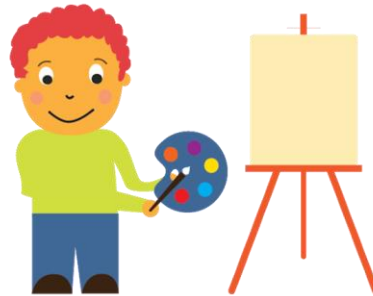# Attendance, Participation and Covid-19:
*Strategies for Maryland's Pre-K Programs
in the 2020-21 Year and Beyond*

With Appreciation

This four-part webinar series is a part of a research study funded by a Maryland State Department of Education Division of Early Childhood grant to the Center for Early Childhood Education and Intervention (CECEI) at the University of Maryland, and its partner organization, Attendance Works.

The purpose of the research study is to understand and improve attendance and participation in early learning. Given the extraordinary circumstances of this coming school year, we believe the information collected from this study is more important than ever. We hope you will attend all four webinars and will consent to respond to the post-webinar surveys. Your responses will inform Pre-K programming statewide and help tailor the webinars to address your priorities.

The remaining three webinars will be held in the fall and spring of the 2020-21 school year and in the summer prior to the 2021-22 school year to help your programs navigate the upcoming school year and prepare for years to come.

The Team

The Center for Early Childhood Education and Intervention at the University of Maryland (CECEI) conducts high quality research on early childhood education and early intervention programs.

Attendance Works is a national non-profit that provides technical assistance, training and advocacy to improve student learning and close equity gaps by focusing on student attendance.

Who is in the Room?

Please type your answers in the chat box.

1. **Your Name**

2. **Your Organization's Name**

3. **Your role:** Early Education Supervisors, Head Start Coordinators, Head Start Directors, Judy Center Coordinators, Community-based Prekindergarten Directors, Other – please identify.

4. **Your programs' primary location(s):** Western, DC Metro, Central, Southern, Eastern Shore

Session Outcomes

The webinar will introduce four elements that are key to successful distance or in-person programming for the challenging 2020-21 School Year. Participants will learn how focusing on these elements can help to:

✔ identify students and families who need support because of Covid-19 or for other reasons;

✔ guide program and resource choices so that they support families and students equitably and effectively; and

✔ ensure access to learning opportunities for all students.

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Agenda

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Expanding how we measure who shows up and why

III. Putting into practice an expanded set of "attendance" measures

IV. Monitoring when students miss too often

V. Summing it all up

Attendance in Pre-K Matters – A Lot

Researchers found that Pre-K students who attended regularly (missing 0-1 days a month) are more likely to master these kindergarten readiness skills:

- Math
- Letter Recognition
- Pre-Literacy
- Social and Emotional Development
- and were far more likely to read on grade level by 3rd grade.

Gottfried, M. (2015). Chronic Absenteeism in the Classroom Context: Effects on Achievement. *Urban Education, 54* (1), 3-34.

Ehrlich, Stacy B., et al. University of Chicago, 2014, pp. 1–64, *Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools Relationship with Outcomes and Reasons for Absence.*

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Regular Attendance is Harder for Some Children and It Matters More

Children who live in poverty:

- are **4 times** more likely to be absent in Kindergarten than their highest income peers.

- are more likely to lack health care, transportation, stable housing, food, clothes, and other supports that make getting to school more likely.

For children living in poverty, the negative impact of absences on literacy development is **75% greater** than for their non-poor peers.

(Romero & Lee 2007 and Ready, Doug 2010)

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Critical Roles for Pre-K Programs

Pre-K programs:

