

TRANSCRIPT

Building Capacity for School Success in Families of Young English Learner (EL) Students

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[Slide: Goals for the webinar]

ERIC HAAS

There are two things that we want you to get out of this, and that you will learn about today. The first is, specific activities that families can use at home to promote school readiness with their English learner students—they're young, pre-K to K, maybe grades 1 and 2, as well—in ways that can help get them ready for school, promoting their L1, or their home language, as well as L2, or English at home. And that will be the first part. And the second part will be ways for schools and families to overcome various barriers that often exist for successful home-school partnerships. And both of these—and especially the second one—we'll talk a lot about how we can tweak activities that we do, specifically for English learner and dual language families.

[Slide: Your presenters today...]

So, we are very fortunate to have three excellent presenters today, who will be talking through and commenting on the various information that's being presented today. The first one is Linda Espinosa, who is Professor Emeritus of early childhood education at the University of Missouri at Columbia. She's a national expert who's written and consulted extensively on second language development, as well as family outreach and best practices for schools.

Melanie Packham and Maria Paredes are both colleagues of mine at WestEd. They work in the Comprehensive School Assistance Program, but more specifically, they work in the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams program, APPT, which works very closely or primarily with building these parents-teacher-school bonds. And recently, for example, there's a White House initiative on education excellence for Hispanics, and they've honored the APPT program here at WestEd, which is led by Maria Paredes, as a "bright spot in Hispanic education." And Melanie Packham is a facilitator in this program. And as you'll see throughout, they have excellent insights and a lot of experience.

[Slide: Reminders:]

So as we move along, I wanted to just do a couple reminders. Please type in as many questions and comments as you have in the chat area—that’s how we’ll communicate, that’s how we can get your feedback—and two of my colleagues here, Elizabeth Burr and Min Chen, will be monitoring the chats to bring any questions or comments you have up to the presenters. Also know that we are going to have a number of resources at the end, so lots of the things we talk about, there will be links at the end of each section of the presentation.

Additionally, we’re going to use two terms, “English learner” and “dual language learner,” interchangeably. “English learner” is often used more often in the K-12 situation, and “dual language learner” is often used more in the pre-K area of education, and there are some slight differences in emphasis; however, for this webinar, we’re going to use them interchangeably. And also—most people I expect to know this, but just to be sure—when we refer to L1, we’re referring to a student’s home language or native language; and L2, we’re referring to their learning of English as a second language. So sometimes we’ll use “home language,” sometimes we’ll use “native language,” sometimes we’ll use “L1,” and sometimes we’ll use “L2,” and other times “English.”

[Slide: Webinar structure:]

There are going to be two main segments today. The first one is going to focus on how families can help students, and young ELs in particular, be ready for school. And the second part will be about family engagement and how we can structure home-school interactions to overcome common barriers and support student success, with an especial emphasis on families with English learners. Each section is going to have basically three parts: an “understand it” section, where we will do a brief review of topics from the first webinar; then we will have some basic tips for people to think about as we describe the various activities; and then we will have two to three activities that exemplify possible things that you could do and that the presenters have actually done successfully—some for school readiness, and some for overcoming barriers to effective home-school partnerships. We will talk through exemplar activities, and at the end there will be resources about those specific activities and many more that you can use yourself as well as with parents directly.

[Slide: *Working with families has been a cornerstone of effective early childhood practices for decades*]

So, the first one that we want to talk about, then, is working with families for school readiness, and I will turn this over to Linda Espinosa, who will describe the basic understandings involved in this.

LINDA ESPINOSA

Well, hello to everybody, and thank you for joining us. What I’m going to talk about first is sort of the basis for active engagement of families—all families, including linguistically diverse families. And as many of you know, it has been a cornerstone of early childhood education for decades. It was a requirement in Head Start since Head Start’s inception in 1965, and in most

state pre-K programs now, it is also a requirement. So I think we've known, through our basic educational principles for a long time, that it's an effective way to support children's learning, particularly when they're young. However, we now know...also know an awful lot more, through recent, rigorous research, exactly what types of parent engagement strategies are effective and exactly what types of outcomes with children we can expect to impact through our parent engagement activities. So, effective family engagement is linked to improved child outcomes—we know this now—in literacy, cognitive language, math, and social-emotional skills. There's research that supports the long-term improvements in academic outcomes. And, particularly with children from linguistically diverse families, we know that the families are critical to the cultural and language preservation. Sometimes we describe it as families holding the key to the cultural and linguistic knowledge that is so important to children's long-term dual development and life success.

I think what's particularly relevant for this webinar is the very recent research that helps us understand what are those effective strategies for engaging diverse families and, specifically, what are the practices that families and schools can use together that promote school readiness for young dual language learners. So we have a lot of recent information that can help guide our practices around exactly how we engage families and how this will benefit children.

