



State Support Network

Partnering for School Improvement

Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement

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About This Resource

This resource provides an overview of evidence-based strategies that schools and districts may use to promote equitable family engagement practices. Organized around five categories of equitable family engagement strategies, this resource includes summaries of the research on equitable family engagement as well as examples of school and district practices across the country, linking to publicly available information where possible. School and district leaders may use this resource to build staff knowledge around equitable family engagement and inform strategy selection as part of implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While this resource provides a broad overview of equitable family engagement, it is meant to be informational rather than definitive or comprehensive.

Defining Equitable Family Engagement

Equitable family engagement focuses on meaningful engagement activities and systems between schools and families that do not characterize or treat specific parent groups as deficient in their level of engagement or approach to education (Day, 2013). This includes specific practices or approaches that reflect the values of a general group of families, as well as systems that foster tailored supports, flexible engagement options, and coordination between families and schools. For many schools, equitable family engagement includes a special focus on minority, immigrant, or refugee families.

For parents, equitable family engagement can include:

- A relationship with a trusted staff person or teacher who is approachable, friendly, receptive to concerns, and a champion for the student and family.
- Perceptions that families are welcome and valued at the school.
- Receptivity, transparency, empathy, and flexibility from school staff regarding communication and collaborative efforts to support learning and success.

(Day, 2013; Ferguson, 2005; LaRocque, 2013)

For school teachers and leaders, equitable family engagement can include acknowledging and navigating cultural differences through communication and sensitivity, as well as overcoming other structural challenges or barriers (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006). This includes skills such as:

- Accepting and respecting different cultural differences around communication and values.
- Self-awareness regarding one's own culture and values.
- Understanding how various factors influence interpersonal dynamics and experiences.

(NEA, 2008)

Introduction

Family engagement is a regular practice at most schools and may include activities such as parent-teacher conferences, regular reports about student progress, parent volunteer activities, input on school decision making, or collaboration between teachers and families around meeting individual learning needs (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Family engagement is intended to foster communication with parents about student performance and collaboratively support learning; equitable family engagement describes conditions where all types of families are positively involved in their children’s education. This often means ensuring that family engagement is equitable, inclusive, accessible, and culturally competent (i.e., respecting and meeting the social, cultural, and linguistic norms and needs of families and students). Schools and districts that face challenges around effectively engaging specific types of families, especially those from different racial or cultural backgrounds, can work to address family engagement inequities by considering the needs of their communities and how to best engage family members meaningfully in their school activities.

A wide body of evidence emphasizes the importance of family engagement for student achievement and social development over time and makes a strong case that engagement can be a powerful strategy for sustainable long-term student success. Research shows a variety of links between effective family engagement and student success:

- Teacher-family communication is linked to better homework completion, attention during instructional tasks, and class participation rates, as well as improved teacher-student interactions and student motivation (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).
- Students whose families are involved in their school experiences are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- School-based family engagement activities (e.g., volunteer activities or Parent-Teacher Association involvement) have been shown to have a positive effect on student outcomes (Hill & Tyson, 2009).
- Students whose families help them make connections between their current school performance and their long-term goals (e.g., attending college, working in a specific profession) is correlated with higher achievement levels for these students in secondary school (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Schools often face challenges implementing responsive family engagement strategies and practices that consider the full range of culturally diverse populations in their communities; likewise, more immigrant parents report barriers to engagement (e.g., language barriers) than non-immigrant families (De Luigi & Martelli, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009). A wide variety of factors may contribute to barriers to engagement that also vary across different cultures and groups (e.g., race, religion, class); therefore, a school wishing to improve family engagement may consider conducting a needs assessment or consulting experts to better understand the challenges specific to that school community (see the State Support Network [Needs Assessment](#)

[Guidebook](#) for more information). However, several common challenges are documented in the research literature:

- Family members may not be able to attend school meetings or functions due to scheduling conflicts, time constraints (often involving childcare, commute time, or multiple jobs), and other challenges.
- Family members (especially recent immigrants) may have had different, few, or no experiences with formal education.
- Family members who are recent immigrants, regardless of age, may be experiencing stress regarding cultural dissonance or major life changes. Family members may distrust public institutions and choose to limit interactions with school personnel or to participate in their children’s education outside of the reach of the school system. Some immigrant and refugee families come from a culture where parents are not expected to be engaged with schools, but rather to entrust their children’s education to outside experts.
- Educators may have limited time or capacity to engage in thoughtful or detailed interactions with families.
- Educators may communicate with families about problems but fail to offer guidance or information to help parents support students, especially in middle and high school.
- Educators may lack the preparation or administrative support to effectively engage with diverse families.
- Educators may hold expectations for family engagement that do not realistically reflect the schedules or cultures of families.
- Educators may neglect to engage families based on perceptions that families do not wish to be involved, which can exacerbate communication challenges between families and school staff.