- ✓ Build Literacy and Numeracy Skills

- ✓ Build Student Attendance Muscles

- ✓ Teach the Importance of Routine

- ✓ Build Family-School Relationships
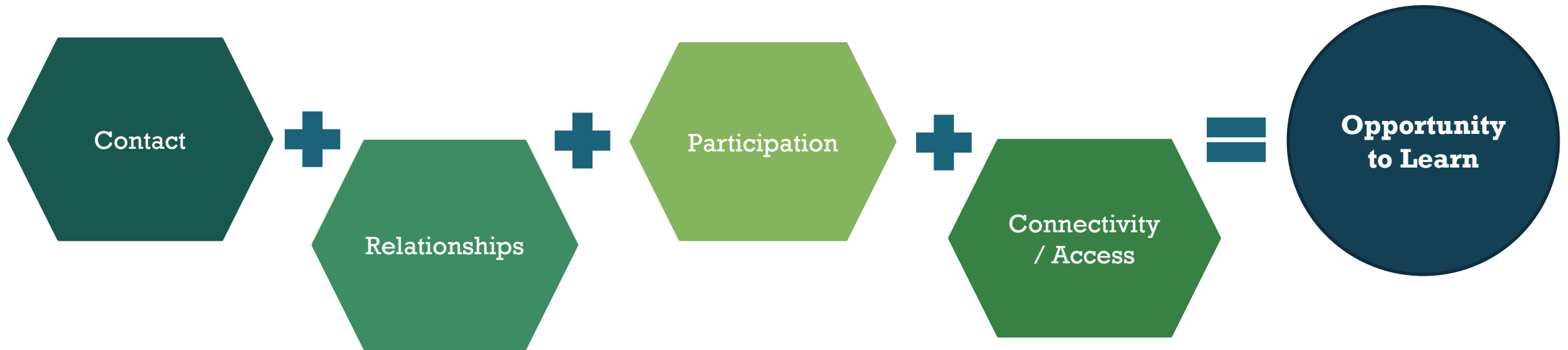
- ✓ Provide Support and Resources

Poll:

What level of attendance do you anticipate for the coming year?

Attendance mattered before Covid-19, but what about in school year 2020-21?

How do we measure the opportunity to learn?

Contact **+** Relationships **+** Participation **+** Connectivity / Access **=** **Opportunity to Learn**

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Four Key Concepts for School Year 2020-21

Contact
Programs have working contact and back-up information for each enrolled student and their family.

Connectivity / Access
Students and families can access their program's learning materials and opportunities, whether they are packets, home-based resources or require a computer, software, and internet access.

Relationships
Students and families are connected, supported and engaged in reciprocal, problem-solving relationships.

Participation
Students participate in meaningful learning opportunities.

Contact

Element 1: Contact

Why is it important?
- Without contact information:
  - Program staff can't know what families and children need.
  - Families and children can't stay informed about learning opportunities under Covid-19 conditions.

What are the equity implications?
- Families who must move often, are homeless, have limited financial resources, or have a non-English home language are more likely to have missing contact information and also to struggle due to Covid-19.

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Element 1: Contact

What do we need to know?

- Do we have working contact information for all of our families?
- Do we have a working back-up contact for all of our families?

What do we need to do?

- Regularly update contact information.
- Make up-to-date contacts available to relevant staff.
- Focus on families with missing information and haven't been reached.

How do we know if we are successful?

- We have working contact information for 100% of our families.

Connectivity / Access

Element 2:
Connectivity & Access

Why is it important?

- No access to on-line, packet-based, or in-person programming results in no connection to learning opportunities.

What are the equity implications?

- Poverty, geographic location, home-language and special needs make connectivity to learning opportunities more difficult.

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Element 2:
Connectivity & Access

What do we need to know?

- Do all families have the ability to access learning opportunities?

What do we need to do?

- Identify families who don't have access to learning opportunities, provide resources to connect them, and/or add learning opportunities they can access.

How will we know we are successful?

- % of families with technology (have computer, software, and internet).
- % of families that have received training and support for utilizing technology
- % of families that have received in-home learning resources (books, project packets and smart-phone based e-learning technology)

Relationships

Element 3: Relationships

Why are they important?

- When students and families have real relationships with staff they are more likely to engage in program offerings.

What are the equity implications?

- Students and families who aren't connected are more likely to be those who are challenged by geography, poverty, language and disabilities.

Element 3: Relationships

What do we need to know?
- Does each family and student have an on-going, positive, and supportive relationship with one or more members of our staff?