[Slide: *Supporting school readiness for young DLLs – Understand it*]

The first concept there is school readiness. So what do we mean by school readiness for all children? And I think probably everybody on this webinar knows that all states have a set of early learning and development standards, or guidelines; people call them different things. But they basically outline what is it that children are expected to know at three years, at four years, and then at kindergarten entry age, along all the developmental domains. So in language skills, in early literacy skills, in mathematical knowledge, social-emotional, disposition to learn, etc., they have identified through a very careful process what it means to be ready to be successful in kindergarten. For instance, in mathematics, most states have expectations that at kindergarten entry, children will be able to sort and classify, so that they will be able to use attributes of objects like size, shape, color, and sort different objects into piles that match that particular attribute; or count to 20; or speak so others can understand them; find patterns and shapes, etc. So these are basic competencies that states would look for, and programs would look for, as children enter kindergarten—all children.

The new dimension of school readiness, the dimension that often isn't given as much attention, is what does this mean for children who are dual language learners who have a language other than English that is their primary or dominant language? What we know now—and it's very compelling research—is that a strong foundation in the child's first, or home, language is essential for school readiness and long-term academic success. And I think if we understand that principle really well and communicate it to families about their role in preserving and developing and maintaining and supporting that first language, then that process of acquiring English is going to be so much easier for this child, and other aspects of the child's development will not be compromised, because they won't be threatened with loss of that first language.

The other thing, I think, we know definitively right now, is that when dual language learners enter kindergarten, they also need to have some English language skills. And these English language skills can be taught and learned in a pre-K setting, in an early childhood setting, in an additive way, so that in addition to supporting home language—which we do with the families—we can add English to that. And that will improve that child’s long-term success of academic achievement in English.

[Slide: Supporting school readiness for young DLLs – Tips]

So, those things that I mentioned earlier—the basic concepts of math, language, literacy—children can know those in any language, and states need to actually consider how they will acknowledge and assess and document what children know in any language.

[Slide: Supporting school readiness for young DLLs – Understand it]

I think we’re moving to that position as a country, and it does present us with some assessment challenges, but children know many, many things, even though they may not know them in English. And the other aspect of school readiness, of course, for dual language learners—which we found out—is that typically they have strong social-emotional skills, and the positive dispositions or orientations towards peers and adults are important for their ability to interact and attend to and learn the content that’s necessary to be successful in kindergarten.

[Slide: Supporting school readiness for young DLLs – Tips]

Okay, so, supporting school readiness for young DLLs, dual language learners. These points really address the need to develop strong, positive, reciprocal relationships. So in order to have these strong relationships with families that are not fluent in English, what have we learned? Historically, it has been more difficult and more challenging to effectively engage and sustain families with school events when they’re not fluent in English. And some of the things that we know that will improve that ability to successfully engage and work collaboratively with diverse families, is that first point around families feeling respected and supported. In many, many studies, families that don’t speak English report that they feel unwelcomed in schools and they consider it to be occasionally a cultural barrier, but very, very frequently a language barrier—that when people don’t understand them, we need to add additional strategies so that that language and that culture and these families—who may be recent refugees or immigrants—that they do feel welcomed and they feel respected for what they bring into that reciprocal relationship. And in order to do that, one of the practices that we have employed that has fostered this mutual respect is to take the time at the beginning of the year, very early on, and get to know your families and your children. And we’ll talk about some more specific activities about how you can accomplish that, but this idea of a personal connection with families is extremely important in many cultures.

Then, once we know about the families—the families’ talents, the families’ aspirations—then we can build upon those in developing the successful engagement and interactive activities with families, and then also build upon them in our classroom settings with a method for teaching young dual language learners.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you, Linda. I'm going to move us on to the first specific activity, the All About Me books. So, Linda, can you give us an overview of this first activity?

[Slide: Activity: Building knowledge about home and community in L1 and L2]

LINDA ESPINOSA

Sure. And this is something which we've described as "All About Me Books"—it's also been documented through some pretty rigorous researching called Early Authors Program—but what it is, it's a fairly traditional activity that's built upon to both support early language and literacy skills, as well as foster communication and collaboration between the school and the home. So the basis of the activity is really where the teachers, in the classroom setting, would ask the children to describe something about their family; something about their history; something about their community; something that's meaningful and important to them. And young children can tell you all kinds of things, you know—who had a birthday last weekend, or where their uncle or aunt live, or you know, somebody down the street maybe has an important connection to their family. So they start to reveal and describe aspects of their home background that we can then record it and send it home to families to build upon. I've seen it very successfully done around structure—the structures that families live in, the structures that exist in a community—and it evolved into a whole building project where the families assisted with designing, constructing different types of structures, and then came in and read the booklets that the children had developed, and also shared in a child...the classroom presentation of the books, and the constructions themselves.

So these things are really...can take a variety of forms, but basically, it's this very intentional, systematic, and well-developed process of finding out about families and children and what's important, and using that in that classroom setting to expand literacy and conceptual knowledge and a whole variety of early academic skills. And like I said, a specific approach has been researched pretty extensively, and we have a link on the resource page—the Early Authors Program—but I think it's fairly straightforward, and all teachers in all settings can do this. And I think it can be a wonderful start to some of this collaborative family engagement.

