



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

>>> WINTER 2019-2020

An effective family engagement system builds connections between home and school and is an essential component to meeting the needs of each child in your program.

TIP#1 SNOW DAY SECRET MISSIONS



Get parents and students engaged on their surprise day off is by sending home secret missions that get to be opened on a snow day. From baking, to helping others, to building a snowman together, these missions keep students busy and parents engaged in their learning. Parents and students are overjoyed to find out their secret missions and excited to complete them together!



TIP#2 TEACHER SELF-CARE

Do you have in place program policies, practices, and an overall climate that support staff members' competence and self-care practices? As a manager, you need to promote and offer opportunities for staff to practice self-care. This is especially important because child care can be a stressful occupation. [See this lesson](#) on ideas on how to support your staff. And don't forget to take care of your self too! Avoiding burn-out is one reason self-care is important. You cannot care for others if you do not take care of yourself. Same idea with your tea hers and the children in their care.

Also consider focusing offering professional development around self-care or mindfulness. Bring in a meditation or yoga teacher to lead the staff in some restorative practices. Mindfulness strategies, a fun team-building outing, writing exercises, and even small-group counseling sessions help those of us who spend our lives helping others. Begin meetings with some breathing exercises. Take time to compliment the efforts of others. Positivity is contagious and peer support makes a strong foundation for your hard work.

Do you have a space where you can set up a gym or exercise room for staff? Research shows that exercise can help increase energy, improve concentration, and decrease stress and depression. It also allows you to focus on yourself and take care of your body. Both are important for reducing burn-out.

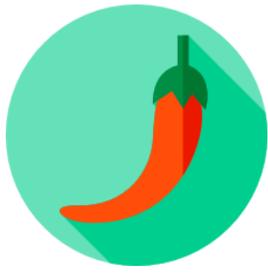
Work to cultivate a school culture where supporting each other is the norm. Building and relying upon small support groups, staff teams or work/home friendships can help make the work more manageable. When staff realizes that they aren't alone, the burden gets lighter. It's important that these support networks remain a positive resource, rather than a breeding ground for negativity. Give your staff an outlet and a safe space to talk about everyday stressors/concerns in a staff wellness group! Check out this article: [Happy Teachers Practice Self Care.](#)

TIP#3 APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY



Want to generate excitement, acceptance and engagement among staff for organizational change? Try Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for a professional development and/or team building activity. AI is a change management (strength-based) approach that focuses on identifying what is working well, analyzing why it is working well and then doing more of it. It is a way to conduct self-review and improvement by focusing on the positive aspects of a group, rather than by identifying the problems then generating and implementing solutions. Appreciative Inquiry builds strength-based communities, inspires strength-based leadership (and leadership development) and helps people be respectful and positive. Plus it that liberates the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of people at all levels in an organization while strengthening relationships between all of those that make up your early learning community.





TIP#4 CHILI COOKOFF

Holding a cook-off is a great way to bring together your school family and eat delicious food at the same time. You and your guests will be able to show off your cooking skills with a little friendly competition. Families in the school community prepare their favorite chili recipe. The winner gets to take home a coveted trophy, but just for one year—the next year, the trophy gets passed to the next winner. This event could tie in well with a football tailgate or Super Bowl theme.

TIP#5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & PLC'S



What does your center's professional development look like? Do you employ an external source to come in and educate the staff on various early childhood topics? They might lecture about a certain topic and show a slideshow and encouraged to try activities in the classroom. Would your staff be eager to go carryout these activities in the classroom but then their excitement would soon fizzle? Maybe the lack of follow through or discussion from leaders or peers after the PD day was concluded was the issue? Or was it the fact that the PD day was chosen from the top down and not by those who work in classroom daily? Did the teachers feel valued or included in their own learning?

Skip formal professional development and support a PLC. A professional learning community (PLC) involves much more than a staff meeting or group of teachers getting together to discuss a book they've read. Instead, a PLC focuses on a continuous improvement in staff performance as well as student learning. PLCs entail whole-staff collaboration with colleagues and focus on their classroom environments, teaching practices, and the content children learn. PLCs provide a space for members of a school community or district to come together to gain deeper knowledge and understanding about a topic as they work collaboratively to improve their school, teaching, and/or students learning opportunities. PLCs enable teachers to continually learn from one another via shared visioning and planning, as well as in-depth critical examination of what *does* and *doesn't* work to enhance student achievement. Being a part of professional learning communities is to work with colleagues to put into practice what we already know. It is an opportunity for teachers to offer support to one another, find challenges to be solved and facilitate a cohesive professional vision.

Many teachers are aware of practices and have sufficient knowledge but lack the motivation to put it into practice. Through professional learning communities teachers can support one another through difficult aspects and challenges that arise during the school year. There are many positive outcomes of collaboration among groups of teachers and professional learning communities. Beginner teachers will learn an abundance from the veterans, while the veteran teachers will have a sense of leadership and continuing their professional development on an ongoing basis. There will be less isolation amongst teachers as they will be able to seek advice from one another in an open space. Teachers will gain a sense of satisfaction among teachers as they realize that we can better not only just students in their classroom, but in supporting other teachers can better the entire institution.

Learning needs to be purposeful. That's why educators stress the importance of making learning relevant and meaningful to students. So unless your PD is geared toward solving real problems in your school and addressing what teachers believe to be important, it's unlikely that teachers will engage with the material or retain it.

Check out these resources below:

- [Teacher-Led Professional Development](#)
- [3 Best Practices for Giving Teachers Ownership of Their Professional Development](#)
- [Putting the 'Professional' Back in Teacher Professional Development](#)

