Family Engagement Toolkit
Continuous Improvement through an Equity Lens

California Department of Education

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Family Engagement Toolkit

Introduction

The integral role of family engagement[1] in school improvement has been the focus of increased attention throughout the United States in recent years, perhaps more so than at any time since the 1960s when the importance of parental involvement was recognized in the original Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), which was part of the War on Poverty legislation. Driving this more recent push has been the growing recognition, grounded in research, that effective family engagement can contribute to improved student outcomes and to closing persistent achievement gaps among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and family income levels. Moreover, experts advocate for family engagement as an essential strategy for building the pathway to college and career readiness for all students, as well as an essential component of a systems approach to school turnaround (Weiss, Lopez, Rosenberg, 2010; Center on School Turnaround, 2017).

State and federal legislation reflects this increased attention. By 2013, 39 states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws calling for the implementation of family engagement policies (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The 2015 reauthorization of ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), continues to emphasize family engagement as a necessary element for improving student outcomes. For example, Title I of ESSA continues to require parent and family engagement policies and programs (Section 1116); Title III requires local education agencies (LEAs) to strengthen parent, family, and community engagement in programs that serve English Learners (Section 3111 [b][2][D][iv]).

As a result of all this, growing numbers of districts and schools around the country have been engaging families in creative and effective ways. Yet the authors' broad experience working closely with districts and schools throughout California suggests that many educators continue to struggle with the "how-to" of translating positive research findings about family engagement into effective and sustainable structures and practices — especially ones that embrace the full range of diverse families in their community. This toolkit was developed to help districts and schools by providing practical planning and evaluation tools that support efforts to engage all families, particularly those of underrepresented and underserved students.

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1 The term "family engagement" is used in this toolkit for a number of reasons: to reflect the term used in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015; because the research and practice in the field has evolved from using "parent" to including the broader term "family"; and because "engagement" denotes a shared responsibility for designing and building a partnership between home and school.

As is the case for much of the family engagement research, this toolkit uses the term family in its broadest sense, to include any adults who serve a parental role in children's lives. This term includes, for example, birth and adoptive parents, grandparents and other adult relatives, foster parents and other non-related legal guardians, and adults who are close to children although they may not have a guardian role, such as a pastor or a youth group counselor.

Development of the Toolkit

Each of the six individuals involved in developing this toolkit comes from a different California-based education entity that has extensive responsibility for, and experience with, supporting districts and schools on a range of education improvement efforts, including strengthening family engagement. Those entities are the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd; California Department of Education, specifically its Title I Policy and Program Guidance Office; and four California county offices of education — Alameda, Nevada, Riverside, and Sacramento.

In our work with districts and schools, we frequently hear some version of the following questions:

- How can we increase the engagement of underrepresented families?
- How can we help teachers and administrators become more skilled and comfortable working with all families?
- What kind of family engagement activities are likely to lead to the biggest learning advances for students?
- How can we know if our family engagement efforts are having the desired effect?

In considering how to help educators address these important questions in the unique context of their district or school, we reviewed the research on family engagement, reflected on our collective years of technical assistance work in districts and schools, and conducted a review of district-level plans for family engagement from across California. (Details about the research on family engagement and our review of district plans are included in appendix A). In the course of this preparation, we identified a handful of particular challenges related to family engagement that motivated us to develop this toolkit:

- Family engagement activities are often isolated from other initiatives in districts;
- Family engagement staff in districts often work in a silo, not in collaboration with other district departments;
- Families of low-income students and families of students of color are often under-represented in family engagement activities;
- Educators struggle with how to evaluate family engagement programs and activities, beyond tracking the number of participants attending events;
- While opportunities for family members to gain skills and knowledge are growing, building educators' capacity to partner with families is not yet a focus in many districts.

The toolkit is designed to address the above questions and challenges.

Unique Aspects of the Toolkit

Addresses the importance of integrating family engagement with each district's student learning goals

Engaging families will contribute to improving student learning outcomes only when family engagement is integrated into all district goals and initiatives for student learning, including both academic and social-emotional[2] learning goals. Accordingly, this toolkit shows how family engagement can be tied to specific student learning goals. The toolkit does not provide a one-size fits all model of family engagement, nor a do-it-once-and-you're-done model. Instead, it identifies key ingredients of a successful program, describes how to make sure family engagement activities are matched to the unique conditions and initiatives of each district, and outlines a process for continuous improvement of family engagement efforts.

Includes an explicit commitment to equity in every phase of family engagement

Engaging diverse families has the potential to contribute to closing achievement gaps between groups of students, but to realize that potential requires a dedication to using an equity lens in all aspects of the work. The types of diversity among students and families include different racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, and different gender identities, sexual orientations, family structures, and abilities or special needs. All of these characteristics and more must be considered when engaging families. The toolkit describes two critical dimensions of family engagement — building relationships and connecting to student learning — that are specifically designed to engage diverse families. These dimensions are described at length in the Effective Family Engagement section of the toolkit, starting on page 7. Equally important, the toolkit provides an equity lens, in the form of equity questions to consider in planning, implementing, and evaluating family engagement. It also provides strategies and tools to help districts overcome the challenges to engaging underserved and underrepresented families in order to engage families from all student groups.

Uses the dual capacity-building framework in planning and implementation of family engagement

The toolkit is grounded in the concepts set forth in *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), a research-based framework funded by and published in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education in 2013. As its name suggests, the Dual Capacity-Building Framework calls on districts to increase the family engagement-related knowledge, understanding,

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2 Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Definition from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning: retrieved 9.19.16 at http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning

and skills of educators and families alike. This toolkit describes how to embed such capacity-building in the processes of planning and implementing family engagement activities, with a special emphasis on building *educator* capacity. We particularly emphasize building educator capacity because, in our experience, districts tend to be more focused on building families' capacity than on building educators' capacity. For example, growing numbers of districts are implementing parent universities or other parent trainings, and staffing schools with family liaisons or community outreach workers who work with families. These are important and valuable initiatives and need to be supported. At the same time, districts may be assuming that teachers already have the skills and confidence to engage families, when in fact many educators need additional professional learning in this area.

Focuses on the role of the district and the district coordinator in leading a process of continuous improvement at schools across the district

Both research and reports of promising practices have emphasized the critical role that districts play in efforts to engage families (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). The toolkit focuses on the role of the district and is intended for use by district family engagement leaders, most especially the district's family engagement coordinator (or someone in an equivalent position). It emphasizes the importance of having a district-level family engagement team that works hand in hand with the coordinator to guide the work of engaging families at schools throughout the district. Whether a district already has an extensive program of family engagement or is just starting to develop one, this toolkit can help the district take a new look at how to plan, implement, evaluate, and continuously improve those efforts in order to more directly support student success and achieve equitable student outcomes.

Toolkit Overview

This toolkit is organized into several sections that are briefly introduced immediately below. Each one includes *key questions* for a district family engagement team consider, along with *equity questions* to help the team apply an equity lens, to dig deeper and strengthen the engagement of all of the diverse groups of families in the district. In addition, each section includes tools to support the work of the district team. An example of each tool filled out with data from a fictitious district is included in appendix C. The tools themselves are available as editable Word versions in the companion document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates*; they can be revised as needed to meet the needs of a district. Because context, strengths, and challenges are unique in each district and can change over time, be sure to use current information from your own district in completing the tools.

The toolkit includes icons to identify the critical dimensions and important elements in each section:

	Trusting relationships
	Connect to learning
	Key questions
	Equity questions
	Tools

Effective Family Engagement

This section includes a description of the two critical dimensions of family engagement: building trusting relationships and connecting to student learning. It describes what educators and families will know and be able to do if these dimensions are strong, and it includes a matrix showing how districts can strengthen activities on these critical dimensions.

Laying The Foundation

This section addresses the importance of establishing a district-level family engagement team, creating a district vision statement for family engagement, discussing core beliefs, and ensuring that the vision statement and implementation plans for family engagement are reflected in district and school policies and plans. The family engagement coordinator works closely with the team to plan, implement, and evaluate the family engagement work in the district. Even if your district cannot establish this team right away, you can still use the suggestions and tools in the subsequent sections of the toolkit.

Getting Started: Where Are We Now?

This section provides guidance on mapping community and family assets that can support positive student outcomes, identifying the district's current strengths and challenges related to family engagement, and determining how strong your current family engagement program is in relation to the two dimensions in the matrix.

The Process of Continuous Improvement: Plan, Do, Reflect, Adjust

This section includes suggestions for strengthening the two dimensions of family engagement through a four-phase continuous improvement process: Plan, Do, Reflect, and Adjust (PDRA). In this process, the family engagement team works on building capacity for educators and families, using an equity lens to ensure engagement of all families. The section describes high-leverage strategies and activities and includes examples of what each PDRA phase might look like in a district. If a district already uses a similar process, these PDRA activities can be integrated into it. The section also introduces tools to support work in each PDRA phase. The tools themselves, in editable form, are available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates*.

Appendix A: Development of Toolkit and Key Themes from Literature on Family Engagement

This appendix describes how the toolkit came to be and lays out the themes in research and promising practices that inform toolkit content. It also describes the toolkit developers' review of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) in California, as well as highlights from an LCAP review by the Public Policy Institute of California.

Appendix B: Resources

This appendix includes a listing of resources available to support the work of family engagement.

Appendix C: Examples of Tools from a Fictitious District

This appendix includes examples of tools included in this toolkit that have been filled out using data from a fictitious district.

Appendix D: Methods of Collecting Information

This appendix consists of a table that compares the advantages and disadvantages of eight different data-collection methods.

Effective Family Engagement

Effective family engagement has been described as "an intentional and systemic partnership of educators, families, and community members ...[who] share responsibility for a student's preparation for school, work and life, from the time the child is born to young adulthood [Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010]. To build an effective partnership, educators, families, and community members need to develop the knowledge and skills to work together, and schools must purposefully integrate family and community engagement with goals for students' learning and thriving" (California Department of Education, 2017a, Definition, para. 3). This description of family engagement is grounded in the work of key family engagement scholars and researchers of the last four decades, including Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University, Karen Mapp at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Anne Henderson at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. It also aligns to the 2013 Dual Capacity-Building Framework.

Two Critical Dimensions of Family Engagement

We suggest that having schools in which educators and families work as partners to support student learning requires the continuous strengthening of two critical dimensions of family engagement: trusting relationships between educators and families, and the connections of family engagement activities and efforts to student learning, referred to hereafter as connections to learning.

 Trusting relationships are **weak** when

- Educators make assumptions that some families don't value education or are not interested in supporting student learning
- Educators do not communicate effectively with families
- Families do not feel welcome at their child's school and do not attend events at the school

Trusting relationships are **strong** when

- Educators are culturally responsive and reach out to families to build partnerships
- All families feel welcome and respected at their child's school
- Educators and family leaders jointly plan and lead family engagement activities

Connections to student learning are **weak** when

- Educators do not understand how to engage families to support student learning
- Families do not feel knowledgeable or confident about how to provide support for learning
- Family engagement activities are not related to student learning outcomes

Connections to student learning are **strong** when

- Family engagement activities are aligned with district goals for student outcomes
- Families and educators engage in two-way communication about what students are learning at school
- Family engagement activities help families to provide support at home for learning

The matrix on the following page shows how these two dimensions of family engagement are complementary, and it includes an example of activities in each of the four quadrants.

FIGURE 1: Family Engagement Matrix

Connections to Student Learning (vertical axis: STRONG to WEAK)

Trusting Relationships (horizontal axis: WEAK to STRONG)

examples

Top-left (Strong Connections, Weak Relationships): Educators organize math nights and give information to families, but there are limited opportunities for dialogue and few families attend.

