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STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

COMMIT TO HIGH-IMPACT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

It is no secret that that family engagement in school has tremendous benefits for students' learning and well-being.¹ Specifically, research indicates that family engagement can offer a plethora of benefits, including improved student selfesteem, better student behavior, higher attendance rates, and increased achievement and academic outcomes for students "regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic or racial background, or parents' education level."² Consequently, districts and schools should work actively to forge authentic, collaborative, and equitable partnerships with families based on mutual exchange of information about students and complementary application of school- and home-based supports to foster students' academic achievement and their physical and social-emotional health.³



Source: Institute for Educational Leadership³

Educators promote more effective family engagement in a number of ways that embed parents and guardians more directly in school-based activities and strengthen familial self-efficacy and capacity to support students outside of school.⁵ In fact, districts and schools should apply a variety of strategies and a layered approach to family engagement to best support their involvement (such as those <u>listed here</u>).⁶ Common strategies involved in such an approach include:⁷

- Building personal relationships and mutual understanding with families via class meetings, informal oneon-one conversations, and home visits;
- Sharing data with families about student skill levels;
- Modeling high-impact teaching practices so families can use them at home;
- Listening to families' ideas about their children's interests and challenges, and using this input to differentiate instruction; and
- Incorporating content from families' home cultures into classroom lessons.

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The Institute for Educational Leadership, through collaboration with various organizations in Connecticut, compiled examples of practices that yield higher impact on children's development. Click <u>here</u> to access the complete list of high impact as opposed to moderate or low impact practices.

Sample High-Impact Strategies for Family Engagement in School and After School Programs

Source: Institute for Educational Leadership⁸

IDENTIFY AND PUBLICIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

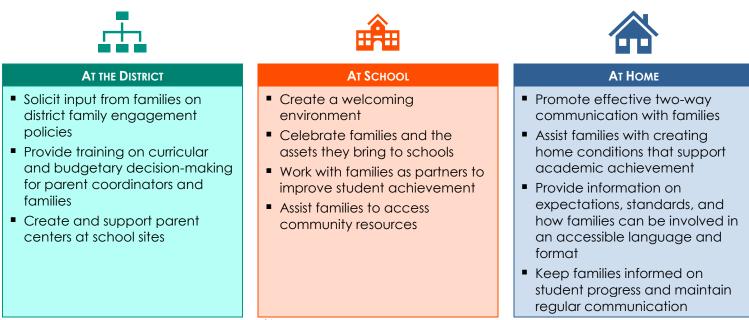
Districts should determine and publicize where needs and opportunities for family involvement exist in the larger district, at individual schools, in classrooms, and with students, as families may want to be involved, but feel unaware of ways to participate or unsure if they have anything to contribute.⁹ By accessing a published list of school needs, parents can easily identify how and where they can contribute based on their strengths and time. Teachers can also meet with parents or the PTA to share needs and availability lists and identify opportunities for engagement that build on parent strengths as well as school and student needs.¹⁰

In particular, the National PTA recommends seeking parents out for engagement, rather than waiting for parents to offer.¹¹ Such family engagement can occur in many formats, and schools should provide families with multiple ways to get involved.¹² Parents can engage in their child's learning at home, in the classroom, at school, or at the district office. At home, parents can create supportive learning environments, talk with students about their homework, set goals and discuss college and career aspirations and plans, and read school communications. At school and in the classroom, and parent-teacher parents can meet with teachers, volunteer, participate in associations/organizations. Additionally, at the district office, parents can attend school board meetings, attend and lead trainings, serve on advisory committees, and participate in decision-



making.¹³ Click <u>here</u> to access additional parent-initiated engagement opportunities presented by California Department of Education.

School/District-Initiated Practices to Promote Family Engagement



Source: California Department of Education¹⁴

Strong communication between the school and home is crucial to promoting family engagement.

