
# Strategies for Creating Home-School-Media Partnerships: Engaging Children Across Learning Environments

## Evaluative Research of Vegas PBS: Ready To Learn Initiative December, 2023 – October, 2025

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## About This Report

This report outlines key findings from the 2023-2025 iteration of the Vegas PBS Ready To Learn Initiative (RTL). Universal themes addressed include:

1. Examining the efficacy of home-school-media educational partnerships to leverage academic takeaways through the creation of take-home materials.
2. Parent mediation of and engagement with educational materials, specifically science and socio-emotional learning materials, used in the home from media partners.
3. Parent perception of teacher-led workshops designed to guide parents through home engagement of educational materials.
4. Teacher responses to leading workshops and distributing take-home materials.

The report begins with a brief overview of RTL grant objectives and a description of how take-home materials created by Vegas PBS served these objectives by providing additional resources to reinforce academic takeaways. Data and analysis surrounding the outreach process and family and teacher self-reports follow. The report concludes with recommendations for future outreach efforts and observations about effective attributes of future RTL take-home materials, given the urgent need for academic interventions in Clark County and, more broadly, Nevada.

## Acknowledgements

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# I. Background

Since 1995, the Ready To Learn Initiative (RTL) has worked to promote school readiness for children ages 2-8 in Title I schools by creating, developing, and distributing free, high-quality PBS KIDS educational materials. In the intervening years between its inception and the current research project, RTL has revised and broadened its focus every five years, shifting from school preparation toward a lifespan approach that also addresses work- and life-readiness. Educational materials are now available in both digital and analog formats.

The most recent RTL theme, "Learn Together: Connecting Children's Media and Learning Environments to Build Key Skills for Success," reflects these modern goals. By connecting PBS KIDS media with home and school environments as sites for both formal and informal learning, RTL aims to enable children to engage with and strengthen key academic and social skills by applying them in multiple contexts. To that end, Vegas PBS, an RTL grant recipient, developed and distributed free, tangible take-home materials for children that addressed science and socioemotional skills—two areas identified by researchers as integral for the development of language and thinking skills (Kalland and Linnavalli, 2023; Silander et al., 2018).

## Introduction

### *Identifying Participating Teachers*

In service to the theme of connecting ecologies to strengthen skills, Vegas PBS engaged schools as a mediating site between home and media. All Clark County School District Title I pre-kindergarten teachers were invited to participate in the study through an email sent by Jessica Russell, Vegas PBS Ready To Learn Coordinator.

Sixty-five teachers were contacted initially, and 33 participated by conducting family engagement workshops and distributing materials. To support the facilitation of the family engagement workshops previously conducted by Vegas PBS Rady To Learn, participating teachers received up to two Family Engagement Workshop Kits. As depicted in Appendix C, these kits included instructions for workshop facilitation, along with plastic bags containing take-home materials for science or socioemotional learning.  Most teachers opted to receive both the science and socioemotional learning take-home materials, although some only opted to receive one subject.

Of the 33 teachers, six were eligible to participate in our research based on principal approval letters received. Table 1 shows the locations and dates of all six teachers' family engagement workshops, which families were informed about through Class Dojo, the Remind app, flyers, and other methods embedded in typical school routines.


***Table 1***
***Family Engagement Workshop Elementary School Locations and Dates***

| School | SEL Workshop | Science Workshop |
|---|---|---|
| Cozine | 12/8/2023 | 2/16/2024 |
| Culley | 12/1/2023 | 4/12/2024 |
| Ferron | 1/9/2024 | 4/5/2024 |
| Ronnow | 12/14/2023 | 3/7/2024 |
| Wolfe | 2/16/2024 | 3/22/2024 |
| Hinman | 1/26/2024 | 3/21/2024 |

Although six teachers initially participated, ultimately four teachers participated fully by indicating interest via email, completing training in the Read-View-Do protocol, choosing themes of science and/or socioemotional learning materials, conducting family engagement workshops, distributing take-home materials to participating families, and lastly completing the research

### *Identifying Participating Families*

Families were eligible for the study based on their attendance at workshops during the 2023-2024 school year and receipt of principal approval letters.

- 247 families attended one of the two workshops
- 87 families attended both workshops
- Of the 87 families, 42 were eligible to participate in our research, based on principal approval letters received. Four families completed the interview process.
- Child participants were selected based on parental permission during parent interviews.