ERIC HAAS

So, Linda, when I look at this—this is often an activity, as you said, that many pre-K and kindergarten teachers will do. How would you do this differently, or how do teachers do this differently, with DL or EL students? How do they tweak this for that community?

LINDA ESPINOSA

Right, and that's an excellent question. And the report that is on the link...that those projects were done with monolingual, Spanish-speaking families. So that the twist for children and families who are dominant in a language other than English is that you would encourage them and support them in their efforts to describe and you would take dictation in that home language, and parents would be encouraged to build upon it in the home language. And there's, again, an excellent opportunity, because if the child can do some sort of dictation,

which you have the ability to transcribe and then the parents build upon it, it gives you the opportunity, then, to show how those words, how those objects developed and then represent it in English. So you can essentially create a bilingual book for the child, and that's supporting the English acquisition on top of the home language development.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you. Melanie, I know that you've done sort of versions of this, including, I think, what I remember is something like a fashion show vest, or something along that line. Can you talk a little bit about ways teachers might extend this activity in other directions?

MELANIE PACKHAM

Absolutely. There's an activity which is an All About Me vest. And as Linda was speaking about earlier, it's really important that we're building on the L1 and we're valuing the cultural competency that the families are bringing to the table. And so having the students create a vest—simply made out of a paper bag—and taking it home, and then having them decorate that in terms of their cultural dress, and bringing that in and sharing that in a fashion show with families when you're...we'll speak later in the webinar about family engagement more and how to bring the families in—but having a type of fashion show where you're really honoring the different cultures and the fashions in the classroom, and having the children perform something. As we know, generally with family engagement, we have much higher attendance when families are coming to see a child perform. So you're actually getting more bang for your buck, in that you're inviting the families to watch the children present this fashion show that's representative of all the beautiful cultures in the classroom, and then you have the families there, so you can share with them some of the literacy learning that will be going on in the classroom—as Linda was saying with these All About Me books—and really honoring the teaching that will be happening throughout the year, and building upon that. But really using the fashion show as a hook to get the families in and watch their children perform while celebrating their cultures.

ERIC HAAS

Great. Thank you, Melanie. One of the things that seems to come up a bit in this conversation that seems different than other things I've seen in school, is the idea of sending a lot of these things home to do. Is there a different sort of level of connection between doing things in class and doing it also at home, either all or in part, with the EL or dual language family?

LINDA ESPINOSA

I think this type of an activity, which you build over time, then, isn't just a one-time, one-sheet event, where the child tells you something and you have a piece of paper. But it's really a whole unraveling or unveiling of what it is that's important to the child and is meaningful to the child, and the families start to contribute to it, and then there's two-way between the child and the family's sense of pride. I think that gives us the chance for families to inform us and to feel proud of what it is that clearly identifies their family, their unique talents, their unique values, the ways in which they approach, you know, maybe the experiences they've had

in immigrating—whatever it is—that that opportunity is often not available for families who come into these settings from very diverse backgrounds. So that sense of pride and connection and willingness to work with the school to foster these academic goals—I think that that’s a seed, then, that will blossom throughout the whole year.

MELANIE PACKHAM

And I concur with Linda. I think that depending on the level of acculturation, or assimilation, and what culture the families are coming from, it’s really an opportunity for us as educators of very young children to engage the families and honor the culture that they’re bringing to the students’ academics, and really teach the families how to be academic supporters of their children. And at such a young age—at preschool and kindergarten—all families want to help their children. And inviting them in and including them in the academic process, and teaching them the expectations as parental or family involvements at your site, at such a young age, is really an invaluable thing. It will help the child so much throughout the rest of their academic career if their families are acknowledged and taught how to be academic supporters.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you. I see in the chat there’s a comment about conversational sentence starters. And it makes me think of two things that maybe, Linda, you could respond to first. And that is, it sounds like it would be appropriate to have both languages—home language and English—in an All About Me book or on the vests. And two, what’s also the role or place of sentence frames or sentence starters in either L1 or L2, in this type of activity?

LINDA ESPINOSA

Well, Eric, I think the consideration for how and when you use the home language versus English in these activities would be, you know, the child and the family’s ability. If they truly are dominant and more proficient in a language and it’s not English, then that really may be the only language they can communicate these things. So from my point of view, the family may label certain objects, or describe events on the vest, or in the books that they send back, and it may only be in Spanish. Then, as the teacher...in our...one of our goals is to add English and we would add the English to the Spanish phrases, words, sentences, etc., that the family and the child have given to us. So as much as possible, it would be bilingual, but I think we shouldn’t expect families to do things in English if they really can’t. I mean, that’s, I think, been a point that has sometimes hung up schools, you know; that their ability to express themselves in their home language is just as important as their ability to use English. And if they’re more fluent in a language other than English, that’s the language they will be most expressive in.