Two-way communication helps create a positive partnership between the home and school, while a lack of effective communication can inhibit family engagement.¹⁵ While schools routinely provide information to families through handouts, websites, and phone calls, families rarely have easy and routine ways to respond. Therefore, "the most effective way to build a real partnership is to create regular opportunities for open, honest dialogue. All families should feel that the school keeps them informed on important issues and events and that it is easy to communicate with teachers, the principal, and other school staff."¹⁶ Families should have both regular communication and access to further communication with the school as a precursor to other forms of engagement.¹⁷

To facilitate better communication between home and school, **principals and teachers should survey families at the start of the school year to determine preferred communication styles and needs**, as "it is critical that schools have a variety of communication strategies that reflect the types of communication preferred in their community."¹⁹ Communications from the district, school, and teacher should be available in languages that families and the community understand.²⁰ Educators may also need to adapt their communication strategies depending on student and family needs. For example, educators can access strategies for engaging and communicating with hard-to-reach families <u>here</u>.

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Communication Strategies to Increase Parent Engagement

Universal Strategies (for all students and families)

- Teachers encourage and plan for parent-teacher conferences with all families;
- Teachers send home daily communication in student agendas;
- Teachers and schools develop electronic grade booklets so families can monitor their child's progress frequently;
- Staff send school or class newsletters to every family and post them on the school Web site;
- The school clearly communcuates school policies to all families in their home language; and
- Adminstrators ensure that teachers and administrators have positive communication contacts with families about students before they contact families about neaative issues.

Targeted Strategies (for some students and families)

- Staff members hold parent-teacher conferences as needed;
- School staff members make frequent phone calls or send special weekly notes updating parents on their child's progress; and
- Educators explain specialized or technical terms about a child's academic or behavioral issues and interventions to families in everyday language.

Intensive Strategies (for a few students and families)

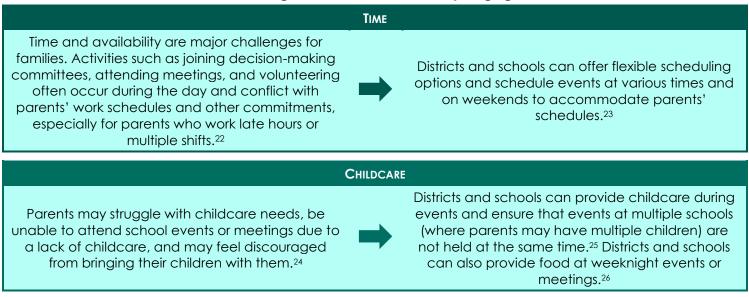
- Staff members including nurses, social workers, teachers or parent mentors conduct home visits to build relationships and share important information with the families of students receiving intensive interventions;
- The school works closely with families of students who are chronically absent to communicate promptly when a student is not at school; and
- The school works with highly mobile and homeless families to establish a communication system that fits the families' needs (frequent changes in phone number, home address and adult caregivers).

Source: Ohio Department of Education²¹

ACTIVELY REDUCE BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Parents may encounter a variety of barriers that inhibit their abilities to actively engage in their child's education and school. Often, these barriers are logistical, and schools can implement strategies to ease parents' engagement challenges:

Common Logistical Barriers to Family Engagement







TRANSPORTATION

Families may lack transportation to the school or have trouble parking.²⁷

Districts and schools can bus parents to events, set up carpools, hold events in community locations that are easier for parents to attend (e.g., community centers, church halls, parks, libraries), conduct home visits, and provide clearly marked visitor-only parking spaces.²⁸

Source: Multiple

Questions to Consider

- What might make a family feel unwelcome at our school? How can we address this?
- What resources are available in our school and/or community that can help families learn the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the education system?
- What are we doing to build trusting relationships with families? What resources are we devoting to this? What resources do we need?
- How might families experience language barriers in our school, and what can we do to support them?

