

# Handout 1: Inclusive Language for Kinship Caregivers and Grandfamilies in Schools

This handout is an overview of inclusive language to intentionally welcome kinship caregivers and grandparents to the school community. The information includes a definition of inclusive language, an overview of its importance within schools, and tips for success.

## What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is the intentional and ongoing use of language to support and enhance the inclusion of all individuals.<sup>1</sup> School systems aiming to welcome *all* the adults who raise their students will want to identify the various types of adult caregivers responsible for students' well-being at home, such as grandparents and other relatives. Inclusive language means intentionally using easy-to-understand words, tones, and behaviors that include all the adults who are responsible for students.

## Why should we use inclusive language in schools?

Inclusive language is a key part of inviting all students' caregivers into schools and classrooms so they feel included and engaged in the school community. The inclusion of all types of caregivers in school efforts helps them to better support their student's learning, academic outcomes, and attendance. Students whose families are involved with the school have fewer externalizing behaviors, such as aggression, decreased dropout rates, and have improved student-teacher relationships.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SRI Education. (2022). Inclusive language quick reference guide. *SRI Education News*.  
<https://srieducationnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/inclusive-language-quick-reference-01312023.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Mapp, K. L., Henderson, A., Cuevas, S., Franco, M., & Ewert, S. (2022). *Everyone wins! The evidence for family-school partnerships and implications for practice*. Scholastic Professional.

## How do I use inclusive language in schools?

The shift to inclusive language will mean changing how all school staff refer to the adults who care for students (caregivers). Table 1 offers examples of commonly used terms and alternative inclusive terms to use instead.

Table 1. Examples of inclusive language

Common terms	Inclusive terms
Mother, father, parents	Caregiver, family member, grownup, adult
Son, daughter	Child, children, student
Husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend	Partner
Members of a household	Family members
Immediate and extended family	Family
Role: __ Mother __ Father __ Other	Another role (please specify) _____

### Tips for success

- Talk with caregivers about how to be more inclusive. Find opportunities to connect with caregivers at the beginning of the school year to identify their relationship to the student, such as biological parent or grandparent, and how they can be included throughout the school year. Consider asking them questions such as “What can I or other school staff do to make sure you are included in the classroom and informed about your student’s progress?”<sup>3</sup>
- Change how schools and classrooms refer to popular meetings, events, and activities. For example, change parent-teacher conferences to caregiver-teacher conferences. Shift away from language like “Muffins with Mom” or “Donuts with Dads” to “Coffee with

<sup>3</sup> Andoh, E. (2022, September). *Why inclusive language matters*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psn/2022/09/inclusive-language#:~:text=It%20can%20enhance%20our%20empathy,further%20exclusion%20of%20marginalized%20people>

Caregivers.” Additionally, avoid using pop culture words or phrases, such as “bro,”<sup>4</sup> which older caregivers may not understand.

- Use multiple modes of communication. Encourage educators and other school staff to leverage various tools to engage with caregivers, ranging from emails, phone calls, social media posts, and text messages, to letters home.<sup>5</sup> Some kinship caregivers and grandparents may be unfamiliar with current technology or may be physically unable to listen to or read emails or text messages. Encourage educators to ask caregivers their preferred methods of communication.
- Review and revise official documents. Use official documents as an opportunity to identify kinship caregivers and grandfamilies of students.<sup>6</sup> Including caregiver alternatives, such as “kinship caregiver,” “grandparent caregiver,” or “another caregiver (please specify),” on school forms sends a welcome signal to all types of caregivers that helps them feel like they belong.
- Continually reexamine the words, phrases, and behaviors used to communicate with the grownups who care for students. This may not be a one-and-done change. Be willing to adapt language for inclusivity on an ongoing basis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walker, K. N., Owens, S. M., & Boone, B. J. (2020). *School family engagement with grandfamilies in mind: Researcher-based strategies for educators engaging grandfamilies*. Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center. <https://ohiofamiliesengage.osu.edu>

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, B. W., Young, E., & Carmichael-Murphy, M. (2016). Grandparent caregivers: Unsung voices in public education. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*, 2(2), 62–81.

<sup>6</sup> The Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Act Family Caregiver Advisory Council & The Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. (2022). *2022 national strategy to support family caregivers*. Administration for Community Living. [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE\\_SGRG/NatlStrategyToSupportFamilyCaregivers.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/RAISE_SGRG/NatlStrategyToSupportFamilyCaregivers.pdf)