So, and the sentence frames or conversation starters, can sometimes be critical. They can get things going. So we can provide those frames, you know—“My favorite vacation was...,” “What I like about myself is...,” “My special talent...”—whatever. Those repetitive frames that we provide to children and families can really start that thinking process that then gives them some points to contribute to what it is we’re developing in the book, or the vest, or the cultural shawl, or whatever it’s going to be.

[Slide: Activity: Leveraging everyday activities (1 of 2)]

ERIC HAAS

Great, thank you. I think that answered my question. So I want to move to the next activity to stay on time. This one is about leveraging everyday activities and we're going to show a brief video. It's about two and a half minutes. It's from Colorín Colorado and the American Federation of Teachers, and it's going to show a family making the most of some everyday activities.

[Slide: To view the video used in the webinar, please go to the Reading Rockets channel on YouTube "Becoming Aware of Print" or go to <https://youtu.be/2Yti78OGxg0>]

[Slide: Activity: Leveraging everyday activities (1 of 2)]

I hope all of you got a good idea of some of the important ways that you may already know about how families can improve school readiness and literacy readiness, and practice those literacy skills. But one of the things that it made me think of is the importance of sharing this directly with parents. That some of these resources and videos and other things that are available at the end of each section, are ones that we can use as educators. But it's also ones that we can provide directly for parents, because what has become often second nature for us as educators may not be, you know, that obvious for parents. So for them to watch these videos as well is very important. Linda, I don't know if there was some additional comments you wanted to make on that, or this use of everyday activities for preparing for school readiness and literacy?

LINDA ESPINOSA

This idea of capitalizing on everyday activities to promote school readiness goals, I think, again...it seems simple, but it can be very powerful as I think you saw in the video. And the other aspect of that is, you know, I talked earlier about family traditions and cultural practices, which may, in fact, already be supporting some school readiness goals, like singing to children, or talking to them, having conversations—all the things that some families may already do. Once we know that, we can, again, build upon those to support more explicitly those academic goals that are important.

[Slide: Activity: Leveraging everyday activities (2 of 2)]

As the educator, one of the things that we can do to help highlight this in the parent's life, and make it more manageable, is to actually design some take-home packets, and, you know, make a meeting a focus of some of these things. So that you would identify what those learning targets are and, ideally, they would reflect from those important early learning and development expectations, so something around language, literacy, mathematical understanding, etc. And those would be kind of the goal that parents would understand. Eventually, it would be just another habit; that they would understand that by taking their child to the grocery store and pointing out words, that would promote literacy.

Or for cooking—when parents cook, you could develop a whole home activity around that—around measuring and pouring and stirring, which would, again, get at mathematical concepts as well as vocabulary, extending narrative abilities, etc. The one that I think every mother does all the time is laundry. And that can be a real opportunity for parents and family members to help children sort and classify by shape—the big towels, the small washcloths; by color—you could divide it out. You could also match socks, so they’re finding pairs. You could have them match or identify patterns in different socks as they’re matching them. And these things are very simple and natural and hopefully will be enjoyable for both the children and the family. So, and develop instructions and materials. And again, once you think this through—and I’m sure you’ll all be very creative in this—those activities can take on a whole variety of forms.

One of the things that we do know that seems to help families that are not fluent in English, is that when you have some kind of a face-to-face meeting, you’re able to model exactly what those activities look like, that go along with the instructions and materials that you give them. And then give them opportunities to practice, so that they understand exactly what it is, what’s the point of the activity, and how it should be carried out.

The final point under that—provide training, home visits, or partner families to support successful implementation. Obviously, the professional development is very important, and if you can, visit families in the home to demonstrate some of these activities. One additional aspect of engaging families that seems to be important for sustained engagement is that when families have other families that they can turn to for support and communication and resources, their attendance at many school events seems to improve. So, some sort of a social network among families—and you can do that in a variety of ways, depending upon your community and your specific families—but that social support, particularly for recent immigrant families or families that are somewhat linguistically isolated, that social support seems to be really key to helping them sustain that engagement with schools.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you, Linda. I think to stay on schedule I’m going to move a bit to the resources now, so that we have enough time for the school-family barriers discussion by Maria. So, yeah, that was very helpful.

[Slide: Resources (1 of 3)]

And I want to just do a quick walk through some of the slides about the resources. We have a number of resources that are here.

[Slide: Resources (2 of 3)]

These are all downloadable, or you could Google them. And again, I just wanted to remind people at sort of getting the sense that, you know, few of these can just be sort of plug and played—that all of them are adapted, or should be used best when they’re adapted, for the various contexts that you are: the school level, the community that you’re working with. And also, some of them are good for the school to work with first, and use as a means to work with

families; and some of them, like the video, can also be shared directly with the families themselves. That can be very helpful.

[Slide: Resources (3 of 3)]

So there're lots of ways that these resources can be used, and here's the third one, including information from and a link to Colorín Colorado. Linda or Melanie, any last comments before we move to part two?

MELANIE PACKHAM

I just encourage the educators to include the families and, as we said several times, to honor all cultures and abilities and language levels.

