

# REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Family and Community Engagement  
June 2020

## Question:

What is the research on planning inclusive and culturally responsive school events for families? What does the research say with respect to specific strategies to increase participation of diverse families in school events?

## Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about planning culturally responsive and inclusive school events. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on planning culturally responsive school events for families. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed strategies for increasing the participation of diverse families. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

## References

Garcia, M.E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C.B., Flores, N., & Miller, K.B. (2016). *Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education: Part 1: Building an understanding of family and community engagement* (REL 2016-148). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569110>

*From the abstract:* “The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education is a four-part resource that brings together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The toolkit defines family and community engagement as an overarching approach to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students’ ongoing learning and development. The primary audiences for this toolkit are administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in diverse schools and districts. Part 1 is designed to guide educators in building awareness of how their beliefs and assumptions about family and community engagement influence their interactions with families and the community and how knowledge about the demographic characteristics of the families in their schools can inform educators about what might support or hinder family engagement with schools.”

Garcia, M. E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C. B., Flores, N., & Miller, K. B. (2016). *Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education: Part 2: Building a cultural bridge* (REL 2016-151). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569111>

*From the abstract:* “The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education is a four-part resource that brings together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The toolkit defines family and community engagement as an overarching approach to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students’ ongoing learning and development. The primary audiences for this toolkit are administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in diverse schools and districts. Part 2 is designed to tap into the strengths of families and community members and help families establish active roles in the school community in support of student learning.”

Garcia, M. E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C. B., Flores, N., & Miller, K. B. (2016). *Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education: Part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through effective communication* (REL 2016-152). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569112>

*From the abstract:* “The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education is a four-part resource that brings together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The toolkit defines family and community engagement as an overarching approach to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students’ ongoing learning and development. The primary audiences for this toolkit are administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in diverse schools and districts. Part 3 is designed to show how cross-cultural and two-way communication enhances family and community engagement.”

Jasis, P. M., & Ordoñez-Jasis, R. (2012). Latino parent involvement: Examining commitment and empowerment in schools. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 65–89. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Latino-Parent-Involvement%3A-Examining-Commitment-and-Jasis-Ordo%3B1ez-Jasis/84ca3038d1584a6095f5998ccefdfaca0dbae582>

*From the abstract:* “This study examines the process of parent engagement at three community and school-based parent participation projects involving Latino immigrant families in California. Through the participants’ testimonios, the study investigates the motivations and interactions contextualizing their leadership development, participation, and organizing activities as well as the significance of their emerging school activism on other aspects of their lives. Specifically, the study explores the notions of *tequío* and women-led activism, seen as critical to understanding the participants’ engagement process and to increase the level and quality of Latino parent participation in schools, maximizing its positive impact on their children’s education and life prospects.”

Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Austin, TX: SEDL. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593896>

*From the abstract:* “This report presents a new framework for designing family engagement initiatives that build capacity among educators and families to partner with one another around student success. Based in existing research and best practices, the ‘Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships’ is designed to act as a scaffold for the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs. The Framework should be seen as a ‘compass,’ laying out the goals and conditions necessary to chart a path toward effective family engagement efforts that are linked to student achievement and school improvement. The components of the Framework include: (1) a description of the capacity challenges that must be addressed to support the cultivation of effective home-school partnerships; (2) an articulation of the conditions integral to the success of family-school partnership initiatives and interventions; (3) an identification of the desired intermediate capacity goals that should be the focus of family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state, and local level; and (4) a description of the capacity-building outcomes for school and program staff as well as for families. After outlining these four components, the report presents three case studies that illustrate and further develop the Framework. The case studies feature a school, a district, and a county whose efforts to develop capacity around effective family-school partnerships embody the Dual Capacity-Building Framework.”

McKenna, M. K., & Millen, J. (2013). Look! Listen! Learn! Parent narratives and grounded theory models of parent voice, presence, and engagement in K–12 education. *School Community Journal*, 23(1), 9–48. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1004331>

*From the abstract:* “Educators’ expectations and understandings of parental involvement in our nation’s schools are often disconnected from the reality of students’ home lives. This qualitative study purports that educators often lose opportunities to more fully understand and serve students, particularly when perceptions of parental involvement and home-school-community relationships are not accurate or expansive enough to appreciate the nuances of

different cultural, economic, or geographic circumstances. Parent (or caregiver) engagement, as we define it, encapsulates both parent voice and parent presence. Parent voice implies not only that parents have ideas and opinions about their children, but also that educators are receptive to this voice, allowing for an open, multidirectional flow of communication. Similarly, parent presence refers to actions related to the voices of caregivers. Based on a grounded theory model of qualitative research, we used a small, theoretically derived sample of parents involved with a local parent-education program to further understand parent engagement, presenting detailed descriptions of conversations and writing done by participants through focus groups and interviews. From these data, new models of parent voice and presence emerged. These models act as precursors to a reconfigured and more comprehensive model of parent engagement. Crucial to the final model is an understanding of parent participation in children's lives that is fluid, robust, and specific to context and culture. The final model presented herein is a combination of parent voice and parent presence, whereby children's well-being is central to the interactions."

