

Engaging Families to Support Students' Connectedness to School

When families are involved in their children's education, students have better attendance, earn higher grades, have higher test scores, and enroll in higher-level classes. In terms of social and emotional learning (SEL), students demonstrate more positive social skills, improved behavior, and better adjustment to school.¹ Teachers and school leaders can increase family engagement using research-based practices. Content in this infographic is partially based on the [Engaging Parents and Students from Diverse Populations in the Context of Distance Learning webinar](#).

1. Invite two-way communication.



Family members are more likely to be involved in their children's education if they feel welcome and have trusting and supportive relationships with school staff.² Two-way communication between teachers and families expands parental involvement.³

Tips for teachers

- » Invite family members to observe or volunteer in the in-person or virtual classroom and provide opportunities for them to suggest how to improve the learning experience for students.
- » Send students and their families weekly digital progress reports that they can reply to.
- » Share information about the classroom, including course work, and invite engagement through widely used virtual platforms. Texting families is a cost-effective way to increase student attendance.⁴

Alameda Unified School District recognized that email was not an effective way to reach their immigrant families. In response, the district leveraged WeChat, WhatsApp, and Facebook to connect with families. The district also administered multilingual surveys to families to better understand families' needs and gather feedback on the district's approaches to distanced learning.

Tips for district and school leaders

- » Work with the office staff to ensure that they are welcoming of all families in verbal and written communications.
- » Develop strategies to help family members of students receiving special education services understand their student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
- » Send schoolwide information and invite engagement through widely used internet, social media, or other virtual platforms.

2. Develop shared goals for students.



Teachers and family members build trust, collaborate, and support one another when they co-develop and track progress towards shared goals for students.⁵

Tips for teachers

- » In addition to in-person parent-teacher conferences, use virtual parent-teacher conferences or an online survey to ask families about their academic and SEL goals for their children.
- » Monitor students' progress toward the goals and share students' successes with their families through their preferred internet, social media, or other virtual platform.
- » Describe specific ways that family members can support students at home and in the community.

Tips for district and school leaders

- » Provide family members with opportunities to make joint decisions that directly impact students, such as which curriculum to adopt or which supports to offer students.
- » Include family members in conversations about the school's vision and mission.
- » Provide family members with opportunities to make joint decisions about school goals and co-design plans for how to reach those goals.

3. Remove barriers to family-school partnerships.



Many families, especially in high-needs areas, want to support their children but do not know how to become involved in their children's education.⁶ Barriers may include that some families are not aware of opportunities to be involved in school, are not able to attend events at scheduled times, or do not speak the same language as school staff members.⁷

Tips for teachers

- » Describe clear and explicit ways for families to be involved in their children's education or the classroom (whether virtual or in-person).
- » Offer a range of days/times to meet with families.
- » Ensure access to translation services.

Tips for district and school leaders

- » Provide multiple ways for families to be involved in school, both in-person and virtually.
- » Ensure that opportunities for family involvement are held on varied days and times, including some that occur on the weekends and in the evenings.
- » Develop systems that support communication with families in their first language.

4. Build an understanding of families in the school community.

Understanding local context fosters mutual respect between school staff members and families.⁸ Taking a culturally responsive and assets-based approach can help strengthen parent involvement.⁹

Tips for teachers

- » Conduct empathy interviews with families virtually to understand their experiences and context.
- » Offer students opportunities to share about their families and cultures and provide space for them to have sensitive conversations about racism and equity.¹⁰
- » Use materials that reflect the cultures and diversity of the community.

Tips for district and school leaders

- » Facilitate professional learning that allows teachers to learn about families' perspectives in order to recognize, respect, and address cultural and socioeconomic differences.
- » Model ways to have respectful interactions while having difficult conversations during professional learning for teachers.
- » Set goals to hire staff members who reflect the community's demographics.

Practice in action:

At a K–8 school in Oakland Unified School District, families shared their experiences and perspectives in a virtual fishbowl discussion during a professional development session for teachers. The teachers' role was simply to listen. According to one school administrator, "The more teachers know about families, the more they engage with them."

5. Foster family-to-family relationships.

Families are more involved in school if they have supportive social networks.¹¹ Developing structures for families to engage with one another can help increase their engagement in school.

Tips for teachers

- » Facilitate activities for families to get to know one another during back-to-school night.
- » Invite families to volunteer at the same time so they can interact with one another.
- » Set up communication channels where families can participate in discussions with one another.

Tips for district and school leaders

- » Facilitate classes for families based on their interests and needs.
- » Establish a space and regular times where families can comfortably gather formally and informally.
- » Create channels for families to interact with one another on social media platforms.

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