ELIZABETH BURR

We have a question that I think is really interesting and relevant to this point. There's a participant who points out that not all parents feel comfortable reading in any language, and that teachers can also use wordless books and stress oral storytelling, for example. And so, Melanie or Linda, do you have any tips on doing that?

LINDA ESPINOSA

I think the participant is exactly right; that just having conversations with young children promotes those language goals. If you have wordless books at the school and can share them with families, and families can just sit down and have conversations about those wordless books, that's a very rich...very rich and very important parent engagement and home activity that will support language and literacy goals. I think that's exactly right.

MELANIE PACKHAM

I would agree with that. As a former kindergarten teacher, that is one of the most important ways to build student comprehension in reading. And often we encourage our families, when you're talking about comprehension, to have those conversations in the home language. So the stronger the student's understanding of story and text can be in the home language, the stronger the transference to literacy in English will be as well. That's an excellent point. Thank you for making it.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you. So with all of that in mind, we're now going to move to part two. And Maria Paredes is going to lead that, and it's going to go through the same basic process [as] before. She'll give a brief overview with an Understand It and Tips section, and then we will go into specific activities, followed by resources.

[Slide: Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships]

Hi. It's good to be with all of you. I wanted to start my conversation with you, first, to introduce this Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships that was released by the Department of Education in December of 2013. What's great about this document is that it really provides schools and school districts and early learning centers, an opportunity to learn what we have learned from research in the last 15, 20 years and sort of has captured this into this guide of how to create effective family-school partnerships. And I think of this resource as a great option for maybe having a capacity-building workshop with your staff, and really reading this and discussing this and learning what family engagement is, and how we can overcome some of the barriers that sometimes get in the way of getting schools and families working together.

[Slide: Overcoming barriers to effective home-school partnerships – Understand it]

We encounter challenges with building effective family-school partnerships—and I'm just quickly going to go over this, so that we can get into how to overcome them—but language is often a challenge. Families sometimes feel overwhelmed or lost because they are not necessarily fluent in L2, and we need to really create opportunity for families to participate in their own language and provide, if possible, translation services.

Also, a culture...not all countries have the same sort of expectations of family engagement that we do in the United States, and so it's really important to be clear with families as to what role we expect, as educators, for them to play in supporting their child's learning and achievement. It's really important that we give them a definition, that we show them how we expect them to work with their children at home, and how much we honor their culture and how much richness that adds to the classroom. Another important aspect that sometimes prevents from us developing some good partnerships is, we don't necessarily provide teachers and administrators with professional development or classes that really address effective family and community engagement, and so it's really important that we offer opportunities for professional development in our centers or in our schools on an ongoing basis. It's really important that we develop these aspects of school programming, so that everyone has very specific goals and objectives that we meet with capacity-building for all staff.

And another part is organizing for effective family and community engagement. Sometimes, what happens is that we have so many types of activities that we offer families that, again, it becomes overwhelming and families are not exactly sure how to prioritize, or which activities deserve their presence at school and how to navigate all the invitations that come to them in the form of text and flyers and different types of “now we have to remind”—and many other ways of inviting families. So they get overwhelmed by not really knowing what to pick, and this is sometimes difficult with so many things that they are juggling in their own personal lives—many children and many responsibilities, and sometimes more than one job. So it's really important that we think of ways of really organizing engagement for families.

[Slide: *Overcoming barriers to effective home-school partnerships – Tips*]

One of the first things that I wanted to discuss with you, an activity...I think it is really important that we set a standard from the very beginning of the year. So I'm going to share some things that we can do from the very beginning of the year to set the tone of how we expect to partner with families; how are we going to spend the year together.

So it's really important that we provide families either an open house, or a meet-the-teacher type of meeting, either before school starts or as soon as school starts. And we want to give families a list of all the most important concepts that their children will be learning during that year.

[Slide: *Activity: First connection of the year*]

We want families to be very clear as to what those learning targets are, and explain to them what those are. That's also very important. We want to provide families with a list of events and activities that we want families to attend and...so that families and teachers have the opportunity to plan together, to collaborate, and to meet other families. And then also—during this beginning meeting—we also want to communicate with families how important it is that children get the opportunity to learn at home and at school. And parents and teachers are working together to support that learning. So it's really important that there are those understandings from the very beginning—that families know what children are going to...are expected to learn, what they will be learning in the classroom, and what is expected to be supported at home. That families get, from the very beginning, an organized list of events, which they're expected to attend, and how important those are.

[Slide: *Family Engagement Calendar*]

So this is an example of what one of these calendars may look like. So this is what a school can share—a teacher can share—during a meet-the-teacher or open house, and really go through this with families so they know, first of all, in what order children will be learning the skills, and opportunities for families to come and participate, and also that there are options—that these activities, that are learning activities, are also paired with social events and opportunities for volunteering. So with this type of upfront type of calendar, the families really can put this on the refrigerator and have this proactive look at the whole year and plan their family lives around attending one event a month, or sometimes it would be every other month. But this really organizes the school, it organizes teachers to be able to plan in advance, to collaborate, to invite families to be a part of these meetings, and to perhaps invite families to be presenters and to...going back to what Linda Espinosa, the activities that she was providing initially—maybe this is a great opportunity for having families present with their child, or act out with their child that All About Me book, and share with the rest of the families. All of this with the idea that we create community and that we organize from the very beginning how the school and the family expect to spend the year together.

