



The New York State Office of Religious and Independent Schools

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTER (PDRC)

*The Upstate PDRC - All NYS Regions North of NYC*

## **Strategies for Family Engagement: A Quick Guide**

# Goals of this guide

**Use an equity lens for exploring the role of family engagement in supporting learning**

**Distinguish between information-sharing, communication and collaboration as stages of shared planning**

**Become familiar with promising practices that can promote and strengthen family engagement**

# A note on terminology

**Family**



**Parents**

**Guardians**

**Caregivers**

**Extended Community**

**Engagement**



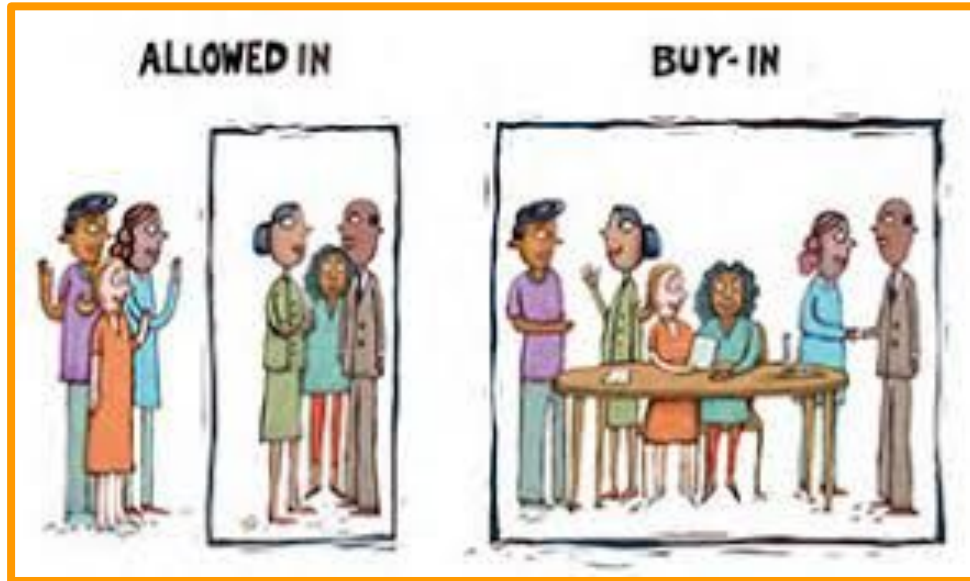
**Participation**

**Inclusion**

**Partnership**

**Collaboration**

# Examining our work through an equity lens



# Expanding our cultural competence as teachers

- ❖ Conducting self-assessments
- ❖ Learning about students' cultures
- ❖ Employing culturally responsive pedagogy
- ❖ Fostering respect in the classroom
- ❖ Involving families and communities

Source: Strategies for Building Cultural Competency

<https://www.gssaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Strategies-for-Building-Cultural-Competency-1.pdf>

# Possible barriers to high family engagement

Unfamiliar/intimidating

Power differential

Language

Cultural differences

Economic insecurity

Prior negative experiences

Low sense of belonging



"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." -- Ryunosuke Satoro



# Unexpected benefits of remote learning

- ❖ family induction into pedagogical language, techniques and tools
- ❖ greater family knowledge of expected products and processes
- ❖ greater appreciation for the training and commitment of teachers
- ❖ greater transparency of school culture as well as of home culture



Can it work in both directions? How can our families **set us up** for success?



# Web Resources

The National PTA Center for Family Engagement: <https://www.pta.org/center-for-family-engagement>

Family Engagement tools and resources at Edutopia: <https://www.edutopia.org/topic/family-engagement>

“Promoting Family Engagement: 5 Ways to Foster Meaningful Connection” at Getting Smart: <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2018/04/promoting-family-engagement-5-ways-to-foster-a-more-meaningful-connection/>

The Red-Carpet Treatment from Project Appleseed: [https://66f6648b-5dd3-447f-94f1-4fc393283251.filesusr.com/ugd/842f93\\_5fb6037125f24b52b9159ba7b4cf081e.pdf](https://66f6648b-5dd3-447f-94f1-4fc393283251.filesusr.com/ugd/842f93_5fb6037125f24b52b9159ba7b4cf081e.pdf)

Project Appleseed: <https://www.projectappleseed.org/>

Family Engagement Resources: New York State Community Schools <https://www.nyscommunityschools.org/resources/family-engagement/>

# Book Resources

Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships. (2007) Anne T. Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson, Don Davies

Why School Communication Matters: Strategies From PR Professionals (2008) Kitty Porterfield and Meg Carnes

The Distance Learning Playbook for Parents (2020) Rosalind Wiseman, Douglas Fischer, Nancy Frye, John Hattie

The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation (2017) Shane Safir

# Information versus communication

Newsletter

The primary function is to **inform**

Group emails

**Structural hierarchy (top-down)** is maintained

**Two-way** communication is not necessarily invited

Robo-calls

Hard to know how (or if) these attempts are **received**

Report cards

Open House

# Seven Strategies For Strengthening Engagement



# I. Strategy for engagement: Focus on two-way communications

- ❖ Survey families about what they need and collaborate with parents to establish policies and practices from identified needs
- ❖ Develop ways for families to showcase their best practices at home
- ❖ Flexible meeting times
- ❖ Use multiple communication paths, such as social media and local television or radio call-in programs
- ❖ Bilingual staff or parent volunteers available to attend family meetings

# Mobile devices reach the biggest audience



....and somebody has to be committed to responding to parent posts.