Top-right (Strong Connections, Strong Relationships): Educators and family leaders jointly plan interactive trainings for family members on how to support college and career readiness.

Bottom-left (Weak Connections, Weak Relationships): Educators send out announcements about meetings and information on school social events via email, text, and social media.

Bottom-right (Weak Connections, Strong Relationships): Families are comfortable participating and volunteering for social events, fundraising, etc., but don't have opportunities to develop skills or knowledge to support student learning.

Laying The Foundation

Four important actions lay the foundation for effective family engagement. The first is to establish a district-level family engagement team that will work closely with and offer guidance and support to the district family engagement coordinator. The other actions are discussing core beliefs about family engagement; agreeing on a district vision statement for family engagement based on those beliefs; and reviewing district and school family engagement policies. Each action is described more fully below.

Establish a District Family Engagement Team

Establishing a team of district- and school-level educators, staff members, family members, and community representatives for the planning process enables a district to benefit from the collective perspectives they bring. Johns Hopkins University researcher Dr. Joyce Epstein was an early advocate of having family engagement teams, and her book, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2009) is a foundational resource in the field. Epstein emphasizes the importance of including both family members and educators on such teams, along with others who have important connections with families and students. By including educators and staff who have roles in different programs, such as Special Education, Title I, English Learner Services, Student Services, and Health and Wellness, the team can better align family engagement activities across existing district initiatives. On the family side, it is important to include those who reflect the diversity in the district, to ensure that the voices of all families are reflected in the design, implementation, and evaluation of family engagement activities. (Districts using Johns Hopkins University's Action Team for Partnerships model may want to include representatives of site-based action teams on the family engagement team.)

We suggest you consider people in the following roles for your team:

- District Family Engagement Coordinator
- District, state, and federal program staff (e.g., programs for English learner students, students with disabilities, students in foster care, and students who are homeless)
- Site administrator(s)
- Teacher(s)
- Parent leader(s), including members of advisory committees (e.g., an English learner advisory committee, a special education advisory committee)

- Community partner(s)
- Support staff (e.g., custodian, nurse, receptionist, classroom aide)

Establishing a district family engagement team that will work closely with the family engagement coordinator can help ensure that family engagement activities are an integral part of all district initiatives, and having a team with a broad-based membership increases the likelihood of greater participation in those activities by both educators and families.

Key questions to consider in establishing a district family engagement team:

- Who has been successful in engaging diverse families at their school site?
- Who is influential in the district and/or community and could help to promote family engagement activities?
- Who will be able to bring the perspective of teachers and staff to the team?
- Who are the parents of students in programs that could bring their perspective (e.g., Special Education, English Learner Programs, Title I)?

Equity questions to consider in establishing a district family engagement team:

- Have we identified prospective parent leaders who are representative of our diverse families? Have we considered all forms of diversity, such as socio-economic, racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender identity, and family definition (e.g., foster families)?
- Have we sought out family leaders who can bring the perspective of families that have historically been underrepresented on district leadership teams?
- Does the final list of prospective team members reflect the diversity of our district?
- Are we scheduling meetings at a time that is convenient and realistic for all team members?
- Do we need to provide transportation, childcare, or translation/interpreting services for any team members?

Tool 1 can help you to brainstorm prospective members of your District family engagement team. An example of tool 1 that has been filled out using data from a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

Discuss Core Beliefs about Family Engagement

Educators and family members sometimes hold different core beliefs about family engagement. These beliefs often come to light during informal conversations, but may not generally be discussed in a thoughtful way that can lead to greater understanding about individuals' experiences, hopes, and fears or concerns. Sometimes educators and family members are not fully aware of their own core beliefs or make assumptions about the beliefs of others. Core beliefs can impact the success of school-family partnerships.

Members of the family engagement team can benefit from discussing their core beliefs about the capabilities of families and the role of educators. It may be difficult for them to reach agreement on core beliefs right away; however, starting the conversation will help team members learn about each other's experiences and views on engaging families.

In *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), another foundational resource for family engagement, the authors suggest four core beliefs that are important for educators to hold:

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.
- Families and school staff should be equal partners.
- Responsibility for building and sustaining partnerships between school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

One way to discuss core beliefs is to ask all team members to reflect on how much they agree or disagree with each of these four core beliefs and then to share their thoughts. Past experiences, fears, and concerns may make it difficult for some team members to embrace all these beliefs, so it is important to have a well-facilitated discussion. Additional tools for facilitating this discussion are included in *Beyond the Bake Sale*.

Agree on a Vision Statement for Family Engagement

A district team's agreement on a vision statement for family engagement amounts to deciding on a destination. Once the destination is determined, the plan to get there is easier to develop. A vision statement expresses agreed-upon ideals (see samples below). It can be shared with other stakeholders to build family engagement support across the district.

Sample Vision Statements

Every school is a community of educators and families who work together as partners, sharing responsibility and leadership, and advocating for the success of all children.

All educators and families in the district will be knowledgeable and confident to work as partners and share responsibility for student learning.

To reach agreement on a vision statement, we suggest the district family engagement team do the following:

- Review some of the research on family engagement described in appendix A at the end of this toolkit.

- Review the current district vision statement for family engagement if there is one (see section below on reviewing district and school parent involvement or family engagement policies).

- Engage in a facilitated discussion about a new vision statement.

Key questions to consider in discussing a vision statement:

- When our district has outstanding family engagement that promotes student achievement, what will it look like?

- For each stakeholder group (i.e., families, teachers, administrators, students, staff, and community groups), what will they know or be able to do, how will they feel, and what will they be doing?

Equity questions to consider in discussing a vision statement:

- Will this vision statement resonate with families of all student groups?

- Does this vision statement include a potential role for all stakeholders?

- Will this vision statement serve as an inspiration for all stakeholders?

Tool 2 provides a process for considering the questions above and creating a district vision statement for family engagement. An example of tool 2 that has been filled out using data from a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

Review District and School Family Engagement Policies

Written district and school family engagement policies "establish the agency's expectations and objectives for meaningful parent and family involvement" (ESSA, Section 1116[2]). The policies also describe the way those expectations will be carried out. In other words, policies describe the planned course of action for the district and schools to engage families as partners. These publicly available policies are required for districts and schools receiving Title I funds, and they must address specific components of family engagement.

In districts and schools receiving Title I funding, parents of Title I students or other family members must be involved in the development and annual evaluation/revision of the policies. A district may wish to involve the family engagement team in the fulfillment of these responsibilities. Importantly, the team should be familiar with the policies and, in its ongoing work, ensure that the vision statement and plans for family engagement are aligned with, and outlined in, these policies.

Getting Started: Where Are We Now?

When the district has laid the foundation by establishing a family engagement team, discussing core beliefs, agreeing on a vision statement, and reviewing current district and school family engagement policies, the real work of engaging families begins. An assessment of the current family engagement situation is the starting point for strengthening the two critical dimensions. The team will need to learn about the families in the district, the current relationships between educators and families, and the effectiveness of existing family engagement activities. This information will become the basis for beginning the PDRA process.

Family engagement activities may sometimes be planned based on assumptions about the needs of families, on what has always been done in the district, or on what has worked in another district. But just as planning teams have learned to use data in academic planning and in areas of school climate (e.g., attendance or discipline), so too should districts use data in family engagement planning.

Each district context is different, so understanding the strengths, or assets, in your district, as well as your unique challenges, is key to building a family engagement program that effectively engages all of your families. We suggest your family engagement team investigate the current situation and gather data in the following areas:

- Strengths and challenges of families in the district
- Current levels of trusting relationships between educators and families
- Current levels of connections of family engagement activities to student learning
- Strengths and challenges of existing family engagement activities

Strengths and Challenges of Families in the District

The families in every district have unique strengths and challenges. Using an assets-based or strengths-based approach to understanding families will help the team be more culturally responsive and help guard against making negative assumptions about families

(see p. 46 for research and the section "Understanding Families" in Resources for more information about these approaches). The team needs to learn about the support and resources that families and communities provide for their children, as well as the challenges they experience in caring for their children and supporting their learning.

Key questions for learning about strengths and challenges of your families:

- What languages are spoken in our communities?

- How long have families lived in the neighborhoods or had children attending the district schools?

- Who are the leaders that have influence in different communities?

- What are the assets in the community (e.g., religious organizations, small businesses, health and social service agencies, recreation facilities)?

- What have been families' experiences of their school? Have they felt welcome at school and district offices? Are there differences in the experiences of families in different groups (e.g., families of English learner students, of students with disabilities, or from particular racial or ethnic backgrounds)?

- If families are living in poverty, is it due to recent changes in the local economy or is inter-generational poverty a characteristic of many families?

- What previous experience with schooling do families have (e.g., in previous generations and/or in other countries)?

- Are immigrant families first- or second-generation immigrants? Are they refugees? How recently have they arrived in the U.S.?

- How many students are in foster care, or living with grandparents or other family members who serve as their guardians?

Keep in mind that one district may include many different communities, and families' experiences, strengths, and challenges may differ from one community to another.

Looking for data about the strengths and challenges of families in the district can be an opportunity to collaborate with leaders in various district programs (e.g., after-school programs or English Learner programs) or to partner with community-based organizations. Some of these organizations may already conduct asset- or opportunity-mapping to learn about their communities and may be working to promote equitable access and outcomes for students. The data you gather about families in the district may also be useful to teachers in the classroom. For example, when educators are aware of the support and resources in their students' community, they can incorporate these in the curriculum and partner with community leaders and institutions to support student learning (WestEd, 2010).

Current Levels of Trusting Relationships Between Educators and Families

We suggest gathering data both from educators and from diverse families to assess the current level of trusting relationships between educators and families. (For guidance on asking educators about their beliefs, see "Discuss Core Beliefs About Family Engagement," p. 11.)

Key questions to ask educators:

- How well do you know your students' families?
- What are your beliefs about engaging families?
- How confident are you in reaching out to all families?
- Would you benefit from structured practice in listening to families' concerns and getting input from families about their children's education?

Key questions to ask families:

- Do you feel welcome at your child's school?
- Do you feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher?
- Do you feel respected by educators at your child's school?

Your district may already collect some of this information, or you may be able to add some or all of these questions to existing data-collection tools. For additional suggestions on how to gather this data and information on survey resources, see the box "How to Gather Evidence," below.

Tool 3 can help you organize data-gathering about the current levels of trusting relationships between educators and families. The tool asks the team to describe the evidence already gathered, identify additional evidence to gather, and determine the next steps for gathering that evidence. Once the team reviews all the evidence, the team can draw from it to identify needs; there is a place on the tool for documenting the needs. In turn, those needs are used to define improvement objectives during the Plan phase of the continuous improvement process. An example of tool 3 that has been filled out using data from a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

How to Gather Evidence

A variety of methods may be used to gather evidence to answer important questions. If your district asks parents to complete a climate survey, you can use the survey data. Other methods for collecting evidence include walk-throughs, focus groups, home visits, parent surveys, and self-assessment rubrics. Be sure to discuss with your team exactly what questions you are trying to answer, to determine whether any particular method of gathering data would be more appropriate than another for a given question.

To assist your team in deciding which method to use, see the chart in appendix D that shows some benefits of each method. For example, when you use a survey in a needs assessment, you can establish an information baseline for comparison with future survey results. When a diverse group conducts a walk-through of a district office or school site using a common observation tool, family engagement planners can learn how the school and district environments may feel more welcoming to some families than to others.

Designing a survey is best done with the help of assessment professionals. It is easy to introduce bias in the way questions are worded, or to ask multiple questions within one survey question, which makes it difficult to interpret the answers. Please see the Resources section of this toolkit, page 43, for guidance on designing surveys and gathering data for assessing your current situation.