So that is an example. This really moves us from having family engagement be kind of spontaneous, to a more year-long plan that really addresses for parents what children are going to be learning. Parents can expect to be modeled to, and given examples of activities that they

can do at home with their children; they would be given opportunities for practicing these activities; and then taking maybe practice materials home, to make sure that we, again, eliminate any barriers to families participating and being a part of this academic support for their children. So I invite you to hopefully create this kind of organizing calendar for your own schools or centers, and really explain how all of this will work with the families for the entire year. And I think this will help you plan better, and for families to plan better, and hopefully this will give you better results than what we traditionally do in schools.

ERIC HAAS

Maria, let me ask you a couple questions on this, on some things that I noticed. If you could comment a little on how it relates specifically to ELs and DLLs. One, I noticed just how much more explicit this calendar is than the one I received from my own daughter's school—you know, the listing of dates and standards or activities that are going on. And I also noticed that there are multiple meeting times under each sort of activity. Can you comment a little bit on the importance of those two things?

MARIA PAREDES

Yeah. I think that, for example, the fact that there are multiple dates and times for the meetings—we really want to make sure that we give every family, regardless of their work calendar and their other responsibilities, an opportunity to participate, and this providing the same meeting several times allows families to really plan ahead and attend the time that best fits their timeline and their home life. So the other thing, as you mentioned, is that you're bringing together different aspects. You're bringing together the academic sharing that's going to be happening—what parents are going to learn, what teachers are going to learn from parents, what everyone is going to learn together. But there's also an opportunity to socialize and to do some of these...I think it's team building through an activity that follows the academic activities. So that in one visit parents can experience the academic sharing of parents and teachers and the modeling that they will receive on the activities to take home, but also have the opportunity to get to know other parents and, really, the opportunity to build team in the classroom.

ERIC HAAS

And I think that last point builds on the next two activities that are here. So I'm going to move to the next one, which is effective outreach. And if you could talk a little bit about how to get more parents there and coming more often.

[Slide: Activity: Effective outreach]

MARIA PAREDES

So this is one of the areas that I think is difficult for a lot of schools and teachers is, how do we get a really good turnout when we have planned and have worked really hard to have an activity for families? How do we make sure that we have a really good turnout? How do we do effective outreach? And what we have learned is that personal invitations probably have the most positive effect. Personal invitations can come from the teacher, and these are in person,

either a phone call or speaking to a parent in the parking lot when they are picking up their child. It also can come from the child themselves, so the child inviting the parents personally. This is different from, for example, of comparing it to a flyer or something that goes home on paper, or something that is posted on the website, or something that is third-hand. So we want to make sure that parents get direct invitations from teachers, so that parents understand how much this means to them, and how much their presence at the meeting is necessary toward working together.

You want to make sure that the parents know ahead of time that there will be interpretation or translation available, so that they can feel comfortable in the meeting. There's sometimes, there is a need to provide transportation. And the children...this is a meeting where you want parents to get to know each other, and share and build communities. Children should be...should have the opportunity to be doing activities in a different classroom, so that parents have the ability to not be concerned of where to leave their children, because very often, that is a clear obstacle for families. Part of what we wanted to do in giving you the example of the calendar is to make sure that you understand that parents want to be...when they are invited to attend a school activity, that it really is about the children; that they feel that both what they are learning—that it's academically centered, or social-emotionally centered—it's about their children and that it's relevant to their lives and what they can do at home, but also that they have the opportunity to see their children perform or present in any way that can bring additional pride to the family. So bringing these two together; so having the academically centered meeting first and then ending it with the child performances—perfect. Parents will always attend an event where their child is performing.

And, again, being efficient; this is also really important. Less activities during the month are better, and if you can pair the activities that include presentations by the child, socializing between families and teachers, and then learning about supporting student learning in the home, and how that can be done. If you can bring those together, it really feels like the family comes, and they feel that there's efficiency, that they have received what they need from the school. And in turn, the teachers will also feel like they have to do less and that what they are doing addresses the needs of the children, the families, and the teachers.

ERIC HAAS

Great, thank you, Maria. Yeah, that's very helpful, looking at that big picture of outreach. I want to then follow that up—which, I think, moves to the next level—and that is, you know, what are some team building or other activities that you could actually do with parents, between parents and staff or teachers? And so, as we move to the third activity, Melanie, can you walk us through the idea behind this M&M activity and some of how it would work?