Depicted in appendices A and B, all take-home materials contained lesson plans for parents to follow and pertinent reference materials. The socioemotional learning materials included the book From Head to Toe by Eric Carle, paper caterpillar-making supplies, and links to related PBS KIDS media; the final product was intended to track student learning goals at home. The science materials included a dropper, wax paper, a sponge, the book I Am Water by Jean Marzollo, and information on how to download the free PBS KID Play & Learn Science app containing related


# II. Research Study

## Research Questions

To assess experiences and enduring recollections, the current study sought to evaluate parent and child responses to, and usage of, science-themed and socioemotional learning take-home materials approximately one year after they received these materials, using surveys and interviews. The study also sought the responses of teachers regarding their decisions in selecting science and/or socioemotional learning materials, as well as their experiences facilitating family engagement workshops.

Four key questions framed this study:

1. Did parents/caregivers use the take-home materials? If so, how? And what were their children's responses?
2. What, if anything, do children remember about the materials?
3. How did teachers select take-home materials for their classes?
4. How comfortable were teachers in facilitating the family engagement workshops?

## Research Design

### *Teachers*

A Google survey was emailed to participating teachers, which included Likert-type scales and opportunities for qualitative feedback to describe their experiences. For further follow-up, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in an in-person or digital focus group.

### *Families*

Families were contacted by phone and invited to participate in a phone interview. Following the phone interview, families were offered the opportunity to complete a Google survey with Likert-type scales and short answer options. The details provided by the respondents formed the basis for purposive sampling for participation in a focus group with their children.

Ultimately, due to low response rates, the focus groups did not take place, as focus groups are typically comprised of 8-10 people. Although smaller groups of 4-5 can be optimized, each group of respondents provided enough detail to address the research questions posed.


## III. Findings

This section will detail findings for both teachers and families.

***Teachers***

1. **Teacher reasons for selecting kits varied – no common trend emerged.**

No trends emerged in teachers' reasons for choosing science kits; responses varied and included student-centered learning, school design, curriculum, and simply wanting to try the kits.

Specifically, one teacher responded based on school culture, stating, "We are a STEAM school so we try integrate all learning into each activity. It supports lessons and best practices that are already happening at our school." A second teacher responded that she simply wanted to try it out. A third responded with a curricular reason, stating, "Because science is an important part of our PreK curriculum, and it develops critical thinking." The last responding teacher provided a student-centered response: "Science kits are a great resource for students to practice their natural curiosities. They often lead to high engagement for all students as well."

Similarly, no trends emerged in the reasons teachers chose the socioemotional learning-themed kit. These responses could be categorized similarly to the reasons for the science kit – student-centered learning, curriculum, school partnership with families, and parent concerns.

Specific responses included:

- "Many families have concerns about their child's emotional health so this helps them find a way to support their child."
- "In our PreK program we use a wholistic approach, and developing social emotional skills and self regulation is as important as any other academic component of our daily instruction."
- "I enjoy this kit at the beginning of the year for families to partner with us in their child's learning," and,
- "Important for social development and for parent to understand purpose"

2. **All teachers found the Family Engagement Workshop Kit easy to use.**

These statements were clear and positive:

- "Having a teacher pack with direct information helped guide me, having all the supplies with no teacher prep just open the box and follow steps was helpful."
- "The kit was very complete and easy to implement. It provided me with the lesson plan and all the materials were ready to use. The instructions were very easy to follow."


- "I used the teachers guide to mimic the Vegas pbs presentations and keep me on track. Everything is well laid out for distribution."
- "Everything there directions simple to follow."

**3. Veteran teachers felt nervous about facilitating the workshop despite many years of classroom experience.**

All responding teachers were "veteran" teachers, with 9, 10, 19, and 30 years of classroom experience. Two participating teachers noted the ease of use of materials, yet two described feeling nervous about facilitating the workshops. Assisting parents helped one respondent overcome this fear, but another expressed concern about not being able to translate into Spanish.

***Families***

A major finding from the interviews is that families were able to recall the materials, describe their mediation of the activities, and report on their children's responses one year after receiving these materials. Among the responses, the following themes emerged as common to all responding families.

