Partaking with Families of Pre-school and Elementary Students with Disabilities  
Online Class – 3 graduate credit hours  
15 sessions – 67.5 PDPs

Instructor: Margaret O’Hare  
Office: virtual  
Telephone: 617 236-7210  
E-mail: mcohare@fcsn.org  
FAX: 617 241-0330

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to equip educators with the knowledge and skills required to develop and strengthen collaborative partnerships with families of pre-school and elementary students with disabilities. When we speak of achieving “success,” we mean the process goal of creating optimal conditions of communication and trust so that professionals and families can work together effectively. This course will focus on models of partnership, the requirements of the law, research findings, effective communication, and understanding and working with families, including issues specific to early childhood, family systems, and cultural competence. As a final project, course candidates will create their own plan for family-professional partnerships.

If you plan on matriculating into a graduate program at Fitchburg State University, please be aware that twelve semester hours of Fitchburg State University credit taken within a year prior to the student's admission may be applied to the degree program with the approval of the program chairperson. Anything over 12 credits prior to matriculation will NOT be accepted towards the degree.

TEXTS:


SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:

Each week of the course provides additional supplemental texts and resources.

Fitchburg State University Teacher Education Conceptual Framework

LEARNING OUTCOMES / OBJECTIVES:

Knowledge: As a result of the learning experiences in the course, you will become more cognizant of:
- Models of partnership between schools and parents
- Epstein’s six types of parent involvement:
- Requirements of the law relating to IDEA and NCLB
- Massachusetts laws and policies
- Grief cycle and how it relates to parental concerns
- Research findings related to parent involvement in education and outcomes for students
- Issues specific to family systems
- Role of culture in your own decision making
- Role of culture in family dynamics
- Transition planning for students with special needs
- Role of community partners in relationship to schools
- Resources available to families

Skill: As a result of the learning experiences in the course, you will become better able to:
- Effectively communicate with families regarding education of their child
- Partner with parents of students with special needs in the IEP process
- Collaborate with the student and family on transition planning
- Increase parent engagement in their child’s education
- Differentiate levels of engagement for parents
- Map community resources which can support educational goals

Caring: As a result of the learning experiences in the course, you will become more competent in your ability to:
- Discuss student challenges with families
- Foster resilience and motivation to learn for students with special needs

Ethical: As a result of the learning experiences in the course, you will become more competent in your ability to:
- Establish professional boundaries with students and families
- Respect cultural differences
Maintain transparency around IEP compliance

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

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<th>Lecture</th>
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<td>Discussion/Questioning</td>
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<td>Pre-Practicum</td>
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<td>Laboratory</td>
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<td>Role Playing/Simulation</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>Problem Finding/Solving</td>
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<td>Independent Learning</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
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<td>Field Trips</td>
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<td>Interviewing</td>
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<td>Computer Applications</td>
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<td>Collaborative Learning Groups</td>
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<td>Viewing or Listening to Followed by Discussing</td>
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<td>Reflective Responses</td>
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<td>On line forum</td>
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<td>Creating Visual Illustrations of Concepts</td>
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**Technology Initiatives:**
Users of the Fitchburg State University computer systems are subject to all applicable federal, state, and international computer laws. Questions regarding regulations may be directed to the office of Information Technology Initiatives:

- Mass One Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Blackboard Learn to access the course and resources
- Communication method of interacting with each other in class through the discussion responses which will be posted on Blackboard

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**
There will be a discussion each week, based on the week’s course materials. In order to participate in the forum, candidates should read and then post answers to the week’s Guiding Questions in each week’s discussion. **Answers must be thorough and reflect engagement with course materials. Students are expected to make several references to the reading assignments in their posts.** **Guiding Questions often have multiple parts, so please read and respond carefully.** The purpose of the discussion is not only to answer the **Guiding Questions** but to respond to others’ ideas. Each discussion requires a response to one of your colleague’s posts. Candidates should read what others have written and make relevant and well thought-out comments which move the discussion forward. Thus, weekly discussions will provide both an opportunity for class candidates to post their own reflections on the week’s course materials AND to respond to the thoughts of other class members. All new topics start on Wednesday; all comments should be posted by 11 p.m. on the following Wednesday.

**This course requires two additional written assignments and one final project:**

**Assignment One: Reflecting on Culture and Diversity**
This assignment has two parts. This assignment is due during Week 5.

1. **Analysis:** Write a short essay (500-700 words) in response to questions asked about a family situation described in a case study that will be given to you in this assignment. You will need to rely on what you have learned about family systems and the impact of culture on how families function to address the questions raised. There will be no right or wrong answers, just what would you need to consider and what would you do to support this family. Be sure to reference and cite reading assignments to support your essay conclusions.
2. Reflection: Using the theory you have learned in the 4 modules you will have completed by the time this assignment is due, reflect in a short response (500-700 words) on one positive interaction and one negative interaction you have had with a family. Why was the positive interaction so successful? What caused the other situation to have less favorable outcomes? Be specific and reference reading assignments whenever possible. Include a bibliography with this assignment.