[Slide: Activity: *Building community*]

MELANIE PACKHAM

Absolutely. In the model that I support in Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, a big piece of the model is the team building. And with so many of our children's families that are immigrating from other cultures—they might be new to the area—it's very important that we help them to

create a support network, and the school is a wonderful place to do that because they're taking their children there, they're there every day. So introducing families to other families, and creating a support network for both academic reasons and social reasons, is really helpful to the families. And starting that...as I said earlier, starting that at such a young age, in preschool and kindergarten, and, in fact, in any grade when the families arrive, it's really helpful to the families. So when you have a family meeting, and you're doing back to school night or open house, it's a nice idea to think about creating a team builder or an ice-breaker, if you will, so that the families can get to meet each other. Very often, the children are playing with each other at recess or at lunch, and they come home and they're talking about the other children, but the parents or the caregivers never get to meet each other.

So this activity is very child-centered. It's a way to get families talking about some commonalities that they might have with their children, some successes or some challenges, some sources of pride, if you will, and you may have participated in this yourself at one time or another. You take some M&Ms—and you can have the little Halloween bags of M&Ms or just a giant bag of M&Ms with little bowls at the table, however you want—and you instruct the families to take a few M&Ms, and then there are questions on...in your Power Point, or on a poster, that correspond with each color M&M. So you encourage the families to get up and move around the room, find another adult to speak with, and then choose one of their M&Ms and respond to the question that is the color of their M&M. So, for example, the orange M&M might say, “Describe a time when you were most proud of your child,” or “Describe two ways you do counting at home,” or “What is your favorite book, your child's favorite book?” or “What do you do to instill a love of reading with your child?”—any kinds of questions such as that.

As Maria was...I see some questions here, you know, in the chat box. What do you do about multiple languages being spoken in the classroom at that type of meeting? And when at all possible, I encourage you to think about translation or interpretation and having interpreters for the different languages or encouraging the families to bring a neighbor or an older sibling who might speak English to the meetings. Also, I think we need to give our families a lot more credit, in that when they're put in a situation that they are comfortable and relaxed, they will make every attempt to communicate and to speak with each other. And I've been in a lot of family meetings where they might speak another language, but they stand up, they go to another family, they introduce themselves, and somehow they make it work, especially when it's around their children. They really want to encourage each other to talk, and to get to know each other. So doing an activity such as this—the slide says, “Why do it this way?”—it really creates a collaborative environment and it encourages the families to come. In many cultures, that social capital is the most valuable, and that's the hook for sort of getting them to come to some of these family events. And as I've spoken and Maria spoke about having children perform, that's very key, because in some instances, the school is the place for their socialization as well as their student's academics. So it's really important that we encourage the families to come and make them comfortable when they're there.

And also, to create that support network—if their child is absent, who can they call to get the assignment; or if they need help getting to school; or if they have a question about an early

release day—they have a network of other families that they can then rely on for those questions. And it just...it makes it a nice, supportive network, and it makes the meetings very successful, and families are much more likely to ask questions of the teacher or offer suggestions when you've done some sort of team builder like this, because the families...you really have broken the ice, and they're much more willing to share with each other.

ERIC HAAS

Melanie, to me this seems like the type of activity that every pre-K or every grade should do. Is there something unique or special about this for DL communities? Is it perhaps more important or slightly different ways you would go about it?

MELANIE PACKHAM

I don't think so, Eric. I think it's really important to do this at any type of a meeting. And the advantage that younger educators have with this, I think, is that it sets the culture and the tone for how things will be done in future years to come. And families, many of them with young children, will be new to the classroom-teacher experience, so they might be more willing to do this. I think you can absolutely do it in any grade level, and just keeping the conversation child-centered and using an activity such as this when you can modify the questions. I think having the ability to modify the questions and the topics that the families talk about is how you would modify it for the grade level.

ERIC HAAS

Great. Thank you. One of the things that also came up, I think, in some of our previous conversations, were the idea of some type of partner families. Either formally or informally developing some of those. Melanie or Linda or Maria, I don't...if you all could comment on the use of those?

MELANIE PACKHAM

Linda, do you want to start about the partner families? I feel like this activity is a great way to introduce the families and become partner families and create those partnerships. Linda, would you like to follow up, maybe with some more of your background on those family situations?

LINDA ESPINOSA

Sure. I would agree. So once you have the families together in that type of an activity, going to both, I think, arouse their interest in other families and give them that opportunity to share really vital information about themselves with other like-minded families. So as you suggested, it would be important for families to be paired with other similar families—obviously, ideally, who speak the same language that they do—but then, depending upon, I think, the parents' openness to having some sort of a telephone tree, so that parents can call each other. And they can do this outside of school time, so you don't need to monitor every single time parents communicate with each other. And then you'll find that they do start to share background and experiences, and where to go to get the vaccinations, where the best store is for, you know,

different types of supplies, and families will start to use each other as resources and support and help to build that confidence, then, that, as a group sometime, you could have even parent conferences. But in a group setting, with the support of other similar kinds of families with whom they've developed a trusting relationship, they may be more able to communicate what's really on their mind and what's really important to them about their child's education—whereas a single family who's new to this country, who doesn't speak English, may be very hesitant to interact with the school in any way that may look like they are making suggestions that the school might not appreciate. So, anyway, this idea that families can support each other to foster these engagements, but also foster a range of support activities that are very important to all families' needs in order to prepare their children for school.