(Hill & Tyson, 2009; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Öztürk, 2013; Stephens & Pate 2015)

While there is an extensive body of research on general family engagement strategies, many schools and districts need information about how schools engage all families equitably. The following sections outline strategies and provide real-world examples across five major types of evidence-based strategies for promoting equitable family engagement¹:

- Making a commitment to equitable family engagement
- Making equitable family engagement “business as usual”
- Building relationships between staff and families
- Meaningfully involving and engaging families and trusted community advocates
- Engaging outside of the school building

¹ These categories are similar to those presented in the 2014 brief from the Reform Support Network, “[Strategies for Community Engagement](#).”

Making a Commitment to Equitable Family Engagement

By making a clear and transparent commitment to equitable family engagement in both public communications and leadership activities, school and district leaders can encourage school staff and families to build and strengthen communication and engagement systems. School and district leaders may consider the following strategies for making a commitment to equitable family engagement.

Plan strategically over time. Practicing equitable family engagement requires an intentional, long-term effort to change ingrained perceptions, beliefs, and regular practices of school staff. This is not an effort schools can undertake on their own; to be successful, school staff will need to work with families and the community to facilitate communication, trust, and changes in practice over time. These efforts are most effective when student progress and family engagement is perceived by both families and school staff as a “shared responsibility,” underscored by mutual respect (SEDL & U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Establishing a shared responsibility for family engagement requires school leaders to commit to learning from-and-with families about how to effectively engage with each other over time, rather than approaching engagement as a “top-down” initiative. This may require school leaders to codify equitable family engagement as a major component of their school success criteria, for example:

- Clearly articulating a vision for equitable family engagement
- Establishing family engagement standards and holding staff accountable for meeting these standards
- Supporting staff in developing new mindsets, skills, and practices related to equitable family engagement
- Examining and modifying policies, as appropriate, that affect family engagement
- Reallocating resources, as appropriate, for family engagement
- Monitoring progress and evaluating success in promoting equitable family engagement over time

(Nuri-Robbins et al., 2007)

School and District Examples in Practice

Federal Way Public Schools (Washington)

The district emphasizes family engagement as a core component of its vision for success, stating that “families are critical partners in each child’s learning” (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017). The district offers “Learning Partnership Guides” in eight different languages and for all grade levels, outlining key milestones and goals for students as well as major events throughout the school year (e.g., back-to-school night, report cards, state testing). These guides also include resources and instructions on how to communicate with school staff about needs, questions, or concerns (Federal Way Public Schools, 2018).

Spokane Public Schools (Washington)
The district ensures budget allocations for family engagement are sufficient and sustainable across diverse schools by embedding parent engagement expenditures in individual school budgets (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017).
South Bend Community School Corporation (Indiana)
<p>The district created a Cultural Proficiency Vision Statement, which is used to guide all family engagement efforts and show commitment to cultural proficiency. The district also places a major emphasis on cultural proficiency in its strategic plan, as three of the six strategic goals in the plan focus on engaging and supporting diverse students and families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide effective instructional programs for diverse learners. • Strengthen and enhance productive partnerships with parents and community stakeholders. • Integrate culturally responsive, multicultural, multilingual best practices. <p>In practice, district leaders have clearly outlined not only the vision and goals for cultural proficiency, but also what needs to change and the strategies schools will use to achieve these changes. These strategies, as presented by the district, strike a balance between being specific and actionable while also being customizable by schools. The key strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a diverse base of parent and community stakeholders who can advocate for both schools and students. • Ensure transparency between internal and external stakeholders through clearly defined roles and expectations, including indicators of success (Hanover Research, 2016).

Offer professional learning on cultural responsiveness for school staff. For equitable family engagement to be the norm, school staff need to be aware of key concepts such as implicit bias and identity; likewise, school staff need to effectively use cognitive and emotional processes related to cultural responsiveness such as social-emotional skills (Richards, Brown, & Ford, 2007). Through professional learning, school staff can develop key knowledge and skills related to equitable family engagement, including how to effectively:

- Model and advocate for valuing diversity.
- Self-assess and demonstrate awareness of one’s own identity and culture within the broader school and community context.
- Promote culturally competent teaching and family engagement practices, including distinguishing between behavioral challenges and cultural differences.
- Promote and teach students communication and conflict resolution skills related to cultural differences.
- Understand and utilize appropriate and effective family engagement strategies.