Current Levels of Connections to Student Learning

We suggest gathering data both from educators and from a diverse range of families to assess the current level of connections to student learning.

Key questions to ask district administrators:

- Is family engagement considered a strategy to achieve district goals?
- Do district plans include family engagement actions as part of each student learning goal?

Key questions to ask site-level educators:

- At Title I schools, do school-parent compacts outline specific ways for families to support student learning? (ESSA, Section 1116[d], requires school-parent compacts)
- Do school plans include family engagement actions as part of each student learning goal?
- To what extent do educators at your site have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to
  - » Dialogue with families about student learning, (e.g., sharing student data and learning strategies)?
  - » Partner with families to support student learning?

Key questions to ask families:

- To what extent do you have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to
  - » Provide support at home for learning?
  - » Partner with educators to support your child's learning?

Your district may already collect some of this information, or you may be able to add some or all of these questions to existing data-collection tools. For additional suggestions on how to gather this data, please see the box "How to Gather Evidence," above.

Tool 4 can help you organize data-gathering about current levels of connections to student learning. Similar to tool 3, this tool asks the team to describe existing evidence, identify additional evidence to gather, and determine the next steps for gathering that evidence. Once the team reviews all the evidence, members can draw from it to identify needs; there is a place on the tool for documenting them. In turn, those needs can be used to define improvement objectives during the Plan phase of the continuous improvement process. An example of tool 4 that has been filled out using data from a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

When you investigate the current levels of trusting relationships and of connections to student learning, be sure to examine whether there are differences in the responses for different groups of families, for different educators, different sites, etc. For example:

Equity questions for educators:

- Do educators have more or less confidence engaging in dialogue with some groups of families compared to other groups of families?
- Do educators in some grade levels or at some school sites express more confidence about engaging in dialogue or partnering with families compared to educators in other grade levels or at different school sites?

Equity questions for families:

- Do some families feel more welcome at district schools than others?
- Do some families feel more respected by educators than others?
- Are the responses from families different between elementary and secondary or between different school sites?

Strengths and Challenges of Existing Family Engagement Activities

It is important that the team identify the strengths and challenges of existing family engagement activities in the district and its schools before getting started on planning new or expanded family engagement efforts. Some activities may have been in place for many years and may need to be looked at with a new perspective using the two critical dimensions. The team may find that activities at one school can be replicated or modified for other sites.

Key questions in assessing existing family engagement activities in the district and its schools:

- How well do existing family engagement activities contribute to strengthening trusting relationships and how could they be improved?
- How well do family engagement activities connect to student learning and how might those connections be strengthened?

Tool 5 is designed to use with the team to reflect on existing family engagement activities. The tool asks the team to reflect on current activities and determine how well each one contributes to building trusting relationships and how well each one connects to student learning. The tool includes a space in which to identify how each activity can be improved in order to strengthen the two dimensions of family engagement. An example of tool 5 that has been filled out using data from a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

The Process of Continuous Improvement: Plan, Do, Reflect, Adjust

The process of continuous improvement includes four phases: Plan, Do, Reflect and Adjust. For each phase described below, key questions and equity questions are provided to help the district's family engagement team build the capacity of both educators and families and strengthen the two critical dimensions of family engagement. Each phase includes one or more tools, with examples using data from a fictitious district in appendix C, and corresponding tools to customize for the district in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

Phase 1: Plan

After gathering evidence and conducting an in-depth assessment of the current situation in the district, the family engagement team can move on to make informed decisions about what needs to be done to improve its family engagement and how to do it. Thorough planning can make the difference in whether family engagement activities engage most of the families in the district and support student learning, or whether only a few families participate and activities have a limited impact on student learning.
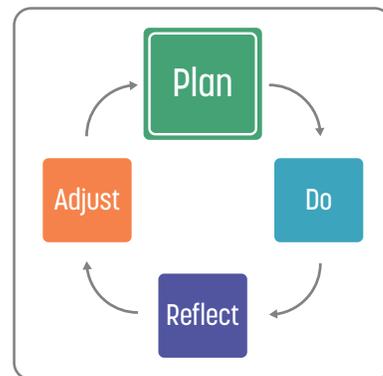
The planning phase involves the following steps for each of the two critical dimensions:

1. Define your objectives
2. Design activities to accomplish your objectives
3. Identify progress indicators that will tell you if the activities are happening and how effective they are

Following is an overview of the three steps, followed by specific suggestions for using the steps to plan how to strengthen each of the two dimensions.

Define your objectives

To define family engagement objectives related to district goals and design activities to accomplish them, you will need to use your findings from the previous section, "Getting Started: Where are we now?" You will also need to consider research and evidence on promising practices in family engagement (See appendices A and B).

We suggest using the approach laid out in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework. As described in the introduction to this toolkit, dual capacity-building refers to building the capacity of educators as well as of families, through thoughtfully planned activities. The framework breaks capacity into four areas; in this toolkit, we will focus on one of those four areas — knowledge and skills — but we encourage readers to become familiar with all the areas of capacity addressed in the framework.

Key questions to help you define objectives for each of the two dimensions:

- What do educators need to *know?*
- What do educators need to *be able to do?*
- What do family members need to *know?*
- What do family members need to *be able to do?*

We also suggest that in the planning process the team use its state framework, whenever possible. In California, the California Department of Education's *Family Engagement Framework* (2014) includes district principles and implementation rubrics that align with the dual capacity-building approach, with state and national statutory family engagement requirements, and with research.

Design activities related to each critical dimension of family engagement

The activities the team designs should aim to help accomplish the objectives the team has identified. As your team designs activities, keep in mind the following guidelines from the Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) for designing partnership opportunities:

- Focus on empowering and enabling participants to be confident, active, knowledgeable, and informed; don't limit family engagement to providing supports and services to families;
- Bring families and school staff together for shared learning that promotes networking;
- Make activities interactive, so participants have an opportunity to try out new skills; don't limit activities to disseminating information.

Identify progress indicators

Progress indicators will tell you whether the activities the team planned are happening and how effective they are. In some cases, a progress indicator, such as feedback from an exit card or a short survey, is useful for gathering information immediately after an event. Other progress indicators, such as data gathered in reports from teachers, attendance clerks, or surveys of educators, families, and students, will be collected periodically during the year or at the end of the school year. More information on progress indicators can be found in the Reflect phase of the PDRA continuous improvement process.

Objectives and activities to strengthen trusting relationships

The responsibility for strengthening trusting relationships between educators and families falls primarily on educators. Once trusting relationships have been established and the district has engaged families reflecting the diversity of the district, parent leaders may be able to assist in maintaining those relationships, for example, serving as parent ambassadors to new and incoming families.

Data from the process described above in Getting Started will help the team define objectives and design activities that match the needs and conditions in the district in order to strengthen trusting relationships. To begin strengthening relationships, we recommend two high-levelage strategies:

- Support educators to learn about the families in the district
- Create welcoming environments in all school sites and district offices

Support educators to learn about the families in the district
When districts begin a family engagement effort by looking for assets in families and communities, educators will recognize the resources families contribute to stronger school-family partnerships and to improved school and student performance. Through respectful listening, educators can understand the strengths and challenges of diverse families in school communities. When educators do that, families feel respected and valued, and they are more likely to participate.

An example of an objective and related activities for supporting educators to learn more about families in their district follow:

Sample objective:

- Educators will understand the assets and challenges among families in their school community

Sample activities for building educators' capacity to meet the objective:

- Train staff to conduct home visits before school starts
- Train staff to make positive phone calls to families

- Conduct asset-mapping of communities in the district
- Provide guidance to administrators on holding informal coffee chats connected to student learning goals
- Invite community leaders to share the history and experiences of their community with district educators

Create welcoming environments at all school sites and in all district offices

A frequent comment the toolkit developers have heard from educators is, "We plan great family engagement activities and events, but only the same few parents come every time." In some families and communities, there is a history of miscommunication with and distrust of educators, and in some districts families do not feel welcomed as partners.

When families do feel welcome at district meetings or in their children's school, they are more likely to participate and to reach out to teachers and other educators to find out how they can support their student. What can educators do to help ensure that families feel comfortable and appreciated in their children's district and school? Education environments are welcoming when district or school staff greet families warmly and treat them with respect. A welcoming message that "we value you and want you to be our partner in supporting your student" can be conveyed by the signs on the wall, the cleanliness of district school facilities, and by having staff members who speak the home language of students and are readily available to interpret — to name a few examples.

The authors of *Beyond the Bake Sale* (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007) describe four types of schools: fortress schools, come-if-we-call schools, open-door schools, and partner schools. In outlining these four school types, they offer insight into the explicit and implicit messages conveyed to families by educators, and provide guidance on how to build a school that welcomes families as partners. In the fortress school, the message is "we don't want you here"; in the come-if-we-call school, the message is "we'll take care of your students and don't bother us unless we call you"; in open-door schools, there may be a welcoming message, but the underlying attitude is that "we know what is best for your child." The partnership school, in contrast, explicitly welcomes families to share responsibility for the learning and success of the students.

Families from different backgrounds may experience the district and schools in different ways, with some finding their child's district or school welcoming while others find them less welcoming, or even off-putting. When using an equity lens, educators listen to and understand the experience of families of all the groups of students in the school community. With each new school year, educators must reconsider the families in their district, because some families will have left and new families will have arrived. Creating an environment that strengthens trusting relationships is not something that can be undertaken just once and then it's done; it is an ongoing process that needs to be a focus of family engagement work throughout every school year.

An example of an objective and activities for creating welcoming environments follow:

Sample objective:

- The environment at all district offices and school sites is welcoming to all families

Sample activities for building educators' capacity to meet the objective:

- Prepare family-friendly information materials in multiple languages
- Provide professional development to all staff in cultural responsiveness
- Hire, train, and supervise family liaisons to serve as point people to develop family engagement at all school sites
- Provide professional development to site administrators on the value and importance of engaging diverse families and on strategies to engage diverse families
- Provide guidance to school sites for organizing family observation days (i.e., days when family members are invited to observe classrooms)

Tool 6 is a planning tool for strengthening trusting relationships that helps your team put together objectives, activities, and progress indicators. An example of Tool 6 showing the plan of a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.* In the example, the district team plans to strengthen trusting relationships by supporting educators to learn about families and by creating welcoming environments at school sites.

Objectives and activities to strengthen connections to student learning

It is important to use the district's current goals for student learning as the starting point for strengthening connections to student learning. Such goals might include increasing student attendance, supporting the English proficiency of English learner students, improving the algebra pass rates, or supporting positive discipline initiatives. If you are in the early stages of developing your family engagement program, we suggest choosing one or two goal areas to focus on. Ideally, as family engagement work grows, family engagement activities will be embedded in the plan for each of the district's student learning goals.

Be sure to use data from the process described above in Getting Started to help define objectives and design activities that match the needs and conditions in your district to strengthen connections to student learning. To begin strengthening the connections, we recommend two high-leverage strategies:

1. Focus on assisting families to provide support at home for learning
2. Promote meaningful two-way communication between home and school

Assist families to provide support at home for learning
This toolkit considers student learning to include both academic learning and social and emotional learning. The phrase "support at home for learning" was carefully crafted to

emphasize that the developers define this support in the broadest sense. We see support at home for learning as including a continuum of activities, starting with meeting students' basic needs and extending to supporting learning activities at home. Families support learning when they provide food, clothing, and shelter for their children. They also do so when they ensure that their children get to school each day, communicate high expectations for their children's education attainment, and set aside space for doing homework. Families also support learning through everyday activities, such as modeling how to budget expenses at the grocery store, sharing stories of family ancestors, or following a recipe in the kitchen.