Source: WIDA23

Relatedly, families may hold beliefs or have negative prior school experiences that act as barriers to their involvement in their child's school. Families may be unfamiliar with the school or school's culture and practices.²⁹ Schools can address these barriers by warmly welcoming families to the school, building mutually trusting and respectful relationships, establishing regular communications, personally welcoming parents who seem uncomfortable and withdrawn. and developing a parent handbook that lists rules, procedures, policies, and where to find answers to frequently asked questions.³⁰

Language and culture can also act as significant barriers to engagement.³² For example, language can obstruct engagement when meetings, events, and communications are not available in the family's primary language.³³ Schools can reduce language and cultural barriers to engagement by:

- Providing educators with targeted professional development on engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families.³⁴
- Providing translators for all events and activities for families who do not speak English and translating family notices and newsletters.³⁵
- Viewing interactions from the families' perspective and working to understand how a person's cultural lens influences interactions and family and community engagement.³⁶



PROVIDE PARENT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Parent education initiatives and programs should provide parents with the tools, knowledge, and skills to support their child's learning or increase their own knowledge.³⁷ For example, teachers can provide parents with resources and effective study habits for supporting and reinforcing what students are learning in the classroom at home, from content such as fractions to tools such as PowerPoint.³⁸ Parent education can also offer parents strategies and information related to child development, effective parenting strategies (e.g., nutrition, communication, behavior), and tips for establishing supporting learning environments at home.³⁹ Districts and

Effective Practices For Parent Instruction

- Implement programs of sufficient duration to enhance learner progress;
- Build on parents' prior knowledge, skills, and experience;
- Respect parents' cultures and ways of knowing;
- Get to know parents and their needs; and
- Focus on the information and skills parents will need to help their children.

Source: Center for Applied Lingusitics³²

schools can support parents' efficacy and capacity in multiple ways, such as providing resources, offering classes and workshops, and providing a parent resource center:

PROVIDE RESOURCES

Districts can provide parents with physical resources to help them learn about the school and support their child's learning. For example, the NEA offers parent guides on a variety of topics, such as math and literacy, the Kindergarten transition, and bullying.⁴¹

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Salt Lake City School District offers multiple online resources for parents on its website,

accessible here.

Parent Education Methods

OFFER CLASSES

Districts should offer classes based on topics that parents would find helpful and about what their students are learning. Districts can determine what parents want to learn by conducting a needs assessment or survey of parents' interests.⁴² Topics can span child development, strategies to support students' learning, or parent skill development such as ESL, for example.

IMPLEMENT A PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

Parent centers are welcoming, comfortable locations within schools or districts that provide parents with additional support. ⁴³ Parent centers serve a variety of functions, such as welcoming families; modeling effective parent engagement; providing information, resources (e.g., on disabilities), and communication; and providing technology access and assistance.⁴⁴

Source: Multiple

Sample Parent Education Topics

- How the school system works and expectations for parent engagement;
- What their child is learning/content covered at certain grades;
- Preparing for school or grade level transitions;
- Child growth and development;

Source: Multiple⁴⁵

- Students' social-emotional development, behavior, and bullying;
- English as a second language; and
- How to help with homework, improve study skills, and support student learning.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide further information on family engagement and can support educators in engaging parents on specific topics or in working with specific populations.

Resource	ΤΟΡΙΟ	Publishing Organization	Shortened URL (with embedded hyperlink)	
"English Language Learners and Parental Involvement" ⁴⁶	Parent engagement for ELs	National Education Policy Center	https://argo.page.link/YtnhM	
"Parent Engagement Strategies and Resources to Communicate with Families" ⁴⁷	Parent engagement for college and career readiness	Oregon GEAR UP	<u>https://qrgo.page.link/gs1Me</u>	
"Bringing Attendance Home: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence" ⁴⁸	Parent engagement for increasing student attendance	Attendance Works	<u>https://argo.page.link/sCfdA</u>	
"Newcomer Toolkit Chapter 5: Establishing Partnerships with Families" ⁴⁹	Parent engagement for newcomer parents	U.S. Department of Education	https://qrgo.page.link/DgqRY	
"Handbook on Family and Community Engagement" ⁵⁰	Family and community engagement	School Community Network	<u>https://argo.page.link/YZj8m</u>	
"Partnering with Families to Improve Literacy Skills (K-5)" ⁵¹	Family engagement for literacy skill development	Ohio Department of Education	https://argo.page.link/ASiqA	

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