**1. In the home, parents were active managers of the take-home materials.**

After receiving the take-home materials, parents played an active role in using these materials, yet not always in a positive or negative way. One parent with two children at home, ages 5 and 8, initially reported allowing her children to gravitate to materials on their own; however, she later discussed dissuading both of her children from using the science kit because it seemed "messy." This parent allowed her child to complete building the caterpillar from the socioemotional kit, but did not discuss goal-setting.

Similarly, another parent read the book contained in the kit and noticed that "it helped with sight words." This parent also allowed her child to complete the caterpillar, but did not discuss goal-setting.

A third parent guided her child through the science materials, spending an hour reading and discussing the activity together. She did not mind the time commitment because she assumed it was likely similar to the amount of time spent on the topic in school.

The final responding parent completed the caterpillar activity with her son at school during the workshop. At home, both parent and child completed the activity again, this time with an older sibling.


**2. In homes with more than one child, participants and their siblings interacted with the take-home materials.**

When participants had siblings, parents reported that all siblings participated in using the take-home materials. In one case, sibling collaboration was parent-facilitated. This parent reported completing the caterpillar activity with both her sons, ages 5 and 7, and then she "shared the activity" with her other son at home. She particularly appreciated the creativity of the caterpillar because it allowed the family to strengthen their bond as they worked together. "...We [created] like a bond, a stronger bond...like all together creating the caterpillar." She also reported that the caterpillar activity sparked a family conversation about setting specific goals, such as reading a book and doing one's best.

**3. All parents found the materials easy to use and would use the materials again.**

Even if their children experienced difficulties using the materials due to motor challenges, parents praised the clear directions.

**4. Parents believed co-facilitation of the Family Engagement Workshop Kit by Vegas PBS and teachers would be beneficial.**

Parents generally felt that receiving materials from Vegas PBS would encourage parent participation, while teachers could contribute their own knowledge of the children and provide academic connections relevant to school in the presentation.

***Notable Data from Family Interviews***

**all names have been de-identified with aliases*

In the interviews, parents responded to questions and often elaborated with more in-depth answers. These semi-structured interviews allowed parents to recall additional details about the take-home materials. Each interview lasted between 45 and 80 minutes.

**Tracy (parent) and Julian (daughter)**

Tracy has two children, ages 5 and 8, who both live with her. She found the materials easy to use and clearly written, making it simple for parents to facilitate. At first, she reported allowing her child to choose which materials to engage with, noting that "she was more wanting to learn it...others she didn't want to mess with."

Tracy observed that her daughter, Julian, showed interest in the caterpillar activity. Although Julian struggled with completing it, the activity served as a good starting point. Julian also showed interest in the science materials, but Tracy thought it would "get messy." Julian's brother, age 8, also expressed interest in the science materials, but Tracy instead chose to manage both children's completion of the caterpillar to prevent tantrums and messes.

Tracy tries to get Julian to be more independent, though she notes that Julian resists.


**Jean (parent) and Michelle (daughter)**

Michelle is 6 years old and an only child who, according to her mother Jean, already enjoyed science and water play prior to the take-home materials. In fact, she had previously asked about two science kits she saw in the store, one involving water and oil displacement and another for making bath bombs. According to Jean, the science take-home materials "propelled that interest."

Jean said she would use the materials again and noted the importance of having easy instructions for her as a parent. She read the included books with Michelle because they "helped with sight words," but answered neutrally on the development of scientific dialogue, explaining that Michelle currently prefers to address everyone as "bruh." Jean also responded neutrally to the development of socioemotional goals because she was unsure of what the goals were.

She strongly agreed that the caterpillar provided a starting point for dialogue, noting, "[They] are a Bluey family which means we talk about our feelings... I always ask her how she feels... 'Mommy I feel sad that you got mad at me'" [referring to situations when Michelle doesn't want to do homework or brush her teeth]. Jean agreed that teachers should continue to facilitate the family engagement workshop because "teachers can insert what kids need more of" into the workshop.

**Olivia (parent) and Anthony (son)**

Olivia, whose primary spoken language is Spanish, is the mother of Anthony, age 6, and his older brother. Upon receiving the materials, she spent approximately one hour explaining them to Anthony. She recalls, "Pero al hacer el experimento lo que más se toma tiempo, creo que en explicar al niño" [translation: "When doing the experiment, what takes the most time is explaining to the child"]. Ultimately, she didn't mind the time because it likely matched the duration of a typical school lesson, about one hour.