Almost every family can participate in such ways (CDE, 2014; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). But what happens when a student does not have a family member who can provide this support or who can communicate with educators at school? In such cases, educators need to consider alternatives. One option is to identify an *education champion* to serve in this role (see box below). Another option is to enlist community partners. Support for learning can take place in multiple settings outside the school day. Support may be provided during after-school programs or in evening hours and may be provided by community organizations, business partners, social service agencies, or other government agencies. We encourage educators to keep these resources in mind, especially when families may be limited in their own ability to provide support at home for learning.

An example of an objective and related activities for assisting families to provide support at home for learning follow:

Sample objective:

- Families engage in literacy activities at home or in the community to support students' language acquisition in their home language and/or English.

Sample activities to build educators' capacity to meet the objective:

- Provide professional development to teachers and staff in designing family literacy nights, including how to share student achievement data and strategies to use at home
- Develop materials for family literacy nights
- Provide support for outreach to families
- Train educators and parent leaders to jointly design family literacy nights

Education Champions

For some students, there may not be a parent or other family member who can provide support for learning outside of school. It is important that every child have at least one person who serves as an "education champion," the person who not only provides support for learning, but also communicates with teachers and educators about the student. A child's education champion might be a relative, a coach, a community or religious leader, or a staff person at the school. (The National Center for Youth Law is piloting a program in Santa Cruz County, California: https://www.calhealthreport.org/2014/10/15/santa-cruz-pilot-project-equips-foster-youth-with-education-champions/)

Promote meaningful two-way communication between home and school

In our experience, families are most likely to engage in activities with educators when the activities relate to their own children. When educators have a dialogue with families about the goals for their individual children, educators can learn from families about the experiences and interests of students, and families can learn from educators about ways to support their children's learning. One way educators can begin two-way communication is to reach out to families before school starts or at the beginning of the school year, to make a positive connection. This can be done with phone calls or through structured home visits; either way, educators can benefit from training to help them feel more comfortable and be successful in connecting with families. In addition, every family engagement activity needs to include an opportunity for two-way communication between educators and families, to discuss what is happening at home, in the community, and at school. Opportunities for two-way communication can also be built into well-designed parent-teacher conferences, family nights focused on math or literacy, and classroom meetings with students and families.

Families may be engaged in many additional ways, including volunteering at school or serving on advisory committees and decision-making bodies. All families should be encouraged and supported to participate in these roles. Generally, however, only a small percentage of families have the time, interest, and confidence to participate in decision-making activities on an ongoing basis. Moreover, these activities have not been shown to impact student learning to the same degree as support at home for learning and meaningful, two-way communication between home and school (California Department of Education, 2014).

An example of an objective and related activities for strengthening meaningful communication between home and school follow:

Sample objective:

- District and school staff engage in dialogue with families about the district's program options for English learner students, the goals for English language acquisition, and the process of reclassification

Family Engagement Toolkit
THE PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: PLAN, DO, REFLECT, ADJUST

Sample activities to build educators' capacity to meet the objective:

- Train staff on the program options in the district, the system of English language acquisition, and the policies and processes for reclassification

- Provide professional development to all staff in effective listening and communication skills

- Provide professional development to all staff in cultural responsiveness

- Design opportunities for educators to practice communicating with families about policies and programs related to English learner students

- Review procedures for determining when the translation of written documents and interpretation of oral communication is needed

- Train staff on how to effectively integrate interpretation services during interactions with families

- Employ staff to provide interpretation services when appropriate

Tool 7 is a planning tool for strengthening connections to learning that puts together objectives, activities and progress indicators. Two examples of tool 7, based on plans from fictitious districts are included in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.* In example A of tool 7, the district team chose to strengthen connections to student learning by aligning family engagement objectives and activities with the district goal of increasing student attendance. In example B, the district team chose to align family engagement objectives and activities with the district goal of increasing the level of English proficiency among English Learners.

We encourage your team to discuss the Equity Questions below to ensure that the needs of families in all student groups are addressed in planning activities. We also encourage your team to develop additional equity questions that reflect your unique school community.

Equity questions for planning:

- Are parent and community leaders from our diverse school communities involved in planning activities?

- Are we planning targeted outreach to all our families?

- How are we planning to engage parent and community leaders in reaching their communities?

- Are we providing information in language that is easily understood?

- Are we providing information translated into the home languages of our families?

- Do families of English-only students have an opportunity to learn about the importance of programs for English Learners?

- Are we providing opportunities for educators to listen to the experiences of all our families?

Phase 2: Do

When the planning is done, it is time to implement the activities. This "Do" phase involves developing and implementing an action plan for each activity and a communication plan to disseminate important information about family engagement. The action plan helps to ensure that an activity will be carried out, by breaking the activity into a series of tasks and specifying who will be responsible for each one. The activities in the communication plan help to develop support across the district and in the community for family engagement activities and help to promote the value of engaging diverse families.
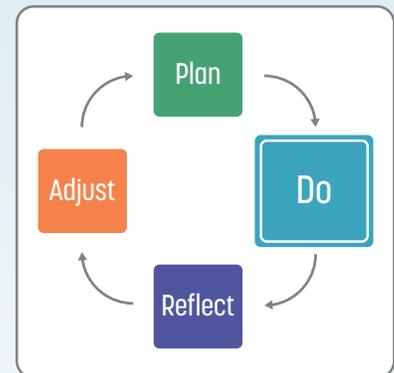
Develop and implement an action plan

The action plan outlines the various tasks needed to implement each planned family engagement activity and identifies who will do each task, what materials are needed, and the timeline for completion. The person responsible for each task will vary based on available staff in the district. Keep in mind that the person responsible may not actually be the one to do all the work involved, but can recruit or assign others to complete tasks. The person responsible will be a person who can ensure that tasks are completed and can report on progress to the district family engagement team.

Tool 8 is a tool to develop an action plan. An example of Tool 8 showing an action plan of a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.* We suggest completing an action plan for each activity in your plan.

Develop and implement a communication plan

The district family engagement team needs to communicate with various audiences in the district about the importance of family engagement and about the district's ongoing family engagement work. The purpose of communication will vary for different audiences and different situations, but will likely include one or more of these objectives:

- Increase awareness of the importance of family engagement in positively impacting student learning outcomes
- Increase awareness of the role that all educators play in building trusting relationships with families and connecting family engagement to student learning
- Contribute to integrating family engagement objectives and evaluation methods into district and school plans
- Solicit feedback and input on family engagement plans and activities

Communication needs to be an ongoing effort, starting with the formation of the district family engagement team, continuing during the school year, and reporting on accomplishments and next steps at the end of the year. Each member of the district family engagement team has a role to play in communicating about the objectives and progress of family engagement work with their constituencies; for example, a principal or teacher on the team can share information and solicit input at a principals' or teachers' meeting and a parent leader can communicate with advisory committees or parent-teacher associations. Communication will take different forms; it may involve a presentation at a meeting, a posting on social media, an article in a newsletter, or an informal conversation.

All stakeholders in the district need to know about the district's plan for family engagement and understand the role they play in engaging families. In addition, all stakeholders need to be made aware of the research findings about the importance of family engagement to student achievement. Following are some of the audiences in a district and examples of additional information each may need to know.

Board of trustees (or school board members)

- Identified district needs in family engagement
- Examples of integration of family engagement objectives in district plans
- Indicators of successful family engagement

Superintendent and other district-level leaders

- Resources needed for implementation of family engagement activities
- Data on results of district and school family engagement activities
- Methods the district can use to build the capacity of educators to partner with families

Site administrators

- Alignment of school family engagement plans and objectives with school and district student learning goals
- Staff available to support family engagement
- Evaluation methods for family engagement

Teachers and classified staff

- Strategies for linking family engagement to student learning objectives
- Professional learning opportunities to increase their skills in partnering with families
- Strategies to foster two-way communication with families

Advisory Committees

- Resources available for family engagement
- District and school family engagement policy development and evaluation
- How they can increase their knowledge and skills related to decision-making

Key questions to consider as the District family engagement team prepares to develop a communication plan:

- Who are the audiences we wish to reach or connect with?
- What are their interests/roles related to family engagement?
- What are we asking them to think about, say, or do?
- What is the key information for each audience?
- What are some important talking points, or common messages, to share with all audiences?
- What feedback or input are we seeking from each audience?
- What are the best ways to communicate with each audience?
- Who will be responsible for communicating with each audience?

Equity questions related to communications:

- Have we considered how diverse staff and families access information in the district?
- Do we need to make our communication materials available in different languages?
- Have we used easily understandable terminology and avoided education jargon?
- Have we explained all acronyms?
- Have we indicated where staff and families can get more information and who to talk to if they have questions or want to get more involved?

Tool 9 can help the team address these questions and make a communication plan for family engagement. The plan identifies the audiences in the district to communicate with, the key information needed for each audience, what feedback to solicit, what method to use to communicate, the timeline, and the person responsible for communication. An example of a communication plan for a fictitious district is included in appendix C and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates.*

Phase 3: Reflect

After the "Do" phase, during which the action plan is implemented, it is time to reflect. Reflection is the evaluation stage of the continuous improvement process for family engagement. It needs to address both implementation, or effort, and results, or effect, meaning how well did we do what we said we would do, and what effect or impact did our efforts have on educators and families. Reflection is an essential phase because it can yield insight into which activities worked well and should be continued or expanded, what types of improvement may be needed for some activities, and which activities were not effective and should be discontinued. Some family engagement activities may be very effective with one group of families and less effective with another; having diverse team members reflect together will provide valuable feedback as to why this might be.
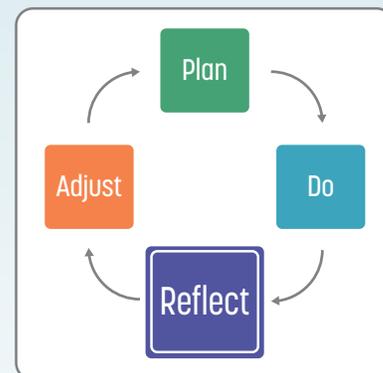
Reflection should be built in throughout the year in the form of periodic progress checks and also included at the end of the year as an annual evaluation. Data and insights from the team's reflection need to be shared with families and the broader school community, to get their feedback and to continue building trust between educators and families. Each of these aspects of reflection are described in detail below.

The team may also choose to reflect on the progress of student learning, or may be asked to provide evidence that family engagement is improving student learning outcomes. We suggest using caution in this regard because family engagement cannot generally be isolated as the single cause of improved student learning. Family engagement is one factor among many that can impact student learning; others include, for example, school climate, school leadership, classroom instruction, interventions, and academic support at school.

Progress checks: How are we doing?

Reflection on progress is often called *formative* assessment because it provides feedback that can be used immediately to adjust or improve activities during the school year. The team should use the progress indicators developed during the Plan phase to reflect on activities throughout the year.

Key questions for reflection on progress:

- Are the planned activities being implemented?
- Are they being implemented as envisioned?
- If the activities are not being implemented, why not? Are there problems with outreach, logistics, or other factors?
- How effective are the activities that have been implemented?

End-of-year evaluation: How did we do?

The end-of-year evaluation is an opportunity to reflect more fully on what was implemented, which objectives were accomplished, and what lessons were learned. This type of reflection is often called *summative* assessment. The team should review the objectives and progress indicators developed during the Plan phase as a basis for discussion.

Key questions for end-of-year evaluation:

- Did we do the activities we planned?

- How well did the activities strengthen trusting relationships and how well did they connect to student learning? (Use the matrix in figure 1, page 9, as you reflect on this question.)

- If the activities did not have the desired outcomes, what got in the way? Were there problems with outreach, logistics, or other factors?

- Have we increased the relevant knowledge and skills of our educators?