What do we need to do?
- Inventory relationships to identify connected and disconnected families; reach out to build meaningful two-way communication, as needed.
- Ensure families can participate in and influence program decisions.

How will we know we are successful?
- High/increasing % of families report positive relationships with school staff.
- High/increasing % of families report providing program input.
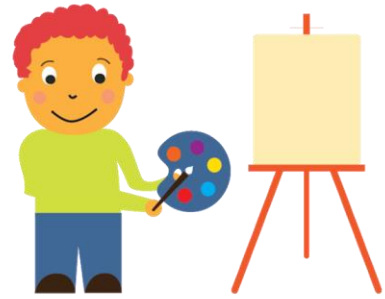
Participation

Element 4: Participation

Why is it important?

- Students who participate regularly are more likely to be ready for kindergarten and on-grade level learning.

What are the equity implications?

- Families whose contact information is unknown, don't have access/connectivity to learning opportunities, or good relationships with program staff, are not likely to be able to participate.

Element 4: Participation

What do we need to know?

- Are all of our students and families participating in learning opportunities?

What do we need to do?

- Provide a range of high quality, engaging programming options that are matched to family and student resource and connectivity levels to ensure access for all.

How do we know we are successful?

- High/increasing % of families who pick up and return home learning materials.
- High/increasing % of families who log on each week.
- High/increasing % of families who share examples of student learning at home.

Putting the Four Elements Into Practice
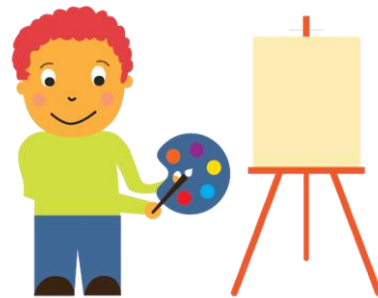
Making Contact

Poll:

Your program has contact information for approximately what percentage of families?

Covid-19 May Keep Families from Enrolling Students in Pre-K

Making Contact Can Help Address Family Fears and Concerns.

✔ **Program can send warm, welcoming messages to families** with calls, letters, postcards, texts, etc.

✔ **Use Fun and Playful activities**, by hosting virtual events, equip families with celebratory materials.

✔ **Identify Eligible Pre-K Children by Working with Partner Organizations,** such as social services, religious organizations, and school systems (siblings).

✔ **Notice which families are missing,** as you host activities and events identify which families have not engaged and provide personalized outreach.

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Connectivity / Access

Ensure Families have Access and Connectivity

✔ **Update Families Often about Plans for School in the Fall** to allay fears and describe options for participation.

✔ **Develop a Virtual Summer Bridge**; introduce teachers, classmates, and other school staff, host virtual tours, describe the program schedule and how to participate and engage.

✔ **Survey Families and Identify Learning Needs**; determine families technology resources along with in home learning resources, identify and provide what families need to support at-home learning.

✔ **Create linkages between families;** encourage families to connect off-line to support one another and build relationships.

✔ **Connect Families to Services**; health, housing, nutrition, and others, as needed.

Relationships

Relationships Start Within Your Program

✔ **Prepare for the School Year** with check-in emails, calls, and texts focused on caring and sharing

✔ **Offer a support series** that provides a safe space to connect and share concerns

✔ **Have fun**, mail candy and cookies to staff homes, host a beginning-of-year Zoom session

✔ **Get input on decisions,** invite staff to brainstorm topics such as, virtual family engagement and outreach strategies; increasing enrollment

✔ **Provide information** on accessing behavioral and mental health resources for staff and families

Poll:

What is one thing families would want most to weigh in on?

I wish my program would let me tell them about…

Relationships are Reciprocal

❖ Create opportunities for families to influence programmatic decisions.

❖ Now more than ever, families should have real and meaningful opportunities to provide input and be heard. This is a key element of restorative practices.

