

Meaningful Family Engagement Strategies



“Family engagement is a shared responsibility between schools, families, and communities where all receive equitable access to tools and supports needed to successfully work together toward the development of children and youth for college, career, and lifelong learning.

[Office of Family Engagement](#), Nevada Department of Education

What is family engagement?

“Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development,” and continues across a child’s life and learning settings (Reference: [National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, NAFSCE](#)).

This definition implies a collaborative relationship between schools and families that empowers families to actively support children’s social, emotional, and academic success.

Family engagement differs from family involvement, which focuses on the activities at home or school that families can do together (Reference: [An Investigation of Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Parental Involvement](#)). Instead, family engagement involves shared responsibility and leadership which appreciates and leverages the important role of a family in their child’s life.

These strategies were borrowed in part and adapted from the



New York
21st Century Community Learning Centers
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Tip #1: Establish trust and build authentic relationships

Parents and families need to feel valued, included, and connected within the school culture through authentic relationships. Consider ways to promote a sense of inclusion and belonging:

Strategy:	Action Item:
Establish a solid foundation - indicate program values and the importance of a successful parent partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Participate in training on building relationships with families offered by the district *Use Welcoming Families' resource from Flamboyan Foundation *Invite families into the school
Recognize the apprehension some families may have with school systems or establishments - acknowledge their experiences and approach interactions with sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ask families what supports they need to be successful *Be aware of our community needs and barriers and risk factors for families not asking for help *Share positive news – send home “Keep it Positive” postcards to highlight something positive their student achieved *Create ongoing check-ins for family input
Demonstrate consistency and transparency around policies and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Share staffing or district- and/or school-initiative updates *Keep school website up to date *Provide school newsletter monthly with updates
Ensure that school communication and engagement are accessible to everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Design family-friendly materials that are easy to use/read; translate as needed *Ask families what mode of communication works best for them
Devote resources to coordinate with family members and facilitate community connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Share the role of designated family engagement staff with direct ways to communicate with families

Promising Practice: *Designate a Site-Based Family Representative*

Designate a Family Representative to build authentic relationships with families. The presence of a consistent and positive face will help to establish trust of the program and school. The Family Representative may be responsible for communicating with families to promote engagement in school efforts. As trust is built, families will be more likely to engage in school offerings.

Featured Resource:

Edutopia outlines [20 Tips for Developing Positive Relationships With Parents](#).

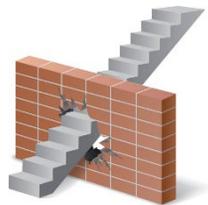


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Tip #2: Engage parents/families in student learning

Effective schools view parents/families as partners in facilitating children’s learning and supports them in various ways.

Strategy:	Action Item:
Provide supported opportunities for parents/families to give feedback about engagement in their children’s learning at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Parent-Teacher Conference surveys *Back-to-school night feedback forms *Easy process for scheduling one-on-one appointments with teachers/administration
Provide guidance tools to help families support their children’s learning at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Provide homework policies *Offer Parent University classes on strategies on how to monitor student grades through Parent Portal, technology, how to help with organization and study skills, and the impact of social media use, etc.
Communicate strategies for families to support their children’s learning at the district, school, or classroom level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Provide family-friendly, grade-level learning objectives *Host a family information night about curriculum and/or assessments *Show families Resources from WCSD Family-School Partnerships *Give families information on free tutoring through Brainfuse at the Washoe County Library System
Provide families with opportunities to participate in academic goal setting for their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Share individual goals and objectives at Parent-Teacher Conferences *Offer conferences at the secondary level *Offer virtual conferences to families *Host Pre-K to Kindergarten transition training with I’m Ready for K booklet *Ask families what mode of communication works best for them



Promising Practice: *Identify Barriers to Family Engagement*

Recognize families’ challenges to engagement. Interview families and school staff to find out what may be preventing families from engaging with the school. Note the lack of, quality of, and clarity of communication to families. Be on the alert for misinformed assumptions about families and schools.