She used the materials with Anthony and was able to take home an extra set of science materials after the workshop. This proved to be advantageous, as Anthony wanted to experiment with water repeatedly. Olivia strongly agreed that the take-home materials created interest and enthusiasm in Anthony and that the science materials encouraged scientific dialogue. She reports, "Sí, Lo que pasa es que él, él, antes del taller, él no utilizaba la palabra reflejo del agua, el material o lo absorbió. Sí, él empezó a utilizar la palabra, flotar cuando algo flotar en el agua exacto." [translation: "Yes, the thing is, he, before the workshop, he didn't use the word 'reflection of water,'...or 'absorbed it.' Yes, he started using the word 'float' when something floats in water, exactly."]


According to Olivia, what interested Anthony most was observing how water could be repelled. He was so interested in observing the properties of water that, “Cada vez que iba a bañarse, Crees que lo teníamos que hacer en serio y tomaba como unos 10 o 15 min.” [translation: “Every time he went to bathe, you think we had to do it seriously, and it took about 10 or 15 minutes.”]

Olivia also recalled Anthony’s response to the socioemotional learning take-home materials. She agreed that they provided a starting point for socioemotional dialogue, as he set a goal, even for the activity itself. Building the caterpillar was challenging for Anthony, due to a motor difficulty and being left-handed, which made cutting and gluing frustrating. Nonetheless, he set a goal to complete the caterpillar and achieved it.

Olivia agreed that the materials were easy to use with her son. She also reported, unprompted after the first interview question, that as of March 13, 2025, the science take-home materials were still in use in their home.

Of her daughter, Jean reports, “she’s pretty cool and she makes me cool.”

**Jennifer (parent) and David (son)**

David, Jennifer’s son, is 5 years old and has a 7-year-old brother. In their home, Jennifer and her sons created the circles of the caterpillar together and liked being able to reuse materials when possible. In her words, “We did the experience at school together, then shared the experience with David’s older brother at home.” She loved the creativity of this activity because it allowed family participation and dialogue, and she reported that it strengthened the family bond by creating together and collectively discussing goals. “We created like a bond, a stronger bond...-like altogether [when we were] like creating the caterpillar.”

Jennifer also noted that the goal-setting happy faces were exciting for David because receiving them as rewards was familiar to him from his home and school settings. Because of this environment matching, David was even more motivated by the activity. Jennifer stated, “He gets excited like every time, like even right now at school, ...they do ... that type of method where if you do good in school, you get like a stamp or a sticker, or a small toy like a treasure hunt.” Some of the goals David set with his family included learning numbers, reading a book, and doing his best. She reported that the caterpillar activity helped David become more independent.

David and his brother also enjoyed the science take-home materials, but the vocabulary proved to be challenging. In response, they reframed the properties of water as “magic,” like when the water disappeared into the sponge and caused the dry sponge to expand. They enjoyed showing their mother the “magic.”


## IV. Analysis

Considering family profiles and interviews, this section examines the contributing factors to the success of take-home material usage, as well as the limitations of the study.

***Home Environmental Variables Affecting the Outcomes of Take Home Materials***

The most in-depth interviews and the most successful outcomes, as indicated by parent reports of their children's newfound behaviors and questions, originated from two families: Jennifer and David, and Olivia and Anthony. The following factors may have contributed to the success of the

1. **After completing the lessons in the take-home materials, children behaved differently by applying the activities to their everyday lives.**

After his mother spent one hour completing all the activities offered by the science take-home materials, Anthony began using the dropper, wax paper, and sponge during bath time. Similarly, another parent recalled a new request from her daughter to help her cook dinner. Bathing and cooking in water are depicted on two of the pages of *I Am Water* by Jean Marzollo, which centers young children in 11 of the 14 illustrations. It is also worth noting that the children illustrated in *I Am Water* are multi-ethnic, likely reflecting some attributes of the reader's appearance.

It is possible that the children in this study imitated the behaviors depicted in *I Am Water*, providing evidence of symbolic modeling (Bandura, 1986). These new behaviors are particularly significant because, according to research from SRI, parents often express hesitation about introducing and teaching science concepts, more than other subjects such as literacy and social studies (Silander et al., 2018). The current findings suggest that this hesitation can be circumvented by completing concept-building activities alongside reading a strategically chosen text.