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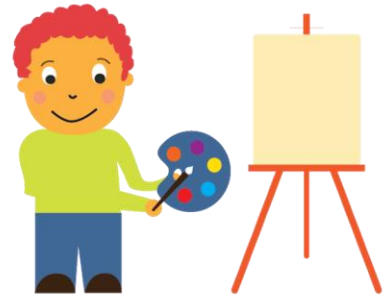
Participation

How can we assess participation?
Hypothetical Scenarios:

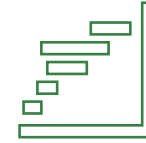|	On Site Class	Taped On-line Read Aloud	On Site Class	Live On-line Parent Gathering	Live On-line Drop in Support Call with Family Specialist	At-Home Art Activity
	Monday	Parent Choice	Wednesday	Thursday Evening	Friday Morning	Parent Choice
Shannen	✖	✖	✖	Absent	Absent	✖
Sue	Absent	✖	Absent	✖	✖	✖

1. What do you think is happening with Shannen? Share in the chat.
2. What do you think is happening with Sue? Share in the chat.
3. How would you find out for sure?

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What are underlying reasons for absenteeism?

| Academic and Social Conditions	Learning at Home	Health and Safety
Lack of knowledge about when school starts	Access to the internet or technology	Depression as a result of a new or added trauma
Lack of access to in-home supports for students with disabilities	Material available in their first language	Family member is ill
Lack of information about the school schedule	In-home responsibilities such as sibling or elder care	Inadequate nutrition or sleep
Lack of relationships in the school with school staff	Conflicting schedules	Worry about virus spread on campus
Lessons are not engaging or meaningful	Unstable Housing	Lack of well visits and immunizations

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Decide when to reach out and who will do it

	Who and When
Personalized Outreach	**What activates outreach about participation?** (e.g. One missed interaction, One missed assignment) **Who provides it?** Teachers? **What support do they need to reach out?**
Early Support	**What activates additional support?** (e.g. Continued lack of participation e.g. missing 40% of learning opportunities in a week) **Who is involved in outreach and support?** Counselor? Nurse? Family Specialist? Others depending upon need for intervention?
Intensive Support	**What activates sustained intensive support?** (e.g. Loss of contact?) **Who is involved in outreach and support?** Social Workers? Staff of public agencies, etc.?

To Sum Up
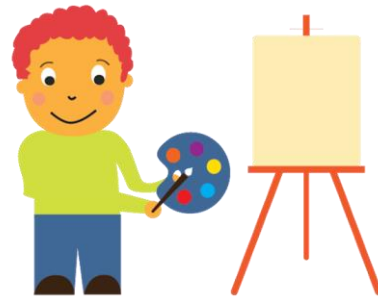
Children Attend and Participate More When....

- ✓ Contact, connectivity, relationships, and participation measures are collected and monitored to ensure all students are accessing Pre-K learning opportunities

- ✓ Staff are supported, connected to families and students, and work as a team

- ✓ Families are connected, resourced, and are true partners

- ✓ Students are connected, resourced, and engaged everyday

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Recommendations for School Year 2020-21

Routines and communication help to increase engagement and attendance. Attendance Works recommends the following practices:

1. Tracking participation and reaching out to students/families who are not participating regularly

2. Scheduling learning opportunities all five days of the week

3. Holding "teacher-family connect hours" at least weekly

4. Building small support groups within classrooms using team activities, buddy systems and ambassadors.

Additional Resources

➢ **Early Matters: Integrating Attendance into Kindergarten Transition** (Published March 2019) has useful information on engaging parents as partners
https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/integrating-attendance-into-kindergarten-transition/

➢ **Early and Often: Showing Up In Preschool Matters** has useful information on tracking data and site-based materials and practices for engaging students and families in attendance awareness and routines.
https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/early-education-toolkit/

➢ **2020 Attendance Awareness Campaign:**
Present, Engaged and Supported! https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/

Post-Webinar Survey
Research project by UMD, MSDE, and AW

How to participate in the research project

Purpose: To understand and improve attendance and participation in early learning.

- If you have already provided consent, we will send you a follow-up email to fill out the post-webinar survey

- To change your consent (accept/decline), contact Sue Fothergill sue@attendanceworks.org

The next two webinars will occur in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 (dates TBD).

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Thank You!

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