Assignment Two: Learning from Parents

This assignment has two parts. This assignment is due during Week 9.

1. Parent Interview: Identify a parent or guardian in your school who has a child on an IEP and who you feel will be able to provide you with information about their experiences in accessing special education services for his/her child. Additionally, you will seek to find out the parent’s feedback and reactions to their experiences which will help inform policies, procedures, and implementation of special needs law within the school system for other families. Parent suggestions on improvement in these areas or any others should be requested. Arrange an in-person interview with this person which could take place on a home visit, a school visit or a mutually agreeable location in the community. Composing interview questions will be covered as part of the reading assignments before you begin the interview process.

2. Analysis and Self-reflection: Please review your interview. Include your reflections on the interview in terms of what has been presented in the text and readings. Does this resonate with you? Based on parent comments, the readings and your own experience, what suggestions do you have for school improvement? Submit original interview or summary of it along with your analysis and reflection through the assignment option on Blackboard.

Final Project: Family-Professional Partnership at My School

This final project is the culmination of the candidate’s learning and work; it is due during Week 14. Course candidates will create a final project- a practical, stepwise, and comprehensive written plan for family-professional partnership with families who have pre-school or elementary students with disabilities, for use in their own program, informed by what they have learned about (a) family engagement, (b) requirements of the law, (c) family systems (d) making community connections, (e) cultural competence, and (f) trust and effective communication.

Plans should map out stepwise implementation and include means for sharing with school colleagues what course candidates have learned. Because each educator serves different numbers and profiles of students in different types of school and classroom settings, each plan will be specific and unique. Candidates are encouraged to share ideas and information with other course candidates while developing the project. However each candidate must submit an individual project. A bibliography should be included with the project.

Candidates should contact the instructor via e-mail during Week 10 to give a brief written update on plans for the final project. The instructor is happy to provide feedback and suggestions on drafts. Final projects are due by midnight Wednesday of Week 14 and should be submitted by posting on the course website in the Week 14. Students are invited to share thoughts and comments about the projects on the discussion forum in week 15.

Work that is missed may be submitted the following week after contacting instructor by e-mail and receiving approval. A drop in one grade may result.
FIELD-BASED REQUIREMENTS:
Candidates will create the opportunity for an in-person interview with a parent (or guardian) who has a child in their school on an IEP. The interview will include parent’s comments on adequacy of school/home communication, parent involvement activities, and parent’s suggestions for any improvements.

EVALUATION OR GRADING POLICY:

Forum responses (14 forums) – 40%
Written assignments -30%
Final project-30%

This course requires weekly written responses to the discussion questions; answers must reflect engagement with the course materials. Discussion questions are assessed on the extent to which answers demonstrate thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials, and self-reflection and analysis of how to apply new skills and practices in the candidate’s current school setting. Candidates must also respond to at least one of their colleagues’ posts with a thoughtful substantive comment which moves the discussion forward.

Two written assignments are also required. Assignments will be assessed on the extent to which answers demonstrate thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials, and self-reflection and analysis of how to apply new skills and practices in the candidate’s current school setting as well as clarity and organization. Spelling and grammar must conform to the expectations of graduate students.

Course candidates are also required to submit a final project which reflects the culmination of the learning that the candidate has experienced in this course. The final project should be useful work that the candidate may use in his/her work with families. The final project will be assessed on the extent to which it reflects an understanding of the course material as well as a practical application to the candidate’s own school and/or program. Spelling and grammar must conform to the expectations of graduate students.

Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum Rubric</th>
<th>A (3 points)</th>
<th>B+ (2 points)</th>
<th>B (1 point)</th>
<th>C (0 points)</th>
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<td>Demonstrating maximal engagement with course materials. Each response to a question must include at least two references to course (theory/best practices) and answers to all parts of question. Must answer one candidate on the forum with a substantive comment.</td>
<td>Demonstrating very considerable engagement with course materials with at least one reference to course (theory/best practice) in each response. Must answer all parts of questions and respond to at least one candidate on the forum with a substantive comment.</td>
<td>Demonstrating moderate engagement with course materials. Responds with one reference to course materials and misses parts of a multi-part question or indicates only agreement with comment on forum to another’s post.</td>
<td>Demonstrating minimal engagement with course materials. Responds with no references to class material, misses part of multi part questions and/or does not respond to any post on the forum.</td>
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### Assignments Rubric