- Have we increased the relevant knowledge and skills of our families?

- How well did we work together as a family engagement team?

- What are some indications that family engagement activities may be contributing to improved student learning?

Equity questions for reflecting:

- Which families are participating in the activities we planned?

- How did feedback on activities vary between schools or between different communities?

- What are some indicators that family engagement may be contributing to improved student outcomes at different schools or in different communities?

To answer both the key questions and the equity questions, consider coordinating your data collection with other district data-collection activities, such as use of a climate survey (see links to climate surveys in Resources). Also, if you used a particular survey during your needs assessment or at the beginning of the year, we suggest that, for consistency, you use the same survey at the end of the year to find out what progress occurred.

Tool 10 is a two-part annual family engagement evaluation tool. Part A guides reflection on whether the activities were implemented as planned; part B guides reflection on how well the activities accomplished the intended outcomes. An example of tool 10 showing reflections of a fictitious district is available in appendix C, and the tool itself is available in the companion Word document, *Family Engagement Tools: Editable Templates*. The example shows how the evaluation might be completed based on the activities and objectives taken from the planning tool examples (tools 6 and 7, also in appendix C).

Sharing reflection data with families and the school community

The data your team gathers to answer the questions above, and any other questions the team might add, are important to share with district families and educators. One way to build trust is to show that feedback from families and educators is valued and is used to make improvements throughout the PDRA process. It is important to celebrate both progress and accomplishments, as well as to acknowledge when objectives have not been met, activities are not effective, or unforeseen obstacles arise. Sometimes families and educators get so focused on how to improve or what to do next that we forget to pause and celebrate. It is equally important to identify the lessons we can learn when family engagement work does not reach the results we hoped for.

Key questions to consider when thinking about sharing data with families follow:

- What information is relevant and useful to families?

- How can the information be presented in a clear way? (For example, limit each chart or graphic to one or two concepts or pieces of information)

- How can we provide opportunities for families and educators to discuss the data?

Individual families will naturally be most interested in data related to their own students. But we suggest that, in addition to sharing data about individual students with their own family, you share data from all student subgroups with all families to promote a sense of community and shared interests.

Sharing data with families entails two steps:

- **Describe the data.** In this first step, you reach agreement about what the data say, using a neutral statement. For example, "The data tell us that 75 percent of families reported that they increased their knowledge of whom to contact when their child is absent."

- **Interpret the data.** In this second step, you explore the meaning of the data. Different people may draw different conclusions from data, or see the data from a different perspective. It can be productive to engage in a discussion to share different interpretations. For example, one interpretation of the data described in the paragraph above is that "the majority of families will contact the school when their child is absent." However, knowing whom to contact is not the same as taking action to contact the school when a child is absent. Even when families know whom to contact, there may be other reasons for which they do not contact the school, such as their comfort level talking with educators or staff or the relative convenience of reaching the right staff person.

When sharing evaluation data with families and the school community, it is important to provide an opportunity for participants to reach agreement on a description of the data and, also, to discuss their interpretations of the data. Remember to decide together on successes to celebrate, as well as areas for improvement.

Phase 4: Adjust

The final phase in the continuous improvement process is to determine how to adjust the plan for the next period of time. Using the results of the reflection phase, the team needs to consider whether and how to make changes in the objectives, activities, and/or related tasks.

If the reflection stage yields information indicating that current activities are not working, the team may want to make all-out changes or may just fine-tune. How quickly to make the changes depends on the particulars of each activity or task. For example, if a school primarily used robo-calls to invite families to an event but feedback from those who participated indicated that personal outreach was the reason they had attended, and if there is another family event coming up right away, the school may want to switch to more personal outreach immediately. On the other hand, if data collected at the end of the calendar year indicate that holding parent forums in November was not nearly as effective as holding them in August, you may want to calendar events differently for the coming year.
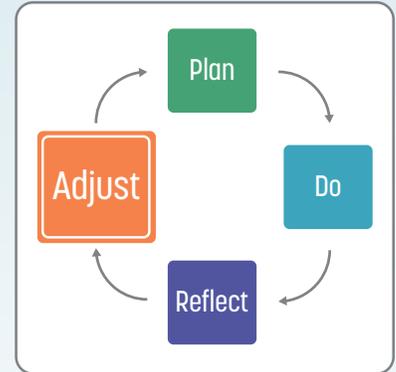
Key questions to consider about what you have learned from reflection and what you should do in response:

- Do we need to change the objectives to better align with the district's goals?
- Should we continue the same activities?
- If we continue, how can we make them more effective?
- What other activities should we substitute or add?

Whether or not your team makes changes in the family engagement plan overall or in certain activities or their related tasks, keep in mind that new families, new teachers, and new staff will join your district and school every year. To ensure that the team stays abreast of the interests, strengths, and challenges of existing and incoming families, and that the team continues to build the necessary capacity both of families and educators, revisit the questions and the evidence-gathering strategies discussed in the Getting Started section, reflect on the data you gather, and determine how to continue strengthening family engagement in your district or school.

Conclusion

Family engagement is an essential strategy for supporting the success of all students. When a district focuses on building trusting relationships and connecting family engagement to student learning, and when it builds the capacity of educators and families to work together, family engagement can lead to a school-family partnership that can positively impact student outcomes and close achievement gaps.

Every district has unique strengths and challenges, among educators as well as among families. A family engagement team that reflects the district's diverse stakeholders and that leads a process of continuous improvement will have the best chance of engaging all families in the district and ensuring that family engagement activities align with district goals for student learning. Using an equity lens in the continuous improvement process will help to engage families of underrepresented and underserved students.

We hope this toolkit will contribute to the field of family engagement and will inspire others to share their practices, insights, and lessons learned. With families and educators working and learning together, we can make a difference for all students.

This toolkit is the product of a collaboration among six developers from six different education entities, each entity having extensive responsibility for, and experience with, supporting districts and schools on a range of education improvement efforts: The California Comprehensive Center at WestEd, the California Department of Education's Title I Policy and Program Guidance Office, and four California County Offices of Education: Alameda, Nevada, Riverside, and Sacramento.

Recent events and conversations with educators in local education agencies (LEAs) across California prompted us to develop this toolkit to strengthen family engagement work. The events that stand out are the 2013 passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in California, the 2013 publication of *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Dual Capacity-Building Framework), and the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The passage of the LCFF, which replaced the previous kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) finance system in California, created new LEA requirements related to family engagement. The LCFF identifies eight education priority areas for California LEAs, with two additional priorities for county offices of education. One of the state priority areas is parental involvement. Each California LEA is required to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that addresses all of the state priority areas. For the parental involvement area, the plan must specifically address: 1) seeking parent input in making decisions for the school district and each individual school site, and 2) promoting parental participation in programs for economically disadvantaged pupils, English learners, foster youth, and individuals with exceptional needs (California Department of Education, 2017b).

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework identified as a major factor in the "relatively poor execution of family engagement initiatives and programs over the years: the limited capacity of the various stakeholders to partner with each other and to share the responsibility for improving student achievement and school performance" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p.7). While the framework resonated with many, in subsequent years practitioners, districts, and schools have continued to struggle over how to best implement its concepts.

At the federal level, the passage of ESSA in 2015 continued to emphasize the importance of family engagement as a key element of efforts to improve student outcomes. ESSA strengthens the requirements originally established by the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESSA states that each school and LEA receiving Title I funds "shall educate teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, principals, and other school leaders, and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of parents, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school" (ESSA, Section 1116[e][3]).

All of the toolkit developers have been involved in providing support to LEAs over many years, some primarily through technical assistance for planning and implementing family engagement and others primarily through gathering input and writing school improvement plans and the recent LCAPs. We frequently hear the questions posed at the beginning of this toolkit from educators in diverse districts, rural and urban, small and large.

In creating this resource, the developers have built on past work in the family engagement field, including, to name a few:

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act legislation, first passed as part of the Lyndon Johnson-era War on Poverty of the 1960s and most recently reauthorized as ESSA

- Joyce Epstein's research on how leadership at the district and school levels affects the quality of a school's programs on family and community involvement; and the Action Team for Partnership model developed by Epstein at Johns Hopkins University

- Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp's work on the reader-friendly book *Beyond the Bake Sale,* and their family engagement research compilation *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*

- The California Department of Education's *Family Engagement Framework*

- *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* from SEDL and the U.S. Department of Education

Key Themes from the Literature

This toolkit reflects key themes the developers identified through a review of relevant research and recent family engagement literature:

Family engagement must be embedded in goals for student learning

- In 2010, researchers and practitioners in the National Policy Forum for Family, School, and Community Engagement advocated for reframing family engagement (Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010). They described the then-current state of family engagement as "random acts of family involvement" and as "siloed into disparate programs that are disconnected from instructional practice and school turnaround strategies" (p. 3). Instead, they argued, "it is time to transform family engagement strategies so that they are intentionally aligned with student learning and achievement. As a reform strategy, family engagement should be systemic, integrated, and sustained. Systemic family engagement is purposefully designed as a core component of education goals, such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround. Integrated family engagement is embedded into structures and processes designed to meet these goals, including training and professional development, teaching and learning, community collaboration, and the use of data for continuous improvement and accountability."

A partnership orientation to family engagement has the most promise for improved student outcomes

- Research in 2005 found that "initiatives that take on a partnership orientation — in which student achievement and school improvement are seen as a shared responsibility, relationships of trust and respect are established between home and school, and families and school staff see each other as equal partners — create the conditions for family engagement to flourish (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005)" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p.5).

- A more recent meta-analysis of parent involvement programs found that "partnership programs designed to help parents and teachers collaborate with one another as equal partners in improving children's academic and/or behavior outcomes" were one of the four types of parental involvement that had statistically significant, positive effects on student outcomes (Jeynes, 2013, p. 2).

- The research on successful schools in Chicago (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010) found that schools with stronger ties between educators, families, and the community had higher levels of student achievement than schools with weaker ties. The stronger ties were characterized by teachers understanding local issues and spending time in the community, inviting parents to observe in class, trying to understand parents' concerns, and embracing parents as partners.

Family engagement programs need to focus on building the capacity of both educators and families to work together as partners

- The Dual Capacity-Building Framework identifies the major factor in poor execution of family engagement initiatives and programs to date as "the limited capacity of

the various stakeholders to partner with each other and to share the responsibility for improving student achievement and school performance" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 7). The framework goes on to specify four types of capacity needed both by school staff and by families:

> » Capabilities, referring to knowledge and skills;
>
> » Connections, referring to networks and social capital;[3]
>
> » Confidence, referring to levels of self-efficacy; and
>
> » Cognition, referring to assumptions, beliefs, and worldview.

- To create welcoming environments, be culturally responsive, and build trusting relationships with families, educators need to build their capacity in the areas described above. Similarly, families need to increase their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy related to navigating the education system, provide support at home for learning, and work with educators as partners to support student learning.

Educators need to be culturally responsive to diverse families and use an assets-based approach to understanding families

- Research indicates that families at all socioeconomic levels have high aspirations for their children. Families from all backgrounds report a desire to be involved, want their children to do well in school, and hope that their children will achieve a better life than their parents have (Gandara, 2011; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009).

- The concept of an assets- or strengths-based approach to families is based in the understanding that educators need to explicitly recognize and learn about the support and resources that families provide for their children. "Evidence is accumulating that programs and policies that address and support school outreach can strengthen involvement, particularly when they are culturally appropriate and responsive, employ an assets-based approach, and honor the strengths and contributions of diverse families" (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). For example, if educators respect the family's role as the child's first teacher, then families are more likely to feel respected and be willing to partner with educators. This contrasts with deficit thinking, which can be implicitly or explicitly embedded in policies and practices, for example when educators blame a student's background or the values of his or her family for the student's lack of success in school (Hafner, Miller, Crow, & Hardman, 2015).