Source: “5 Great Ways Schools Can Use Social Media to Engage Parents and Families”

<http://www.parent-institute.com/reports-for-delivery/etips-bonus.pdf>

## II. Strategy for engagement: increase access

- ❖ Increase access to the principal and school leadership through small-group dialogue sessions on meaningful topics.
- ❖ Increase access to the principal and school leadership through meetings held in the local community, away from the school site.
- ❖ **Assess your school tour, and get feedback.**
- ❖ Promote family access to other families through a school directory

# Resource: The Red Carpet Treatment toolkit



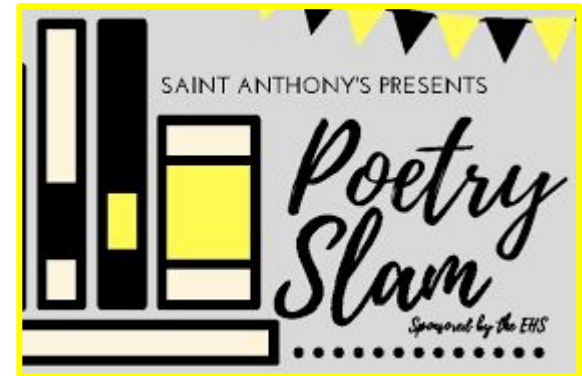
<https://www.projectappleseed.org/red-carpet-treatment>



### III. Strategy for engagement: foster inclusion

- ❖ Establish a help desk/family resource center staffed by parent volunteers and school employees
- ❖ Establish a mentoring system pairing veteran parents with new parents
- ❖ Signage reflects languages present in the school community
- ❖ Parent group/PTA personally recruits and connects diverse parents to volunteering opportunities
- ❖ **Write and tell the story of the school from many perspectives**
- ❖ Remove economic barriers to participation (child care, transportation)

# Making space for sharing stories



Tellin' Stories was selected by the Harvard Family Research Project in a national report for the US Department of Education as one of twelve examples of leading innovations in family engagement (Taking Leadership, Innovating Change, 2010).

Source: <https://www.teachingforchange.org/tellin-stories-family-partners-series>

## IV. Strategy for engagement: share power

- ❖ Dedicate a large number of seats on important committees to parents, including a permanent seat for parent group leadership
- ❖ Have courageous conversations about the root causes of disparities in attendance and achievement-- identify strategies in partnership with parent leaders
- ❖ Parent leaders are cultivated through training opportunities in group facilitation
- ❖ **Back to School Walks to reach out to parents in places where they feel more comfortable: community centers, parks, places of worship**

# Back To School Walks

## How to Connect with Families

*To see real improvements in student learning, use the summer months to build good school–family relationships.*

**Anne T. Henderson  
and Melissa Whipple**

**G**etting off to a good start with families may be more important than you know. Research shows that strong ties with families and community can make it *four times* more likely that your students will make major gains in math and reading.<sup>1</sup> The key is to build strong relationships with families that focus on improving student learning.

To forge such connections, staff members in high-achieving schools that serve low-income neighborhoods engage in the following actions:

- They become familiar with community issues and families' home cultures.
- They use community resources.
- They invite families to observe in the classroom.
- They work as partners with families to improve learning.

■ They quickly respond to families' concerns about their children.

But you don't have to wait until September to begin making those connections. You can use these summer months to plan for or implement activities to get off to a great start in the fall.

**A High-Touch Strategy**  
**Plan a Back-to-School Community Walk**  
How would your families describe their neighborhood? Would your teachers see it the



same way or understand its history? Parents, students, residents, and community groups know the area. Ask them to show it to you and share their stories.

A community walk is a parent-led tour that highlights the resources and challenges of the school neighborhood. Many communities face challenges, from unemployment to gentrification to immigration to poverty. We need to learn more from people with intimate knowledge of both the issues and the community.

Touring the neighborhood will help teachers

“  
How would your families describe their neighborhood? Would your teachers see it the same way?  
”

and staff members appreciate the life and soul of the community where they teach, develop deeper relationships with families, identify community resources to tap, and enrich instruction using what they learn about families' cultures and backgrounds. Teachers can learn more about the realities of the physical environments in which their students live. For example, the neighborhood may have neglected parks, a lack of stop signs and crosswalks, and hot spots where young adults loiter. But teachers can also learn about the pride that many shop owners feel for their businesses and community.