(Nuri-Robbins et al., 2007)

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
Arlington Public Schools (Virginia)
The district provides staff with professional development around valuing and effectively approaching diversity in the school community, focused on helping teachers become more self-aware, culturally competent, and skilled in building positive relationships and rapport to support equitable family engagement (Arlington Public Schools, 2018).

Gwinnett County Public Schools (Georgia)

The district offered professional learning and changed instructional processes to help teachers be more responsive to the learning needs of the growing number of Latino families in the community. Specifically, the district provided extensive professional learning in cultural competency and instruction for English learners (ELs), established common planning time with EL-trained teachers, and engaged local experts to help refine instruction and family engagement practices to be more successful with the diverse community (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2014).

Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland)

The district has an equity unit whose mission is to build staff capacity “to close the racial achievement gap and eliminate racial predictability in student achievement.” District staff have created a series of professional learning modules for educators focused on three key topics:

- How does awareness, knowledge, and understanding of one’s own racial and cultural identity promote effective teaching, leading, and learning?
- How does awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the racial and cultural identity of students and staff promote effective teaching, leading, and learning?
- How can adults establish learning environments that are conscious of race and culture to ensure implementation of culturally responsive practices, policies, and procedures?

These learning modules are designed to help staff become more culturally competent in their practices, including how they communicate and engage with families (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2018).

Making Equitable Family Engagement “Business as Usual”

Ensuring that practices related to promoting or maintaining equitable family engagement become standard practice among school staff can require intentional planning. School and district leaders may consider the following strategies for making equitable family engagement “business as usual.”

Pursue human resource strategies that will attract diverse educators and family engagement staff. It is important to have school and district staff that understand (and where possible, reflect) the school community to help inclusive family engagement become standard practice. Having diverse school staff that reflect the background or cultures of the broader school community can often accelerate improvements in communication, relationships, and interactions with families by allowing staff to learn from each other (Camino, 1992). It is important to note that while having a racially or culturally diverse staff of educators can sometimes facilitate better cross-cultural dialogue or build social trust with families, hiring a diverse staff of educators is not a sufficient strategy by itself for facilitating inclusive family engagement (Boser, 2014). Schools and districts can also hire staff at the school and district levels who are specifically responsible for guiding and managing family engagement. These dedicated staff can provide helpful support to educators and promote the use of more effective, consistent, and equitable strategies across classrooms and schools.

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
<p>Federal Way Public Schools (Washington)</p> <p>The district has family liaison staff at each of the district’s 23 elementary schools who focus specifically on immigrant and refugee family engagement. These staff track the number and type of contact points with families and gather feedback from parents, students, and school staff. Family liaison staff also include these data points in their own performance evaluations (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017).</p>
<p>Tukwila School District (Washington)</p> <p>The district has recruited members of the community who reflect its diversity to be district-level family engagement staff. These staff are responsible for helping families both engage with schools and access needed resources and services provided by other organizations. These staff also organize school and family meetings in each of the home languages spoken in the community using the World Café model.²</p>
<p>Washoe County School District (Nevada)</p> <p>The district has an Equity and Diversity Department, which has a special focus on connecting with families and building staff cultural proficiency. This department includes both general staff as well as staff focused on Native American students. These staff use an “Equity Lens” tool, which includes guiding questions for activities or decisions related to district policy and programs. These guiding questions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What racial or ethnic groups are affected or impacted? • What impact might the program have regarding existing disparities? Could they be ignored or worsened? • How have families and other stakeholders been involved? • How can negative impacts/barriers be mitigated? (Hanover Research, 2016)

Ensure communications are accessible to all families. Limited English proficiency is one of the greatest barriers to school engagement, and providing interpreters is both part of a school’s civil rights requirements³ and essential to fostering improved family engagement (Shillady, 2014). Likewise, written communications (including websites, newsletters, and direct family communications) must be provided in all relevant home languages to ensure families are directly informed. Using students as interpreters and translators may violate civil rights requirements and may create a negative power dynamic among students, parents, and school staff (e.g., when students are responsible for translating information about their own behavior or performance). While students may be able to navigate cultural differences between teachers and families, having students serve as the primary communicator with families can be perceived as a challenge to authority by family members, potentially exacerbating communication challenges (McDevitt & Butler, 2011).

² For more information, please see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>.