2. **Parental time spent actively guiding children through activities correlated with new behaviors from children.**

A positive correlation emerged between the duration of the parent interviews, the level of detail provided in those interviews, and the reported durability of the children's understandings of science and socioemotional learning concepts. Although the content of the family engagement workshops was standardized, parents who provided the most in-depth responses during the interviews were also the parents of the children who reportedly met and exceeded the goals outlined in the materials.


**3. Parent mirroring of school practices proved impactful for children.**

Two parents, Jennifer and Olivia, whose children showed the greatest growth through parent-guided activities, discussed how they extended school practices into the home environment. Jennifer described the shared practice of happy face sticker rewards, which piqued her son's interest, while Olivia described mirroring the duration of one class period. Bridging home and school practices for a child's success invites new questions about creating intentional continuity between learning environments, regardless of the formality or informality of the setting.

**4. Families remembered experiencing new behaviors from their children after using the kit.**

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that parents recalled receiving the materials more than one year after they were initially provided to them during the family engagement workshops. This suggests both a regard for the activities created by Vegas PBS and the perception of the home environment as a site of active teaching and learning. It also suggests the activities were salient and memorable for the parents interviewed.

### *Limitations*

While parents and teachers reported many successes from this iteration of RTL, significant limitations should be noted when interpreting the findings. Parental self-report can be prone to recall bias and social desirability. Additionally, the political climate created hesitation for some Spanish-speaking families, who expressed concern about the confidentiality of demographic data necessary for the study. Finally, the low response rate presented another limitation: of the 42 families who attended both workshops, only 4 provided all necessary consents for inclusion in this report, yielding a 9.5% response rate. Although the response rate may be low for program evaluation standards, the findings are nonetheless meaningful and provide valuable insights for future studies.

## V. Discussion

This section will connect the findings of the current study to current research and discuss recommendations for future research.

In alignment with the Ready To Learn theme, Learn Together: Connecting Children's Media and Learning Environments to Build Key Skills for Success," Vegas PBS collaborated with Title I pre-kindergarten teachers and families to create meaningful out-of-school learning opportunities for young children, bridging their media, home, and school ecologies. By reinforcing science and socioemotional learning takeaways across multiple learning environments, both informal and formal, all Ready To Learn partners aimed to build enduring understandings.


Participating teachers facilitated the family engagement workshops and provided data indicating that veteran teachers, rather than novices, found the facilitation materials easy to use. It is worth noting that these teachers were already familiar with the Read-View-Do protocol used in previous Vegas PBS workshops, which may have contributed to the enhanced quality of the family workshop experience. Despite this familiarity, some teachers expressed nervousness about presenting and concern for effectively communicating with multilingual parents. If the sample size were expanded in future studies, Vegas PBS might consider dedicating more resources to support teachers, both novices and veterans, either alongside Vegas PBS staff or independently.

Reasons for selecting science and socioemotional learning materials varied widely as well. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of self-report. Underlying reasons for gravitating toward socioemotional learning materials may originate from an overall hesitation about teaching science; this hesitation is shared by both parents and teachers (PBS Newshour, 2018; Silander et al., 2018). Findings surrounding science teaching hesitation suggest that increased familiarity with science topics can increase confidence. Additionally, use of concrete materials may reduce parent hesitation in introducing science concepts to children (Silander et al., 2018).

In addition to concept uncertainty, the current study identified another potential source of science hesitation. In her interview, one parent noted potential mess-making and tantrums. In light of the data from the current study affirming shared practices between home and school, future workshop facilitators may choose to frontload these concerns by sharing research and/or equipping teachers to discuss management techniques in the science classroom, such as assigning roles when completing activities with multiple children.

Insights from parent interviews underscored the positive effects of time devoted to take-home materials. A positive correlation emerged between the amount of time parents dedicated to substantive dialogue while completing and discussing the take-home activities, and the amount of time children spent processing and applying their new understandings in everyday contexts. This effect may be attributed to the key components of the take-home materials themselves, namely: 1) lessons written in a way which parents could follow, designed for dialogue and inquiry rather than quick completion, and 2) learning experiences presented through visual, haptic, and auditory channels, supporting research on multisensory educational methods (Kontra et al., 2012; Shams & Seitz, 2008).

Social Learning Theory may explain the children's adoption of new behaviors modeled by children illustrated in *I Am Water* (Bandura, 1977). Thus, it is recommended that Vegas PBS continue to prioritize parent time spent using take-home materials that align with Social Learning Theory and principles of multisensory educational methods.