Featured Resource:

Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships & Implications for Practice, Karen Mapp, Anne Henderson, Stephany Cuevas, Martha Franco, and Suzanna Ewert

Tip #3: Identify and understand family needs

Prioritize collecting feedback and acknowledging family perspectives to help them feel respected and part of the community, while providing staff with valuable insight about community concerns. Explore the following strategies:

Strategy:	Action Item:
<p>Engage in active listening - approach conversations and interactions with care</p> <p>Conduct quarterly meetings with families where families can add items to the agenda and to school surveys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Provide staff with training around the core principles of family engagement *Provide staff with resources about using a trauma-informed approach and building reflective practices for themselves and with families *Use person-first language *Consider cultural differences when communicating *Publish action steps from meetings and results of surveys
<p>Conduct a survey to understand pain points, barriers, and priorities for students and families,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Include topics such as logistical issues and academic goals *Additional methods: parent meetings, informal conversations
<p>Use daily interactions to capture anecdotal feedback or insights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use existing contact points, including student pick-up times, phone calls, texts, and emails to connect with families *Ask families what mode of communication works best for them
<p>Communicate to families how the school will address relevant issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use families preferred mode of communication to ensure information is received
<p>Consider the diverse family structures that exist within a community, which may be biological or non-biological, chosen, or circumstantial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Remind staff to use language such as “parent/guardian” or “primary caregiver” to include a range of family members and people that play a pivotal support role in students’ lives



Promising Practice: *Conduct a family interests and needs’ survey*

Families are more likely to engage with the school when offerings reflect the actual needs of the community. Conduct a survey to drive activities for both students and families. Ask families what supports they need to address barriers to participation in special events and adult learning opportunities (ex: childcare, transportation, interpretation, and meeting times).

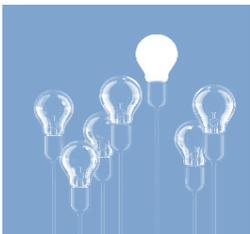
Featured Resource:

Explore this [Family Interests and Needs’ Survey](#) in English and Spanish for an example.

Tip # 4: Provide opportunities for empowerment and leadership

Recognizing and empowering families as leaders in the school is a critical component of family engagement. The methods below can support purposeful collaboration:

Strategy:	Action Item:
<p>Include family members in the planning and decision-making process - sharing power and ownership in the development of activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Include a diverse group of families in developing the School Performance Plan *Provide pre-training for families on how to sit on a leadership team *Ask families to give valuable insight regarding student needs *Obtain family input on parent and family engagement policy *Facilitate discussions to lift up all voices
<p>Provide opportunities for in-person conversations – limit mailings and sending documents home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Leverage student pick-up times, phone calls, texts, home visits, and events *Create family engagement committee with staff and families
<p>Invite family members to share their skills, interests, and talents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Incorporate family skills into school activities: reading to students, showcasing their cultural background, presenting about career pathways *Offer families opportunities within the school
<p>Connect families to each other - building connections within the community can enhance the parent/guardian network and generate ideas for school improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use icebreakers at open houses, academic family events, and social media to promote interaction *Participate in training on building relationships with families offered by the district
<p>Recognize and thank families for their input</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Create certificates of appreciation, family spotlights, thank you notes/signs, or a year-end celebration event



Promising Practice: *Family participation in a Parent Advisory Committee*

Families can provide advice and assistance to the school around the school performance plan, programs, activities, and services. Families' knowledge about the needs of their children, community, and selves makes them valuable to planning and decision making.

Recruit families by expressing the value of their role and gratitude for their participation. Ask what time and location would most easily allow for their participation in meetings and consider any transportation, childcare, or interpretation needs.

Featured Resource:

Youth.gov describes strategies for [Engaging Families as Partners in Decision-Making](#).

Tip # 5: Develop meaningful and equitable opportunities for engagement

Consider providing a range of offerings and experiences that reinforce an inclusive program culture:

Strategy:	Action Item:
Create spaces and activities where staff can get to know families or engage in relevant activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Plan an interactive Back to School Night and/or Annual Title I meeting, peer networking, and learning opportunities *Plan interactive parent teacher conferences *Communicate data to families and invite families to ask questions
Lift up community voices and experiences to build a school culture that represents all families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Consider special events and program offerings like Parent University and other outside resources that appeal to all community members
Offer home visits or plan gatherings in community spaces where people feel comfortable and have an established routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Explore local establishments (e.g., library, parks, places of worship) *Coordinate with other agencies who may already be working with families *Participate in the Parent Teacher Home Visit Program offered by the school district
Coordinate with community organizations and institutions to link families to helpful resources and platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Investigate offerings for mental health supports, free adult education services, and other areas of interest
Ensure school communication materials are translated into families' language of comfort as practicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Work with school and community partners who may be able to provide translation services



Promising Practice: *Family Engagement Access*

With limited transportation options, community resources, employment opportunities, and even internet access, many families are unable to access the supports they need. Asking families about barriers they face and adapting processes based on that information can increase engagement and attendance rates. Creative solutions to increase access may include providing bus passes, offering Wi-Fi hubs, conducting home visits, and/or bringing community services to the school building.