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A (15 points)</th>
<th>B+ (13 points)</th>
<th>B (11 points)</th>
<th>C (below 10 points)</th>
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<td>Demonstrating extremely thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials. Essay includes at least three references to course material on theory/best practice, and both content and analysis.</td>
<td>Demonstrating quite thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials. Essay includes at least two references to course material on theory/best practice, and both content and analysis</td>
<td>Demonstrating moderately thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials. Essay includes both content and analysis, but only one reference.</td>
<td>Demonstrating minimally thoughtful consideration and understanding of course materials. Essay lacks references to class material and/or does not include analysis.</td>
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### Final Project Rubric

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<tr>
<th>A (30 points)</th>
<th>B+ (26 points)</th>
<th>B (22 points)</th>
<th>C (below 20 points)</th>
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<td>Creates a plan for family professional partnership including references to material on family engagement research, family systems, communication, cultural competence, research findings, community connections and the law (at least 6 topics). Must include the following: demographics, proposal, activities to reach desired outcomes, calendar dissemination plan and bibliography.</td>
<td>Creates a plan for family professional partnership but includes references to only 4 topics in course. Must include proposal, activities to reach desired outcomes, demographics, calendar dissemination plan and bibliography.</td>
<td>Creates a plan for family professional partnership but includes references to only 3 topics in course. Must include proposal, activities to reach desired outcomes and two of the following: demographic background, calendar or plan for dissemination.</td>
<td>Creates a plan for family professional partnership but includes references to only 2 topics in course. Missing proposal, demographic background, activity calendar and/or plan for dissemination.</td>
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### GRADUATE GRADING SYSTEM

| 4.0 | 95 - 100 | A |
| 3.7 | 92 - 94  | A- |
| 3.5 | 89 - 91  | A-/B+ |
| 3.3 | 86 - 88  | B+ |
| 3.0 | 83 - 85  | B |
| 2.7 | 80 - 82  | B- |
| 2.5 | 77 - 79  | B-/C+ |
| 2.3 | 74 - 76  | C+ |
| 2.0 | 71 - 73  | C |
| 0.0 | 0 - 70   | F |
| W   | Withdrawn|    |
| IN  | Incomplete|   |
| IP  | In-Progress|  |
COURSE CONTENT / TOPICAL OUTLINE

Week One: Introduction to the Course and Family Engagement
After completing this week’s assignments, candidates will learn about the recent family engagement framework for public schools as promoted by the US Department of Education. Candidates will consider the many roles that parents play in supporting their children’s learning at home and education in schools. Candidates will examine their own beliefs about family engagement using the Henderson and Mapp reading.

2. Mapp, Karen L. Parents as Agents of Change, Video, Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMZqHVDiw7w Mapp Parents as Agents of change

Week Two: Understanding Families
In this session, candidates will learn to define the parts of the family system and their effect on parent engagement. Candidates will begin to build an understanding of how culture affects family functioning and decision making both in a general sense and a personal sense. Candidates will be able to define the ways that culture influences a child’s development and become aware of the avenues to cultural competence.

1. Chapter 1 and 2 in your text.

Week Three: Role of Culture and Diversity in Family Engagement
In this session, course candidates will deepen their understanding of culture and be able to give examples of how culture impacts family engagement in African-American, Chinese-American, and Latino cultures. Candidates will read some specific ethnic viewpoints offered by families of children with disabilities.

3. Go to http://www.aacld.org/home.html National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities (AACLD) Read “the problem” and “the solution”


**Week Four: Understanding Families of Children with Disabilities**

In this session, candidates will learn how the family functions/outputs (affection, self-esteem, spiritual, economics, daily care, socialization, recreation, and educational) impact their engagement with the schools. Candidates will understand the challenges families with children with disabilities face over the life cycle of the child and the family.

1. Chapters 3 and 4 (pages 69-80) in the text.

**Week Five: Family Engagement for All Families**

In this session, candidates will begin closely examining family engagement for all families. They will enter into the controversy about the importance of family engagement and develop their own statement of beliefs about family engagement.


**Week Six: Family Engagement Expectations in Massachusetts**

In this session, candidates will focus on the various requirements, policies and expectations for family engagement in Massachusetts educational initiatives, including the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support, Model for Educator Evaluation, and Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals.


**Week Seven: Family Participation Requirements in Special Education**

In this session, candidates will learn about the federal laws, and their history, concerning children with disabilities. They will learn their responsibilities under the Massachusetts laws for children with disabilities.

1. Chapter 6, pages 109-125 in the text.
4. Explore resources for families about special education topics, Federation for Children with Special Needs, [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org)

**Week Eight: Framework for Family – Professional Partnerships**

In this session, candidates will expand their understanding of the components of family-professional partnerships and explore the application of Epstein’s principals (theory) to actual practice.