Additional recommendations can be made regarding the study design to help mitigate the low response rate. Of the 42 families who attended both workshops and received the take-home materials, two declined to participate in follow-up research. Most families contacted could not be reached via phone or email, the methods put forth in IRB and AARSI proposal materials.

To engage families in the research process earlier, future studies might consider presenting research consent forms during family engagement workshops, providing incentives for research participation, or utilizing group texting to communicate with families. In continuation of engaging the school as a mediating institution and further strengthening the partnership between home, school, and media, Vegas PBS may also consider reengaging teachers by asking them to assist with research interviews about academic takeaways and/or, more administratively, to gather written consent and contact families for follow-up research interviews.

***Summary of Recommendations***

1. Increase training for teachers who facilitate family engagement workshops, as not all will be familiar with Vegas PBS or be veteran teachers.
2. Mitigate teacher hesitation around teaching science topics, which may encourage more teachers to intentionally choose science-themed take-home materials.
3. Use the family engagement workshop to address concerns about mess-making and introduce management strategies mirrored in school, such as assigning roles for science activities.
4. Continue including lesson plans for parents that prioritize depth over speed, and maintain interactive, multisensory learning elements in take-home materials—including haptic elements and books that protagonize children who mirror the learners and apply the knowledge to everyday life.

## VI. Conclusion

Overall, the insights gleaned from this iteration of Ready To Learn, including those from parents and teachers, provide promising data for follow-up research on home, school, and media partnerships aimed at building enduring understandings to optimize a child's development. Most promising is the finding that parents who devoted time to completing the activities noticed new behaviors and witnessed their child's discovery process, perhaps the result of the thoughtful selection of take-home materials and the intentional design of lessons for parents. Clearly, the experience with the RTL take-home materials was a salient experience for parents, as they were able to provide in-depth insights over a year after receiving the materials.

# Family Engagement Workshop Kits

## Appendices

Appendix A:
Science Take-Home Materials



## Appendices

Appendix B:

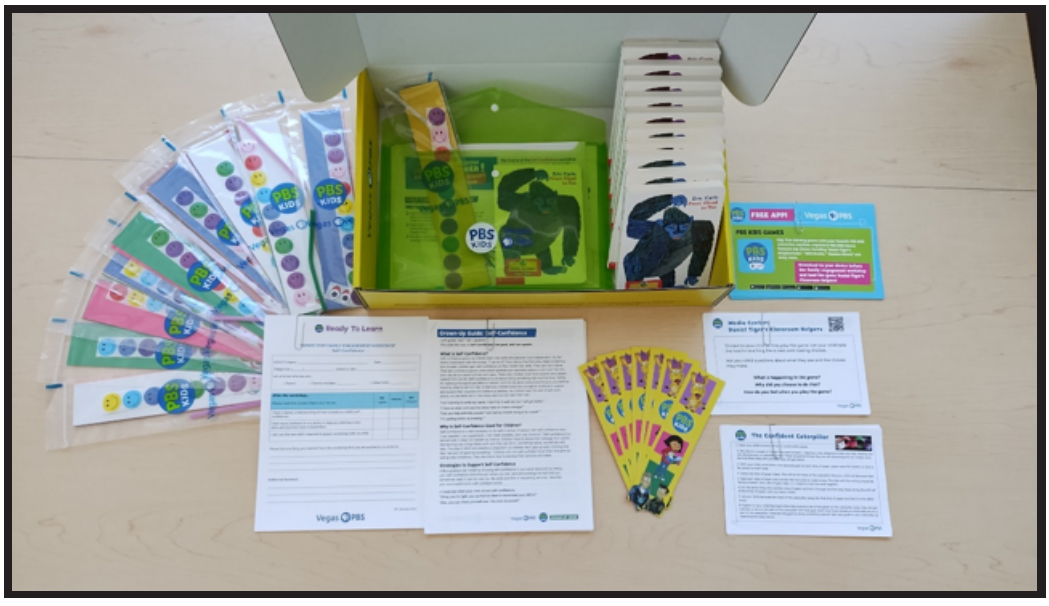
Socioemotional Learning Take Home Materials


# Family Engagement Workshop Kits

## Appendices

Appendix C:

Family Engagement Workshop Kit for Teachers Box

# Family Engagement Workshop Kits

## Appendices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