³ For more information on a district’s obligations to provide meaningful communication to parents who are limited English proficient, as well as other obligations with respect to English learners, please see <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
Washoe County School District (Nevada)
The district Equity and Diversity Department ensures all communications are shared in both English and Spanish (Hanover Research, 2016).
Ready WA (Washington)
Ready WA is a statewide coalition in Washington state that provides information, guidance, and tools to support students in becoming college and career ready. Ready WA focuses on families and school staff collaborating to create language-specific and culturally appropriate guides around standards and assessments. This effort helped families better understand this complex topic and build stronger relationships with school staff (Ready WA, 2018).
Spokane School District (Washington)
The district uses a platform called Thoughtstream, which includes a messaging system for families. Messages can be sent directly to family members in specific groups or to the entire district and may be delivered in multiple languages (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017).

Ensure instructional practices are culturally responsive. For instructional and engagement practices to be effective, they often need to be adapted or modified to “consider language, culture, and context in such a way that is compatible with [families’] cultural patterns, meaning, and values” (Moodie & Ramos, 2014; Domenech Rodriguez, Baumann, & Schwartz, 2011). These adaptations may be minor or substantial, depending on the scope of the practices and the specific cultural values within the school community. Adapting practices not only can ensure that they are effective for the students and families within the school community, but also can help to foster trust, respect, and communications between family members and school staff, and can lead to better outcomes of interventions (Gerdes, Kapke, Lawton, Grace, & Hurtado, 2015).

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
Detroit Public Schools (Michigan)
In partnership with researchers and other experts, the district adapted their parent engagement model to better reflect the values of the Latino community in Detroit. The first adaptations included the same core components of the original, translated into Spanish and refined based on specific values within the Latino community around problem solving and progress monitoring, including family cohesion (i.e., familismo) and respect (i.e., respeto). The second adaptation included two additional components based on the input of families: immigration experiences and racial discrimination experiences, and their connection to school experiences in the district. These adaptations reflect the importance of meaningful adaptation, going beyond language translation, to modify practices and interventions to reflect the values, ideas, and experiences of the target family group or population (Parra Condara et al., 2012).

Building Relationships Between Staff and Families

Building relationships between schools and families can help establish the trust and positive rapport needed to support effective and equitable engagement over time. School and district leaders may consider the following strategies for building relationships between staff and families.

Welcome families in consistently appropriate and culturally competent ways. So that all families feel welcome at all events and engagement opportunities, educators must build cultural competency at both systemic and individual levels. Staff training in parent engagement, as well as in topics of diversity, is essential to support these activities. All staff should be welcoming, accessible, and available to minimize barriers to family participation. In practice, this can include agreed-upon processes for interacting with parents in the school building.

School and District Examples in Practice

Washoe County School District (Nevada)

The district uses clear and direct signage, including welcome signs, in multiple languages within all school buildings to help families feel welcome and to reduce confusion. The district also has clear protocols for family member interactions, including universal check-in and visitor ID policies, front office staff who are fluent in family members' preferred languages, and friendly and professional phone conversation protocols. All schools offer spaces (e.g., bulletin boards, resource rooms) with key information on school policies and procedures for families, including computer access. The district also has a Council on Family Engagement, which hosts school walkthroughs in which volunteers (including family members) assess how "family friendly" the school environment is. Volunteers conduct these walkthroughs annually and gather evidence using a rubric, sharing feedback with schools to inform improvement efforts (Hanover Research, 2016).

Provide families with relevant information about school systems. Families often need basic information about how education systems work, such as how to seek services or enroll their children in advanced learning opportunities. Certain populations, especially immigrant families facing linguistic barriers and families of students with disabilities, may need more information about how the local education system works so that they can advocate effectively for their children. Districts can begin the school year with informational events and related communications that provide this background knowledge before expecting parents to access services or network with staff. Parent universities, workshops, and related programming throughout the year can further help families navigate the complexities of school partnerships, career and college planning, and disability or supplemental services (SEDL, 2013).

School and District Examples in Practice

Green Dot Public Schools (California)

The district's community engagement team offers a Parent Academy, which is designed to teach families specific strategies for supporting their children's education over time. The Parent Academy includes sessions focused on school and family communication, support for learning at home, and postsecondary readiness and transition (Green Dot Public Schools, 2014).

Communicate based on cultural norms and priorities. Families communicate and engage in a variety of different ways; for some schools, there may be significant differences between typical

communication practices and family preferences (e.g., families preferring texting rather than after-school calls or informal conversations rather than formal conferences). Using only a limited range of communication methods can hinder family engagement over time. Adapting communications to reflect both school and family cultural norms and priorities can make it easier for families to engage and help school staff build rapport and trust with families. In practice, the local norms to include or consider in communications may vary depending on the specific culture or community. For instance, many families in the black community engage extended family and friend networks, especially for childcare, so family engagement outreach protocols may have to be extended beyond parents or guardians, e.g., sharing information with aunts or uncles (Moodie & Ramos, 2014).