1. Chapter 7 in the text.

**Week Nine: Communication, Collaboration and Trust**

In this session, candidates will learn about the components of a strong family and professional partnership. They will learn to identify the important strategies for creating trust with families and hear several parents and teachers talk about building relationships.

1. Chapter 8 in the text
2. Assessing your programs success:
   a. For teachers of Pre-k and K:

b. For teachers of 1-5

i. Read *Parent Involvement in Schools*.  Do the assessment.  BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS are a product of University Outreach & Engagement at Michigan State University, connecting university resources to the community.  [http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief30.pdf](http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief30.pdf)

3. *Building Relationships – Ongoing Communication*, Flamboyan Foundation Available at:  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCRxLxNxnA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCRxLxNxnA)

4. Go to [http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/learners/module-4](http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/learners/module-4) Complete the module through part C.

**Week Ten: Parents as Partners in Special Education Decision Making**

In this session, course candidates will learn some of the issues of being a parent of a child with disabilities.  Candidates will understand the contents of the Individual Education Plan and the parent’s rights and responsibilities.

1. Chapters 9 and 10 in text
2. MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.  (2013).  *Parent’s notice of procedural safeguards*.  English version is at the top of the page.  Retrieved from [http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb)

**Week Eleven : Issues in PreK – 5th Grade: Home Visits, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, and Social Media**

In this session and the next, candidates will choose 1 of 3 topics and explore an issue that is pertinent to their own workplace.  Candidates are encouraged to explore all the issues at their convenience.  All three issues this week focus on building relationships with families and effective communication; all are relevant to families of preschool and elementary school age children.  Academic Parent-Teacher Teams are a strategy to use to help families learn how to support their children’s learning at home

**HOME VISITS**

3. Go to the website *The Best Resources for Learning About Teacher Home Visits* at [http://engagingparentsinschool.edublogs.org/2011/10/10/the-best-resources-for-learning-about-teacher-home-visits/](http://engagingparentsinschool.edublogs.org/2011/10/10/the-best-resources-for-learning-about-teacher-home-visits/)  Watch the videos and explore the resources
4. Watch *Parent-Teacher Home Visits*, Flamboyan Foundation Available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y03oP_RRg9U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y03oP_RRg9U)
ACADEMIC PARENT-TEACHER TEAMS
3. *Academic Parent Teacher Teams #1*, Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7UPA_F-AWU

SOCIAL MEDIA
3. National PTA Tip Sheets on Social Media Available at: http://www.pta.org/files/NPTA_Social_Media_Tipsheets_(2).pdf

Week Twelve: More Issues in PreK – 5th Grade: Homework, Inclusion, and Dual Language Learners
In this session and the previous one, candidates will choose 1 of 3 topics and learn about an issue that is pertinent to their own workplace. Candidates are encouraged to explore all the issues at their convenience. In this session, there are readings and resources to help candidates examine their thinking and policies around homework, especially for the elementary aged student. “Inclusion” is focused on early education, especially in preschool. Resources and readings address considerations about dual/second language learners, including how to answer questions from parents and others about whether it is possible for a child with disabilities to learn a second language.

HOMEWORK
1. Read text, pages 259-264

INCLUSION
1. Read text, pages 269-273.
2. View CONNECT: Foundations of Inclusion Birth to Five Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abkuaHlWtm8
   - Introduction – page 10 on Inclusive Curriculum
   - Tables 1-3 beginning on page 30

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS
1. Watch this video: Myths about bilingual children at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVYhpCprtzQ
2. Watch this video: Can special needs kids be bilingual? Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOhWg0YeIMs&feature=youtu.be
5. Review MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requirements for English Language Learners Available at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html

Week Thirteen: Helping Families Transition Between Programs/Grades
In this session, candidates will learn about best practice for assisting children and families in making transitions between programs and/or grades. The first assignment is for everyone. The second assignment is for teachers in PreK and grades K-4. The third assignment is for teachers who have children transitioning into middle school. The fourth assignment is the forum postings – for everyone.

1. Everyone should watch the video on the first page of Foundation of Transitions for Young Children http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/resources/videos/foundations-of-transition
2. For teachers in PreK and grades K-4.

3. Teachers of children ready to transition into middle school should read these 2 articles instead of the 2 above.

**Week Fourteen: Partnering “in” and “with” the Community**

In this session, candidates will examine how to partner with the community to provide supports and services to families of children with disabilities. They will identify resources and services that are available in communities across Massachusetts.

1. Read Chapter 11 in the text
   See forum question 1.

**Week 15: Online forum discussion of final projects**

In this session, candidates review the final projects of the other course participants and offer constructive feedback and support.