A great time for a community walk is the first week that teachers and staff members return to school. Here are some basic steps:

- Early in the summer, form a team of community partners to plan the walk. Partners typically include the parent association, the home-school coordinator, nonprofit groups, social service agencies, civic associations, and area merchants.
- Schedule the walk with the principal and key school leaders.
- Invite all school staff members to attend, with breakfast or lunch and a discussion to follow.
- Map out a one-hour walking tour, near the school if possible.

■ Designate a community member to lead both the walk and the discussion that takes place afterward to deepen school–community connections.

Before taking the walk, encourage teachers to look for things in the community—streets, signs, special places, stores, people—that they can incorporate into their instruction. For example, after one community walk, a teacher in Washington, D.C., incorporated photos from the neighborhood and stories about the local institutions and businesses into her lessons. Students recognized the local landmarks and were able to connect their lived experiences with the curriculum.

Teachers can also ask students what they want to do to make their neighborhood a better place to live. They might suggest that students write a letter to the police about a safety issue, to the city council member about a broken street light, or to the mayor about a neglected park.

## V. Strategy for engagement: community collaboration

- ❖ Dial in community and business representatives to assess needs and develop programs
- ❖ Make school facilities such as the media lab, auditorium, gym or playground available for community use.
- ❖ Develop adult education, recreation and wellness programs after school hours
- ❖ Partner with civic leaders to develop service learning opportunities for students
- ❖ Pair community celebrations with resource fairs

# Family Service Learning model



Source: National Center for Families Learning

[https://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/staffdevelopment/kdlaarchivedwebinars/Documents/NCFL-FSL-brief\\_F3.pdf](https://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/staffdevelopment/kdlaarchivedwebinars/Documents/NCFL-FSL-brief_F3.pdf)

## VI. Strategy for engagement: support student success

- ❖ Parent- teacher conferences seen as opportunities to collaborate on student goals, strengths and resources
- ❖ Teachers are accessible through a consistent pathway
- ❖ Teachers explain throughout the year what students are learning and what good work looks like
- ❖ Parents are included in school committees regarding academic standards and how to maintain high expectations and achievement for each student.
- ❖ Principals review data with the parent group to solicit needed input on needed academic improvements

# Partnership principles: flipping the script

What is your child learning at home?

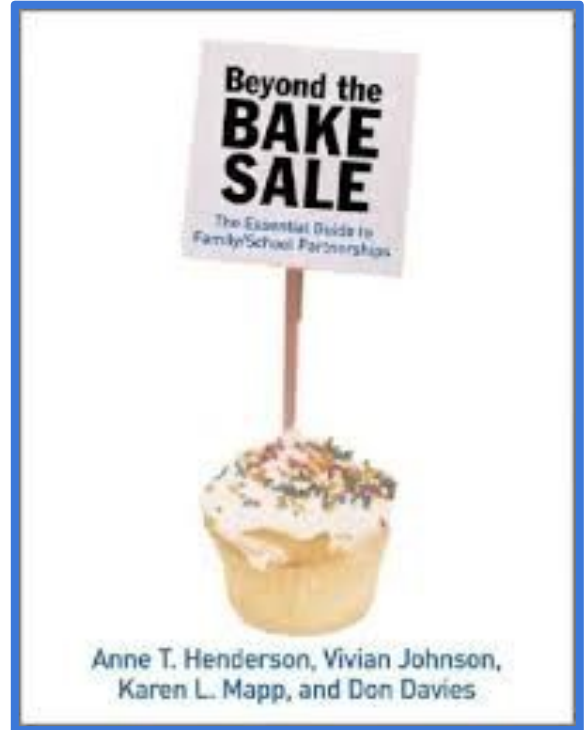
What can you teach me about your child?

What do you need?

How can we set each other up for success?

Your voice is needed for making this decision.

We are in this together.





## VII. Strategy for engagement: cultivate advocacy skills

- ❖ Offer parent workshops on local, state and federally-funded resources, as well as how to access them
- ❖ Team with the parent group to develop a Parent Bill of Rights
- ❖ Team with the parent group to educate all parents on available resources, including enrichment classes, gifted and talented programs, summer programs, internships and college-readiness.
- ❖ Develop protocols for whole-school conflict-resolution systems that are practiced with students, parents, teachers and leadership

# Sample Bill of Rights: The New Teacher Project

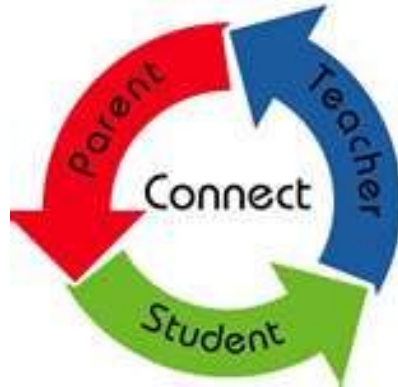


Source: <https://tntp.org/walking-together/story/families>

# Who is doing the actual engaging?

We are.

We are engaging families and communities as assets in the lives of children when we include families in the mission of education.





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**Find more resources on our website:**

<https://www.nysed-soris-upstate-pdrc.org/>

**National Parental Involvement Day is Thursday, November 19!**