- Additional research suggests that "effective urban schools need teachers that not only know their students well, but also have an empathetic understanding of their parents' situations and have the interpersonal skills needed to engage these adults effectively" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p.139).

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3   Social capital refers to the social networks and relationships among adults, including between educators, between family members, and between educators and families.

Educators need to build trusting relationships with families, especially those who have historically not been engaged with their children's school

- "Effective family, school, and community engagement in low-performing schools often must begin with intensive efforts to rebuild trust and promises of accountability given longstanding dynamics of miscommunication and distrust between these schools and their surrounding communities. [Furthermore], there must be a continuous effort at relationship building so that trust binds families, schools and communities to change the trajectory of underserved students" (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010, p.13 & 16).

- Research on levels of relational trust in schools found that schools with strong positive trust levels were more likely to show improvements in student reading and mathematics achievement compared to schools with weak trust levels (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

- According to Covey's work on the importance of trust in successful organizations, some key behaviors that help to build trust between individuals include listening in order to find out what matters most to other people and demonstrating respect. In addition, Covey explains that building trust with one person is noticed by others and, thus, increases trust more broadly (Covey, 2006). This concept can be applied to educators and families; when educators build trust with one family, their actions are noticed by other families, and trust broadens in the community.

Creating welcoming school environments is a necessary component of family engagement efforts

- Parents have reported that feeling welcome and respected by school staff is the top reason they become connected with a school and stay involved (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

- A welcoming and respectful culture is conveyed by the physical environment, such as colorful signs posted in the languages spoken by families; attitudes of staff, conveyed through warm greetings, ready assistance, friendly phone calls; readily accessible translations or interpretation at meetings; and other such signals (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

Families can most influence student success by providing support at home for learning and engaging in two-way communication with school

- In his meta-analysis of parent involvement programs, Jeynes identified four types of parental involvement that had statistically significant, positive effects on student outcomes: shared reading programs that encouraged parents to read with their children; checking homework programs that encouraged parents to make daily checks on whether their children had completed their homework; partnership programs designed to help parents and teachers collaborate with one another as equal partners in improving children's academic and/or behavior outcomes; and communication between parent and teacher programs that fostered increased communication between parents and teachers. Jeynes also found that when schools provided guidance to families on how to engage in the parent involvement activities described above, the impact was greater than when families engaged in the activities without guidance (Jeynes, 2013).

- The literature review in the *California Family Engagement Framework* also identifies learning at home and school-home communication as the areas most highly associated with student achievement (California Department of Education, 2014). Examples of learning at home include providing space at home for educational activities, talking about school, interactive homework, and reading at home.

- Research indicates that providing support at home for learning also improves the likelihood that children will go to college and successfully complete postsecondary education. Parents communicating their education aspirations for their children directly to them, providing encouragement, and planning for postsecondary education are all ways that families can positively affect student outcomes, especially for low-income students (Baldwin, Beckwith, & McQueeney, 2010).

Review of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) in California

To get a sense of the degree to which school districts in California have been drawing from the research for their own family engagement efforts, the developers reviewed 20 LCAPs from across the state, including plans from rural and urban districts, and small and large districts and counties. This review was intended as a way to look for trends across districts and provide insight about district needs.

We looked for answers to the following questions as we reviewed the LCAPs:

1. Are parent involvement actions and services described in relation to district goals for student outcomes?

2. Do the parent involvement actions and services described include capacity-building for both families and educators?

3. How are districts measuring parent involvement outcomes?

We found that:

- Actions and services related to family engagement were described under the parent involvement goal but were not included in goals for improving student learning outcomes.

- Capacity-building actions and services were focused mainly on building the capacity of parents/families to engage in their children's education, with much less focus on building the capacity of educators to do work in partnership with parents/families.

- No districts included methods for measuring educators' growth in knowledge and skills or for measuring their actions to engage families.

The last two of these three themes were also identified in a 2016 study (London) by the Public Policy Institute of California of 15 district LCAPs in California that were "chosen intentionally to represent high-need districts with a known focus on family engagement" (p. 3). The study found that "capacity-building for school or district staff is not a key strategy for family engagement in any district LCAP reviewed … The most common two metrics [found] are counts of family participation at events and response rates to family surveys" (p. 4).

In prior work, the developers of this toolkit, collectively, have reviewed hundreds of LCAPs for other purposes. Drawing on this earlier review, on their more recent review of the 20 LCAPs explicitly for this guide development, and on the recent study of 15 districts, cited above, the developers concluded that family engagement efforts of many districts could be strengthened to better align with the research themes outlined above.

This is a list of resources the toolkit developers have found helpful in planning and implementing effective family engagement. Inclusion on this list does not imply an endorsement of any organization or program. Almost all of these resources are available online at no cost, and some are available in multiple languages. The resources are organized into six categories, following the general topics in the toolkit, and are organized alphabetically within each category.

1. Frameworks and Guidance

2. Surveys

3. Assessment

4. Understanding Families

5. Two-way Communication

6. Analyzing and Sharing Data

Frameworks and Guidance

Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships

Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies. 2007. New York, NY: The New Press.

This foundational book provides guidance to schools and districts for building partnerships with families. It includes surveys, checklists, and other tools.

Bringing Attendance Home Toolkit

Attendance Works. 2014. Available at http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-toolkit/

This toolkit includes research on engaging families with attendance issues, materials to share with families, and interactive exercises to facilitate conversations about attendance.

Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts

California Department of Education. 2014. Available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/famengageframeenglish.pdf#search=family%20engagement%20framework&view=FitH&pagemode=none

This framework includes an overview of state and federal requirements for family engagement, implementation rubrics, and a review of literature. It is available in Spanish and English.

Handbook on Family and Community Engagement

Sam Redding, Marilyn Murphy, and Pam Sheley, Editors. 2011. Available at http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/downloads/FACEHandbook.pdf

This handbook consists of short articles covering research and promising practices in family engagement. It also includes fictional vignettes of challenging situations involving parents and educators.

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

Karen L. Mapp and Paul J. Kuttner. 2013. Available at http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf

This framework provides a compass for the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs. It includes three case studies of dual capacity-building.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, 3rd Edition

Joyce L. Epstein, Mavis G. Sanders, Steven Sheldon, Beth S. Simon, Karen Clark Salinas, Natalie R. Jansorn ... Kenyatta J. Williams. 2009. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

This is a handbook of tools and activities based on the framework of six types of parent involvement.

Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement

Helen Westmoreland, Heidi M. Rosenberg, M. Elena Lopez, & Heather Weiss. 2009. Available at http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement

This Issue Brief from the Harvard Family Research Project describes core district-level components necessary for systemic family engagement, policy recommendations, and examples of promising practices and lessons learned in six school districts.

Surveys

A New Tool for Understanding Family-School Relationships: The Harvard Graduate School of Education PreK-12 Parent Survey

Beth Schueler. 2013. Available http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-new-tool-for-understanding-family-school-relationships-the-harvard-graduate-school-of-education-prek-12-parent-survey

This survey, from the Harvard Family Research Project, includes seven sets of questions for parents to assess family-school relationships, and can be administered online. It is available in Spanish and English.

The California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CAL-SCHLS) System

WestEd. 2017. Available at http://cal-schls.wested.org/

This resource comprises three interrelated surveys, for parents, staff and students, developed for and supported by the California Department of Education.

U.S. Department of Education School Climate Surveys

AIR. 2017. Available at https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls

This resource includes a suite of school climate surveys for middle and high school students, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, and parents/guardians.

User's Guide for Road Map Family Engagement Survey: Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration

University of Washington. 2015. Available at https://education.uw.edu/unassigned/2015-users-guide-road-map-family-engagement-survey-data-inquiry-equitable-collaboration

This user's guide contains a family engagement survey designed from an equity perspective. The survey and user's guide is the result of a two-year process of design and piloting in the Renton school district in South Seattle/South King County in Washington. The guide is available in multiple languages.

Program Evaluation

An Educator's Guide to Questionnaire Development

Jason Harlacher. 2016. Available at https://www.relcentral.org/news-and-events/an-educators-guide-to-questionnaire-development/

This guide is designed for principals, superintendents, and other state, district, and school personnel who need to collect information on attitudes, perceptions, or facts to inform their decisions. The guide takes users through a five-step process for developing a questionnaire.

Assessment Design Toolkit

The Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation. N.D. Available at http://www.csai-online.org/node/1936

An online resource produced by the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation in collaboration with the Reform Support Network, this toolkit includes videos and supplementary materials for designing and writing assessments.

PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide: The Framework for your School District's Local Control and Accountability Plan (2016)

2016. Available at http://capta.org/resource/family-school-partnerships/

This resource includes rubrics for the six PTA national standards for family-school partnerships. Available in English and Spanish.

Understanding Families

Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit

Janice C. Burns, Dagmar Pudrzynska Paul, and Sylvia R. Paz. 2012. Available at http://v5.healthycity.org/en/participatory-asset-mapping

This toolkit describes concepts related to and methods for identifying assets in a neighborhood. It includes guides to planning and facilitation of community meetings to collect knowledge and experiences about local assets.

Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement: Survivors to Leaders

Young-Chan Han and Jennifer Love. 2015. Available at http://www.kappanonline.org/stages-of-immigrant-parent-involvement-survivors-to-leaders/

The authors of this article emphasize that not all immigrant families have the same needs and interests, and they describe how educators can be culturally responsive in designing activities.

The Counter Narrative: Reframing Success of High Achieving Black and Latino Males in Los Angeles County (2017)

Tyrone C. Howard, La Mont Terry, Oscar Navarro, and Adrian H. Huerta. 2017. Available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B6BCVAZoBjwvblNOWVllVWdNNmM

This report, from the UCLA Black Male Institute, includes results of a study of successful Black and Latino young men in Los Angeles, California, using an anti-deficit achievement framework.

Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education

Maria Elena Garcia, Kay Frunzi, Ceri B. Dean, Nieves Flores, and Kirsten B. Miller. 2016. Available at https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4509

This four-part toolkit brings together research, promising practices, tools, and other resources to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members.

Two-way Communication

Creating a Welcoming Environment

N.D. Available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/keytipsadminbrochure.pdf

This brochure for school administrators describes four key tips for creating a welcoming environment.

Partnership 101: The Advocacy Process Workshop and associated Teacher Handbook

Federal Way Public Schools (WA). N.D. Available at https://www.fwps.org/cms/lib010/WA01919399/Centricity/Domain/247/Partnership_101_Handbook.pdf and https://www.fwps.org/Page/2282, respectively

These two handbooks are examples of dual capacity-building resources designed with parent input for use in workshops with parents and teachers. The parent handbook is available in English, Spanish, Korean and Russian.

Quality Indicators for Translation and Interpretation in Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve Educational Settings: Guidelines and Resources for Educators

California Department of Education. 2006. Available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/qualityindicators.pdf

This booklet explains the difference between translation and interpretation, and it includes guidelines for recruitment and training, as well as an English-Spanish glossary of education terms.

U.S. Department of Education English Learner Toolkit

2016. Available at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap10.pdf

Chapter 10 of this toolkit, Tools and Resources for Ensuring Meaningful Communication with Limited English Proficient Parents, describes the requirements for districts to communicate with families of English learners, as updated in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The chapter also includes strategies for school leaders to integrate English learner families into school culture, along with interpretation and translation resources for districts.

Analyzing and Sharing Data

Dabbling in the Data: A Hands-on Guide to Participatory Data Analysis

Public Profit. N.D. Available at http://www.publicprofit.net/Dabbling-In-The-Data

This resource includes guidelines for 15 fun activities to help groups analyze and make meaning of data.

Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively

Harvard Family Research Project. 2013. Available at http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/tips-for-administrators-teachers-and-families-how-to-share-data-effectively

This resource provides guidance to educators on sharing data with families about their student's achievement, strengths and challenges, and learning styles. It also includes tips for families about talking with teachers about their child's progress. It is available in Spanish and English.

Examples of Tools
from a Fictitious District

Tool 1:   Establish a District Family Engagement Team

Purpose: Brainstorm potential candidates for the district family engagement team that will represent the diversity of the communities within the district

Instructions

Lead a discussion about the need for a family engagement team, engaging members of existing district advisory committees and other family engagement staff.

Brainstorm potential members for that team. (Note that having some team members who are already on other district committees can facilitate cross-communication.)

Use the table below to list prospective team members who are representative of each role.

Examine your initial list again in light of the following equity questions:

- Have we identified prospective parent leaders from all of our communities?
- Does the list of prospective team members reflect the diversity of our district?

Designate a leader or leaders to personally invite potential members to an informational meeting where the district family engagement coordinator explains the role and responsibilities of the family engagement team.

Role	Prospective Team Members
District's state and federal program staff	Ms. Montero — Students with Disabilities Mr. Young — Homeless Youth Ms. DeLeon — English Learners
Site administrator	Ms. James — middle school principal Mr. Owens — elementary principal, district mentor of new principals Ms. Taylor — elementary principal who promotes family engagement
Teacher and/or counselor(s)	Ms. Jones — elementary teacher doing home visits Mr. Levy — high school counselor Ms. Ortega — middle school teacher and union representative
Parent leader	Mrs. Garcia — ELAC member Mr. Williams — SSC member Mrs. Chang — recent graduate of Parent University
Community partner	Destiny Dance — after-school program provider Mr. Taylor — Baptist minister Ms. Garcia — business owner
Support staff	Mr. Young — custodian Ms. Costello — family liaison Ms. Garcia — nurse

Tool 2: Create a Vision Statement for Family Engagement

Purpose: Create a vision statement for family engagement in your district

Instructions

Give each member of the family engagement team a copy of the table on the following page. Ask each member to individually reflect on the questions in the tool and jot down ideas in the table.

Ask each member to discuss his or her ideas with a partner and to prepare to discuss them with the group.

Conduct a group discussion to gather team members' ideas about what outstanding family engagement would look like for each stakeholder group. Chart ideas for each of the boxes. (Save your notes from this discussion to use in conducting a needs assessment.)

Through further discussion, build consensus on the key elements of your district's family engagement vision statement.

Delegate a small group to draft the vision statement based on that consensus and bring it back to the team to be finalized.

When the team meets to finalize the vision statement, consider the following equity questions:

- Will this vision statement resonate with families of all student groups?
- Does this vision statement include a role for all stakeholders?
- Will this vision statement serve as an inspiration for all stakeholders?

Consider sharing the vision statement with the Board of Trustees (or school board members), to seek its approval and ask that the vision statement be included in the district's family engagement policy.

When our district has outstanding family engagement, what will it look like?

For each group listed in the chart below, consider these questions:

What will _____(name of group)_____ know or be able to do?

How will _____ feel?

What will _____ be doing?

FAMILIES	TEACHERS
• Will feel confident talking with teachers and administrators	• Will reach out to every family
• Will advocate for all students	• Will be comfortable working with families as partners
• Will be co-leading activities with educators to build capacity of teachers and families	• Will appreciate assets in every community

ADMINISTRATORS	STUDENTS
• Will make all families feel welcome	• Will know their families are welcome at school
• Will support teachers to spend time engaging families	• Will feel their heritage and their families are respected at school
• Will ensure families are partners in supporting student achievement	• Will encourage their family members to engage with teachers and administrators

STAFF	COMMUNITY GROUPS
• Will know they are valued for their role in engaging families	• Will feel they are part of the school community
• Will take initiative to welcome families	• Will partner with teachers and administrators to support student learning goals

Tool 3: Identify Current Levels of Trust Between Educators and Families

Purpose: Gather evidence of, and reflect on, the degree of trust between educators and families in the district and schools

Instructions

Ask the family engagement team to reflect on the two questions in the left-hand column of the table below and to identify existing evidence that helps to answer each question.

If your team has very limited evidence about the current situation, discuss evidence you might gather that will help to answer each question. Reach agreement on what additional evidence to gather and on next steps for gathering it. Be as specific as possible about next steps (i.e., who will do what, by when). As you review the evidence you have, use the right-hand column to note any needs you may want to address when you start the Plan phase of the continuous improvement process.

Questions to Consider	Evidence We Have	Additional Evidence to Gather	Next Steps for Gathering the Evidence	Identified Needs *(to be completed after reviewing evidence)*
How welcome do our families feel at our school/district?	Climate survey data indicate that overall, 65% of families feel welcome at school. Disaggregated data indicate differences between subgroups (e.g., Latino and White families feel more welcome than African American families).	Reasons that some families feel more welcome than others.	Family liaison will conduct focus groups with diverse groups of families to learn about reasons some families feel more welcome than others.	Increase efforts to ensure all families, in particular African American families, feel welcome at school.
Are there differences between different groups of families, by grade levels or schools?	A walk-through conducted by the family engagement team identified a lack of diversity in the photos and posters on the bulletin boards.	Teacher experiences of their efforts to build trusting relationships with families.	Principal or school leadership team will ask teachers at faculty meetings about their experiences of building relationships with families.	Action for upcoming school year: Improve diversity of families in photos and posters, on web pages, bulletin boards, and flyers.

Tool 4: Identify Current Levels of Connections to Student Learning in Family Engagement Efforts

Purpose: Gather evidence of, and reflect on, connections of district and school family engagement activities to student learning

Instructions

Ask the family engagement team to reflect on the three questions in the left-hand column in the table below and to identify existing evidence that helps to answer each question.

If your team has very limited evidence about the current situation, discuss evidence you might gather that will help to answer each question. Reach agreement on what additional evidence to gather, then agree on next steps for gathering it. Be as specific as you can about next steps (i.e., who will do what, by when). As you review the evidence you have, use the right-hand column to make notes of needs that you may want to address when you start the Plan phase of the continuous improvement process.

Questions to Consider	Evidence We Have	Additional Evidence to Gather	Next Steps for Gathering the Evidence	Identified Needs *(to be completed after reviewing evidence)*
Do district plans include family engagement actions as part of each student learning goal?	District plans (e.g., Local Educational Agency [LEA] Plan, Local Control and Accountability Plan [LCAP] in California, district master plan for English Learner programs and services)			Include family engagement actions as part of each student learning goal.
How confident do educators feel about partnering with families to support student learning?	Teacher survey responses	Successful teacher experiences in implementing activities linked to learning.	Principals/school leadership teams will discuss the topic with teachers at school staff meetings.	Include opportunities for educators to role play interactions with families during professional development.
Do families understand effective ways to support their child's learning?	Parent survey responses	Family input on activities linked to learning.	Family liaison will conduct focus groups with subgroups of families.	Provide opportunities for family members to practice learning support strategies with teachers.

Tool 5: Review Existing Family Engagement Activities

Purpose: Reflect on existing family engagement activities and how well they (1) contribute to building trusting relationships and (2) connect family engagement to student learning

Instructions

Make a list of current family engagement activities in the left-hand column of the tool. You can prepare this list ahead of time or you can ask the family engagement team to put the list together as a group activity.

Ask the team to reflect on each activity and determine the extent to which it (1) contributes to building trusting relationships and (2) connects to student learning, then document their response by writing "Not well," "Somewhat," or "Very well" in the appropriate column. Initial work can be done by team members as individuals or in pairs and then discussed as a group, or it can be done as a whole-group activity.

Once the team agrees on the rating for each activity, have members discuss how that activity could be improved. However, before the team makes any plans to change existing activities, be sure to review the continuous improvement process in the toolkit; the discussion about existing activities will contribute to the Plan phase.

Activity	Contributes to building trusting relationships	Connects to student learning	Improvement Suggestions
Family Math Nights	Somewhat	Very well	Revise agenda & design activity to facilitate dialogue between educators & families.
Parent University	Somewhat	Somewhat	Invite teachers and families to engage in dialogue about their lives, their work, and their hopes and dreams for students. Revise curriculum at parent university to better align with district learning goals.
Coffee with Principal	Very well	Somewhat	Select a district learning goal for discussion during each coffee session.

Tool 6: Plan to Strengthen Trusting Relationships

Purpose: Develop plan for strengthening trusting relationships

Instructions

Identify the district goal at the top of the form. (If you have more than one goal, use one form for each.)

Ask the team to discuss and define objectives (i.e., what knowledge and skills you want educators to have, and what you want them to be able to do).

Once your objectives are defined, discuss activities to accomplish your objectives. For each activity, identify progress indicators that will help you know if the activities are underway and how effective they are.

Depending on the size of your team, you may choose to have the members work as a whole group or in smaller groups, with those smaller groups sharing out their work for the whole group, which provides feedback.

Have the team discuss how to integrate these objectives, activities, and progress indicators into larger district plans, such as the Title I Local Educational Agency Plan, or plans required by the county, region, or state, such as the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) in California. Make notes of the next steps for coordination with other local planning processes.

District Goal: Families feel more welcome and more trusting of educators and staff

Objectives *(What do educators across the district need to know and be able to do?)*	Activities *(What activities will accomplish these objectives?)*	Progress Indicators *(How will we know if the activities are happening and how effective they are?)*
All staff learn about the assets and challenges among families in the school community through home visits.	Professional learning for teachers and staff across the district in home visit protocols.	Percent of staff trained in home visit protocols; Feedback from staff & teachers regarding increase in understanding assets and challenges of families through home visits.
Teachers and staff listen without judgment and establish two-way communication channels with family members.	Interactive professional learning for teachers, staff and parents in fostering two-way communication between families and schools.	Professional learning evaluations from staff and teachers indicating increase in skills and confidence in communicating with families.
Teachers across the district greet families and students before school or at beginning of class, in their native languages when possible.	Reminders during staff meetings of expectations for teachers to greet students.	Regular principal reports at staff meetings on observations of teachers greeting families.
Teachers make regular phone calls home with positive messages and ask for feedback from families.	Professional development for teachers, including role playing of teacher-parent phone calls.	Teacher reports at staff meetings on positive teacher calls made to families.

Tool 7: Plan to Strengthen Connections to Student Learning

Purpose: Develop plan for strengthening connections to student learning

Instructions

Identify the district goal at the top of the form. (If you have more than one goal, use one form for each.)

Ask the team to discuss and define objectives (i.e., what knowledge and skills you want educators and families to have, and what you want them to be able to do).

Once your objectives are defined, discuss activities for accomplishing them. For each activity, identify progress indicators that will help you know if the activities are underway and how effective they are.

Depending on the size of your team, you may choose to have the members work as a whole group or in smaller groups, with the smaller groups sharing out their work for the whole team, which provides feedback.

Have the team discuss how to integrate these objectives, activities, and progress indicators into larger district plans, such as the Title I Local Educational Agency Plan, or plans required by the county, region, or state, such as the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) in California. Make notes of the next steps, for coordination with other local planning processes.