O'Donnell, J., & Kirkner, S. L. (2014). The impact of a collaborative family involvement program on Latino families and children's educational performance. *School Community Journal*, 24(1), 211–234. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1032271>

*From the abstract:* "Latino families highly value education and are committed to their children's educational success; however, Latino students often experience educational challenges. Well-designed family involvement programs can encourage Latino families, especially new immigrants or monolingual Spanish-speakers, to increase their involvement resulting in positive outcomes for children, families, and schools. This two-year study examined the impact of the YMCA Family Involvement Project on levels of family involvement and children's educational performance using a sample of 144 low-income, urban, predominantly monolingual Spanish-speaking, Latino caregivers of 208 elementary-age children. Family workshops developed based on community input, focused on in-home education strategies, parenting education, family literacy, and community leadership and advocacy. Teacher training on family involvement and school socials were also provided. Significant improvements were found in frequency of family-teacher contact, family involvement at school, and quality of the family-teacher relationship after program participation. Hierarchical regression analyses found higher levels of family participation predicted significantly better student social skills and work-habits grades after one year of participation when controlling for baseline scores. At the end of two years, level of participation significantly predicted student effort, social skills, and work-habit grades and standardized English Language Arts test scores, and was somewhat predictive of achievement grades. Implications for practice are discussed."

Toso, B. W., & Grinder, E. L. (2016). *Parent engagement and leadership opportunities: The benefits for parents, children, and educators*. Practitioner's Guide #6. University Park, PA: Penn State College of Education, Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED587534>

*From the abstract:* "This guide discusses incorporating leadership training and opportunities into parent involvement and family literacy programs. By doing this, parents can have a

meaningful voice in social and educational issues, and educators can have a better understanding of the benefits of working with and supporting parent [sic] as equal partners in schools and communities.”

Yull, D., Blitz, L. V., Thompson, T., & Murray, C. (2014). Can we talk? Using community-based participatory action research to build family and school partnerships with families of color. *School Community Journal*, 24(2), 9–32. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1048538>

*From the abstract:* “Research has demonstrated persistent, disproportionately negative educational outcomes for students of color, causing national concern in this area. School personnel increasingly understand the need to engage with parents as educational partners, but parents of color may feel marginalized in these efforts. This paper presents findings from a series of focus groups with middle-class parents of color in a small city in the Northeast United States. Using critical race theory, this research examines the parents’ experiences in the community and with the schools. Findings regarding community include lack of cultural enrichment for families of color, isolation in the community, and experiences of colorblind racism and cultural ignorance. School-focused findings include lack of cultural competency in the schools, stereotyping, and racial disproportionality in school discipline. The discussion centers on the school district’s strategic plan and the community-university partnership used as a vehicle for responding to these critical concerns.”

### *Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult*

Ask A REL Midwest at American Institutes for Research. (2018). *What research and resources are available about practices to strengthen family and community engagement or activism within preK–12 education, in particular among culturally diverse groups?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/askarel/2018/family-community-engagement.aspx>

Ask A REL Northeast & Islands at Education Development Center (2019). *What is the research on family engagement strategies that have been shown to be effective in high-need communities?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/AskAREL/Response/36>

## *Additional Organizations to Consult*

National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement: <https://www.nafsce.org/>

*From the website:* “NAFSCE is the first membership association focused solely on advancing family, school, and community engagement (FSCE). Our mission: To advance high-impact policies and practices for family, school, and community engagement to promote child development and improve student achievement.”

- Family Engagement Toolkits: <https://nafsce.org/page/Toolkits>

Teaching Tolerance: <https://www.tolerance.org/>

*From the website:* “Our mission is to help teachers and schools educate children and youth to be active participants in a diverse democracy. Teaching Tolerance provides free resources to educators—teachers, administrators, counselors, and other practitioners—who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Educators use our materials to supplement the curriculum, to inform their practices, and to create civil and inclusive school communities where children are respected, valued, and welcome participants.”

- Family and Community Engagement:  
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education/family-and-community-engagement>

U.S. Department of Education, Family & Community Engagement: <https://www.ed.gov/parent-and-family-engagement>

*From the website:* “Raising the next generation is a shared responsibility. When families, communities, and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits. For schools and districts across the U.S., family engagement is becoming an integral part of education reform efforts.”

- ParentCamp Tool Kit: <https://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement/parentcamp-tool-kit>

## Methods

### *Keywords and Search Strings*

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“culturally responsive” OR “culturally relevant” OR “culturally meaningful”) AND “school event\*” AND (famil\* OR parent\*) AND plan\*
- “school event\*” AND (famil\* OR parent\*) AND (involvement OR engagement) AND (“best practice\*” OR “promising practice\*” OR strateg\*) AND (diverse OR “high-need community”)

## *Databases and Resources*

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

## *Reference Search and Selection Criteria*

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- **Date of the publication:** Searches cover information available within the last 10 years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Reference sources:** IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- **Methodology:** The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- **Existing knowledge base:** Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on June 15, 2020. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.