MARIA PAREDES

I just want to say, really quick, that this is kind of a little bit of a new thing, I think, in family engagement: this idea that we really send a strong message with all families in our classrooms that we are in this together; that we have common goals about student learning; that we can all support each other; that we are there for each other. That some of us have strengths in one areas, and some of us have strengths in other areas, and when we put those strengths together we become stronger as a classroom team. That it is all of our responsibility to make sure that every child in the classroom has support from all their families, and support from one another, and that success is reached together. And so I think this shift from really treating families only as individuals, and bringing this into a whole new dimension which is a classroom team, a strong team that is there to support each other, that's a really important shift. That would be wonderful if everyone out there really embraced this. Families love it and teachers really reap the benefits of all of these families creating a network and collaborating and supporting each other.

MELANIE PACKHAM

And I would just like to build on what Maria is saying and say that, typically, that type of support network is something that we might see at the PTA or PTC meeting. And creating that within the classroom, where all families are coming to the meeting—and it might not just be the smaller community of parents that are able to go to the PTA or PTC meeting, but really taking that same networking and support system and bringing it to the classroom where all students' families have that opportunity made available to them, I think, is a very powerful shift. And families from other cultures, especially those of our English language learners who might not be as comfortable going to a PTA or PTC, or might not even know what that is, but having that connection with the classroom teacher and an activity of this kind, and a social networking of this type being built within the classroom environment, I think, is a very powerful thing.

ERIC HAAS

Let me maybe wrap up with a sort of general, overarching question. And that is, teachers or pre-K staff usually are pretty overwhelmed and very busy. You know, they may not have had a lot of success, perhaps, working with families and engaging them in the past. What would you sort of say to staff who are maybe trying to do this for the first time? You know, is it worth

the...maybe not saying it quite this way—is it worth the effort? How do you get them, you know, to say, “Yes, it may be difficult to get started at first, but here’s what I’ve seen that makes it all worthwhile”?

LINDA ESPINOSA

You know, Eric, I think that’s really an important point because, I think, often times, if you are a pre-K teacher or kindergarten teacher, and your classroom demographics change and you have multiple languages and multiple cultures, and maybe you know very little about those specific cultures or languages, then you might feel overwhelmed—“I don’t know those languages. What can I possibly do to be responsive and sensitive to all of these...this wide range of needs?” And my recommendation, and I think what we experienced in our program is—start small. You know, just find out as much as you can about each of the families without having preconceived assumptions, and I’ll tell you...I mean, this is a very honest conclusion that we came to after several years—is that once you open yourself up to what all families have to contribute and have to teach you about themselves and their children, once you do that, you start learning and expanding your own cultural richness, both from a personal and a professional point of view. And I think it enriches every person who engages in this. It really expands your perspective and it brings that into the classroom, so that the classroom now, then, really, truly reflects the children who are attending and expected to learn the content that you’re teaching.

So it can be overwhelming and intimidating. I’ve personally experienced that. But once you accept the fact that you’re going to start slow and go step by step, and that you start to experience the expansion of your own professional practices, then I think you quickly get over the idea that it’s too much for you. It’s really allowing us to use all of the resources that are available to us from the families and the children.

MARIA PAREDES

My comment about this, and my encouragement to educators, is that it is my experience from all the years that I spent in schools—working in schools as a teacher and administrator and so forth—is that we were already doing too many things. It just happened that many of those things, activities and events, they were very random in nature and so we weren’t just doing eight a year, or nine a year, we were doing over 20 different events and efforts in one year. What we are proposing is that you really take a good look at how you organize, so that instead of doing too many, you do less, but you do...these are just so focused and so intentionally designed to really meet the needs of the child, address the learning concepts that are really important in each step of the year, the milestones, and share those with families. You’re providing families with strategies and activities and modeling for them and having families share what they do that is successful, that addresses those learning concepts. So what you’re really doing is creating efficiency in the way that you organize your family engagement and your schools and, specifically, in your classrooms.

So I really believe that many teachers and many schools are actually doing too many things. And what we want to suggest is that you do less, but you do it proactively—that you really

spread this information; give parents this information; from the very beginning that you set a culture of attendance; that you invite families personally; and just honor those activities that you have planned. And I think that that will give everyone more time for planning, but also better results, I think, in the long run. Because families will really appreciate that they are being given very specific strategies and the types of activities that they can go and deploy in the home and apply with their children and the rest of their families.

ERIC HAAS

Thank you, Maria. I think that's a good clarification. Yeah, we often do do a lot of bits and pieces of this, but it's too random and not as systematic and intentional and thoughtful as it should be.

[Slide: Resources (1 of 2)]

Just like with Linda's section earlier, Maria and Melanie's section, there are a number of resources related to building these school-family partnerships, so there's some here.

[Slide: Resources (2 of 2)]

Some of them overlap with the previous ones, some of them are new. And so there are a number of ways that you can follow up on some of these ideas from today.