(see following pages)

Example A — District Goal: All Students Attend School Regularly

Objectives *(What do educators and families across the district need to know and be able to do?)*	Activities *(What activities will accomplish these outcomes?)*	Progress Indicators *(How will we know if the activities are happening and how effective they are?)*
District and school staff understand the barriers to their families in getting children to school and they engage in meaningful dialogue with families about community resources and the importance of attendance.	Staff professional learning focused on attendance barriers of families Three parent forums to be held in key locations throughout the district to share attendance data, provide an opportunity for dialogue, identify families' barriers to getting their children to school; and share resources for families.	Short assessments at workshops, such as Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) charts, exit cards, before/after questionnaires, group discussion report-outs, to gauge increase in educator and family knowledge and understanding related to attendance barriers and resources.
Teachers use two-way text messaging throughout the school year to send and receive messages related to attendance.	Two professional learning sessions for teachers on using text messages with families.	Short teacher surveys twice during the school year on how many messages teachers sent and how many families responded to text messages related to attendance.
Family members understand the connection between student attendance and student learning, and they know how to reach the appropriate staff member at their child's school site to talk about attendance issues.	Family liaisons make personal phone calls and hold informal chats in Parent Centers to engage family members in discussions about attendance.	Reports by family liaisons on calls and discussions with families about attendance.
Family members notify the school when their child is absent and ask for help when they need assistance to get their child to school.	At school events, such as back to school night, staff work with families to practice using the text message system to contact the school about absences.	Reports from attendance clerk on how many families are notifying the school when their child is absent.

Example B — District Goal: English Learner Students Will Become Proficient in English in a Timely Manner

Objectives *(What do educators and families across the district need to know and be able to do?)*	Activities *(What activities will accomplish these outcomes?)*	Progress Indicators *(How will we know if the activities are happening and how effective they are?)*
District and school staff understand the district's program options for English Learners, the goals for English language acquisition, and the process of reclassification. Staff can engage in meaningful dialogue with families about how they can support their English learner student.	Professional learning sessions for staff focused on language development goals and resources for students in the district.	Quick assessments at workshops, such as Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) charts, exit cards, before/after questionnaires, group discussion report-outs, to gauge increase in staff knowledge and understanding in this area.
Teachers hold class meetings to discuss with families how progress on English language acquisition is monitored and how families can support their English learner student.	Two interactive professional learning sessions for teachers that include role playing on facilitating a class meeting about monitoring English language acquisition and supporting English learner students.	Teacher reports at staff meetings; feedback from families of English learner students indicating increased understanding from class meeting.
All family members understand the district's program options for English learner students, the goals for English language acquisition, and the process of reclassification.	In addition to class meetings, three parent forums to be held in key locations throughout the district to share information about program options for English learner students, the goals and data on English language acquisition in the district, and the process of reclassification. Parent leaders receive training to lead parent forums.	Short assessments at workshops such as KWL charts, exit cards, before/after questionnaires, group discussion report outs, to gauge increased understanding by families.
Family members and allies in the community spend time reading with children. Family members engage in literacy activities at home or in the community and participate in literacy activities at school.	Educators and/or community organizations hold family literacy nights in the community to promote reading with students.	Attendance at literacy events, disaggregated by student groups. Survey responses of families about literacy activities at home, disaggregated by student group.

Tool 8: Develop an Action Plan

Purpose: Identify tasks for implementing an activity, as well as who will be responsible for each task, what materials will be needed, and the timeline for completing the task

Instructions

For each activity in your plans for strengthening trusting relationships and strengthening connections to student learning, make an action plan using this tool. While it may seem like a lot of work to create one, having an action plan with identified tasks, designation of who is responsible for completing the task, and a timeline for completion can make the difference in whether tasks are completed and activities are successful. In some cases, the person responsible may be someone who coordinates others or assigns the tasks to several staff members; ultimately, the person responsible is the person who makes sure the task is completed.

(see following page)

Activity: Hold three parent forums in key locations throughout the district to share attendance data, provide an opportunity for dialogue, identify families' barriers to getting their children to school, and share resources for families.

Task	Who is responsible	Materials needed	Task Completion Timeline
Consult with parent leaders from diverse communities about supports for and barriers to increasing attendance and document responses	Family Engagement Coordinator	District hand-out about attendance Information-gathering tool	3-4 months before event
Convene a focus group of parents to discuss how to present attendance data to families	Family Engagement Coordinator	Recent attendance reports by grade level and by subgroup	2-3 months before event
Get parent input on best date, time & location of forums	Family Engagement Coordinator	Guiding questions Response-gathering tool	2-3 months before event
Prepare data tables in easily accessible format	Director of Assessment or Research	Recent attendance reports by grade level and by subgroup	4 weeks prior to the event
Recruit parent leaders to reach out to families about attending forum	Site liaisons	Contact information Communication log	4 weeks prior to the event
Coordinate with site liaisons to reach out to families	District Family Engagement Coordinator	Flyer or messages for event	4 weeks prior to event
Plan agenda to include opportunities for two-way dialogue about attendance between educators and families	Family Engagement Coordinator	Detailed facilitator's agenda	2 weeks prior to event
Prepare short surveys to determine understanding before and after forums and get feedback	Family Engagement Coordinator with Assessment/Research Department	Surveys	2 weeks prior to event
Recruit teams to set-up and clean-up for forums	Family Engagement Coordinator	List of set-up & clean-up tasks & event schedule	2 weeks prior to event

Tool 9: Develop a Communication Plan

Purpose: Develop a communication plan to increase awareness of family engagement and the role of all stakeholders, and to solicit feedback and input on family engagement plans and activities

Instructions

Facilitate a brainstorm among team members of all the possible audiences in the district and school communities who need to be considered in developing the family engagement communication plan. Keep in mind that each audience may need different information, may prefer different methods of communication, and will have input on different aspects of family engagement.

Depending on the size of your team, you may choose to have the whole group work together or work in smaller groups. If working in smaller groups, have them share out their work with the whole group, which provides feedback. For each audience, have the whole group or smaller groups address the following questions:

- What are their interests/roles related to family engagement?
- What are we asking them to think about, say, or do?
- What is the key information they need?
- What feedback or input are we seeking from them?
- What are the best ways to communicate with them?
- Who will be responsible for communicating with them?

The following communications-related equity questions should also be considered:

- Have we considered how diverse staff and families do or don't access information in the district?
- Do we need to make our communication materials available in different languages?
- Have we used easily understandable terminology and avoided education jargon?
- Have we explained all acronyms?
- Have we indicated where staff and families can get more information and who to talk to if they have questions or want to get more involved?

Audience	Key Information	Feedback to solicit	Best Communications Method	Timeline	Person Responsible
Board of Trustees	Research on family engagement showing importance Work of Family Engagement Team on 2 dimensions Highlights of family engagement in the district	Questions about research and the work of the Team	Board Meeting presentation at beginning and end of the year District website and social media	September board meeting May board meeting Monthly updates	Family Engagement Coordinator and Team members
Superintendent and Cabinet	Research on family engagement showing importance Objectives for family engagement on 2 dimensions Progress reports on family engagement activities	How family engagement activities can be integrated into district initiatives for student learning and strategic plan	Presentation at cabinet meeting E-mails	September presentation and monthly e-mails	Family Engagement Coordinator
Site Administrators	Objectives for family engagement on 2 dimensions Role of educators in the district plan for family engagement Role of family liaison at school sites	Professional development needs of site educators Challenges of engaging families Resources needed at sites	Presentation at principals' meetings	October February	Site administrator on Team

(continues on following page)

Audience	Key Information	Feedback to solicit	Best Communications Method	Timeline	Person Responsible
Teachers and classified staff	Objectives for family engagement on 2 dimensions Plans for professional development on engaging families Role of family liaison at school sites	Professional development needs of site educators Challenges of engaging families Resources needed at sites	Presentation at faculty meetings Newsletter	October — November February — March	Teacher and staff on Team
Advisory Committees	Objectives for family engagement on 2 dimensions Plans for professional development on engaging families Role of family liaison at school sites	Input on plans for family engagement Suggestions on building capacity of family members Professional development needs of site educators Resources needed	Presentation at Advisory Committee meetings E-mails to committee members	September January	Parent Leader on Team

Tool 10: Evaluate Family Engagement Annually

Purpose: Evaluate the implementation and impact of family engagement activities

Instructions for Part A: Did we do what we planned?

Review the action plans for strengthening trusting relationships and strengthening connections to student learning, and use this tool for evaluating accomplishment of each district goal. List the activities in the left-hand column.

Facilitate a discussion with the team about whether each activity was implemented in full, in part, or not at all. Make notes about any obstacles to implementation and/or any observations or insights about what led to only partial implementation. These notes will be useful when the team discusses how to share information and how to adjust activities for next year's plan.

District Goal: All Students Attend School Regularly
Part A: Did we do what we planned?

Activity	Yes	No	Partially	Notes
3 parent forums held			X	2 forums were held at different locations; attendance varied from 10 family members to over 50. Outreach was not effective at some sites. Add note re why.
2 professional development sessions held	X			2 sessions were held and a majority of teachers from each site participated; feedback was more positive at first session.

Instructions for Part B: How well did the activities accomplish the objectives?

Review the plans for strengthening trusting relationships and strengthening connections to student learning, and use Part B of this tool for each district goal. List the objectives for educators and for families in the left-hand column.

Facilitate a discussion with the team about available evidence that provides insight into how well each objective was accomplished. Once the team discusses all the evidence, decide how well each objective was accomplished (i.e., not well, somewhat, or very well). This discussion will be helpful when the team discusses how to share information and how to adjust objective and activities for next year's plan.

Part B: How well did the activities accomplish the objectives?

Objective	Evidence	Not well	Somewhat	Very well
District and school staff understand the barriers of their families in getting to school.	Surveys of teachers at the end of the year indicated 70% of teachers have an understanding compared to 30% of teachers surveyed at the beginning of the year.			X
Teachers regularly engage in two-way communication with family members.	At 10 out of 15 sites in the district, more than 50% of teachers report sending text messages to over 50% of their families.		X	
Family members know how to reach the appropriate staff member at school sites for attendance issues.	Surveys of families indicate 75% of family members know how to reach the appropriate staff member, compared to 30% of families at the beginning of the year.			X
Family members notify the school when their child is absent.	Attendance clerks report an increase in the number of calls from families when a child is absent.		X	

Methods of Collecting Information

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Surveys (Mail)	• Can survey many people • Not time-consuming • Relatively inexpensive • Everyone gets the same instrument • Objective interpretation	• Difficult to get much detail • Sometimes difficult to get correct addresses • May be problems with interpreting questions • Sometimes a problem getting surveys completed and returned
Surveys (Group-Administered)	• Can survey many people • Not time-consuming • Relatively inexpensive • Everyone gets the same instrument • Objective interpretation	• May be problems with interpreting questions • Difficult to get much detail
Surveys (Telephone)	• Able to ask for more detail when needed • Everyone gets the same instrument	• Sometimes difficult reaching people • Lack of anonymity
Interviews	• Researcher can know how people are interpreting questions • Able to ask for more detail when needed • Provide detailed data	• Time-consuming • Because of time, can limit sample size • Subjective interpretation • Can be expensive • Can be difficult to analyze
Focus Groups	• Researcher can know how people are interpreting questions • Able to interview multiple people at one time, thus, more cost-effective • Responses from one person provide stimulus for other people	• Group setting may inhibit some individuals from providing information • Sometimes hard to coordinate multiple schedules • Responses from one person can influence other people's responses
Observations	• Low burden for people providing data	• Time-consuming • Some items are not observable • Can be expensive • Participant behavior may be affected by observer presence
Student Records	• Objective interpretation • Low burden for people providing data • Relatively inexpensive	• May not correspond to exactly what researcher wants • May be incomplete or require additional interpretation • May need special permission to use
Collection of Materials	• Objective interpretation • Low burden for people providing data • Relatively inexpensive	• May not correspond to exactly what researcher wants • May be incomplete or require additional interpretation

Source: Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (n.d.). *Different methods of collecting data.* Washington, DC: Author. (In public domain)

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