



New York State Parental Information and Resource Center

Technical Assistance Guide

What is Family Engagement?

The following definition comes from Dr. Heather Weiss from the Harvard Family Research Project and has been adopted by the Family, School and Community National Working Group.

- Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies 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.
- It is continuous across a child's life and entails enduring commitment, but changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.
- It reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn—at home, in pre-K programs, in school, in after school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

Family Engagement

Family engagement supports learning and is the strongest predictor of school success; and for school districts, it's the law and needs to be addressed on a regular and timely basis to decrease the achievement gap for their students. Actively and meaningfully engaging families benefits everyone involved in a child's education.

Benefits of Family Engagement

Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, more homework completed, fewer placements in special education, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education.

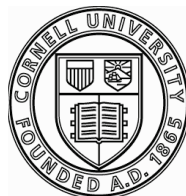
Parents develop more confidence in the school and in themselves as parents.

Schools have improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families, higher student achievement, and better reputations in the community. (www.ncrel.org)

National Standards for Family Engagement (PTA)

1. All families are welcomed into the school community and are supported in being active participants in the life of the school.
2. Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
3. Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school.
4. Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
5. Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families.
6. Families and school staff collaborate with community members.

For more information about implementing the ideas in this guide, contact the New York State PIRC program at info@nyspirc.org.



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6 Ways to Engage (Epstein's Framework)

Parents and caregivers need a variety of options to be engaged and involved. Recognize that different families will be able to be involved in different ways.

1. *Parenting* - Help all families establish home environments to support children as students. (Examples: Workshops, neighborhood meetings, home visits, family resource rooms)
2. *Communicating* - Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. (Examples: Regular schedule of notes, phone calls, newsletters, conferences, e-mails)
3. *Volunteering* - Recruit and organize parent help and support. (Example: Improve recruitment and training)
4. *Learning at Home* - Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework or other learning activities. (Examples: Family participation in setting student goals each year and planning for college or work, information about what is learned in each grade/subject)
5. *Decision Making* - Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. (Examples: Active PTA/PTO, district level councils and committees)
6. *Collaborating with Community* - Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strength school programs, family practices, and student development. (Examples: Service integration)

Additional Engagement Recommendations

1. Recognize that *all* parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well in school.
2. Create programs that will support families to guide their children's learning, from birth through high school. The practices will be different at different age levels, but they should always be engaging, informative, and linked to learning and academic achievement.
3. Work with families to build their social and political connections. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, children tend to do better in school.
4. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with all families and community members. Hire family liaisons to work directly with families and provide a link to the school and community.
5. Link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
6. Focus efforts to engage families and community members by developing trusting respectful relationships and build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
7. Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families. Make sure everyone (parents, school staff, and community members) understands their role. (SEDL)

Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC)
Families and Communities Together with Schools

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