Featured Resource:

Community Health Alliance offers a [Mobile Dental Program](#) with services to children and adults including oral exams and x-rays, dental cleaning and topical fluoride treatment, dental sealants and filling, etc.

Tip # 6: Provide relevant adult learning opportunities

Empower families by offering educational opportunities to build upon their current experience and learn new skills. Consider the following when planning and designing adult learning opportunities:

Strategy:	Action Item:
Ask families what adult learning offerings would be of interest or helpful for themselves or for their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Provide topic and content options as examples *Ask for additional program or curriculum ideas *Partner with Parent University, RISE, community-based organizations *Use the family interests and needs' survey from Tip #2
Use adult learning theories and principles around family engagement – Relational: built on mutual trust; linked to learning and development; asset-based; culturally responsive and respectful; collaborative; and interactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Create engaging lesson plans that offer experiential learning opportunities *Ask open-ended questions and recognize their existing knowledge
Advertise offerings through platforms that families regularly access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use social media or short video commercials *Promote events on the school's communication platform *Partner with local establishments to help share information widely
Include event accommodations to address barriers to participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Partner with Parent University to offer childcare, interpretation, and/or transportation
Consider offerings that are timely and relevant to families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Provide guidance for families to support students or manage difficult issues, such as social emotional learning or digital literacy *Offer transition events for families of students going to middle and high school



Promising Practice: 4-A Learning Sequence

Use the 4-A Learning Sequence when designing adult learning lesson plans, which uses methods most effective for adult learning. Anchor the learner to the topic – “why is this relevant to you?” Add information to increase their knowledge. Apply the new skills in an engaging way. Provide take away opportunities to incorporate the new skill in the immediate future.

Featured Resource:

The [4-A Learning Sequence](#) from Global Learning Partners provides a template to map out learning goals, activities, and strategies.

Tools and Resources

Explore additional platforms and guidance below:

Family Engagement Asset:	Source:
<u>Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement</u>	<i>State Support Network</i>
<u>Communicating with Families in Different Contexts</u>	<i>Flamboyant Foundation (many other resources)</i>
<u>Framework in Depth</u>	<i><u>Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family School Partnerships</u></i>
<u>Parent Teacher Home Visits</u>	<i>Family-School Partnerships, WCSD</i>
<u>Promising Partnership Practices</u>	<i>National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University</i>
<u>Engaging Families as Partners in Decision-Making</u>	<i>Youth.gov</i>
<u>20 Tips for Developing Positive Relationships With Parents</u>	<i>Edutopia</i>
<u>5 Ways Trauma-Informed Care Supports Children’s Development</u>	<i>Child Trends</i>
<u>DEI Resource Portal</u>	<i>NYSED Community Schools Technical Assistance Center</i>
<u>BrainFuse</u>	<i><u>Washoe County Library System</u></i>



Reflection Document: “Glow and Grow”

As you reflect on your school’s family engagement efforts, consider each of the tips shared in this toolkit. Assess practices and systems that are working well (“Glow”) as well as potential areas for improvement (“Grow”). Indicate specific initiatives that should continue in the column on the left and highlight any pain points that should be addressed or improved in the column on the right.

Tip # 1: Establish trust and build authentic relationships	
Glow:	Grow:
Tip # 2: Engage parents/families in student learning	
Glow:	Grow:
Tip # 3: Identify and understand family needs	
Glow:	Grow:

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Tip # 4: Provide opportunities for empowerment and leadership	
Glow:	Grow:
Tip # 5: Develop meaningful and equitable opportunities for engagement	
Glow:	Grow:
Tip # 6: Provide relevant adult learning opportunities	
Glow:	Grow:

The document originally came from [New York 21st Century Community Learning Centers](#).



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Action Planning Document

Use the table below to identify strategies and tangible action items that can enhance family engagement efforts within your organization. Select one tip from the toolkit as an area of focus and complete the rows below with relevant information. Intentional action planning supports accountability and can bring ideas to fruition.

Tip:	
Goal:	
Action/Task:	
Deadline:	
Necessary Resources:	
Lead Staff Member:	
Supporting Staff Members:	
Measure(s) of Success:	