Meaningfully Involving and Engaging Families and Trusted Community Advocates

Trusted community advocates can help build connections between community members and school staff, as well as build knowledge around educational activities occurring outside of school. School and district leaders may consider the following strategies for meaningfully involving trusted community advocates to enhance family engagement.

Offer structures to listen to families. In addition to self-reflection and professional development, teachers, school leaders, and district staff may benefit from intentional structures that allow them to practice listening to families over time. In many schools, communication may be primarily initiated by the teacher; however, schools that establish regular listening sessions with families can help teachers improve their listening and relational skills with families and the community. Some of the most successful parent engagement strategies have involved community liaisons or trusted advocate programs that capitalize on the value of community members that speak the language and are of the same culture.

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
Chicago Public Schools (Illinois)
The district has representation from families, faith-based institutions, and community-based organizations on Community Action Councils, which develop strategic plans for achieving educational success.
South Bend Community School Corporation (Indiana)
The district has a parent advisory committee that includes both flexible scheduling, translators, and childcare to help accommodate the needs of families (Hanover Research, 2016).
Washoe County School District (Nevada)
The district has an advisory body called the Council on Family Engagement, which engages families in systemic reform to improve “biased curriculum standards and instructional practices.” The district and the council work together to survey stakeholders, manage grants, and inform ongoing program evaluations (Hanover Research, 2016).

Federal Way Public Schools (Washington)
In addition to family member representation on key committees and decision-making bodies across schools and at the district level, the district has established quarterly “feedback loops” with families through the Key Communicator group, which includes family members from all schools receiving funds under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and key community-based organization partners meetings (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017).
Tukwila School District (Washington)
The district uses the World Café model to share information with families and listen to their concerns and feedback. In this model, families can network with each other and hear other family perspectives. This approach also positions families as experts in the education system and emphasizes the value of their input (Tukwila School District, private communication 2018).
Green Dot Public Schools (California)
These schools include family representatives in School Advisory Councils, which meet approximately once a month; at the school level, many schools have a Parent Leadership Team composed of four to seven family members who advocate for positive change across the school and community. Team members receive training in leadership and community organization. In some schools, this includes 15 hours of training annually (Green Dot Public Schools, 2014).

Engage family members and community members in ongoing and recurring efforts. For families that have not yet built trust and communication with school staff, it can be challenging or intimidating to become more involved. Schools and districts can partner with family or community members to help bridge the divide, using trusted members of the community to help translate and share key messages and support effective communication. Schools and districts can also ask family or community members to serve as interpreters or facilitators during meetings or after-school events. Schools and districts can also create formal structures, such as a family-led advisory committee, to help school staff learn more about how to best create a shared understanding and system of support between the school and the community (Moodie & Ramos, 2014).

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
DCPS uses an Academic Parent–Teacher Teams model, which includes both individual family conferences as well as group conferences with family members of all students in the class. Group conferences take place three times a year for 30 minutes and focus on broad expectations and learning goals for all students. These group conferences allow family members to network, build relationships, and share information with each other; likewise, these group conferences promote better transparency and communication between school staff and families (DCPS, 2018; Flamboyan, 2018).
Logan Square Neighborhood Association (Illinois)
The association, which works with the Chicago Public Schools, offers a parent mentor program that engages family members in classrooms and the community. Community organizations and schools work together to identify and train family members to work in classrooms (different than the one in which their child is enrolled). Mentors provide general and instructional support, especially around bilingual literacy. These mentors also learn about how school systems work from the inside, sharing insights and information with other family members on how to effectively support their children and engage with schools. Each school in the neighborhood has approximately 10 mentors. Mentors receive a stipend for each hundred hours of time spent, allowing more flexible but regular engagement (Logan Square Neighborhood Association, 2018).

Engaging Outside of the School Building

To build trust and relationships with families, it can be helpful for school staff to engage with families in spaces or at events in which families feel comfortable. These may include family homes, community centers, churches, or cultural centers. School and district leaders may consider the following strategies for engaging outside of the school building.

Conduct home visits. Home visits are a common family engagement strategy for many schools and districts. Home visits can help school staff and families establish a common understanding and goals for students. Studies have found that conducting home visits can also show school staff's respect for the family and home environment, as well as help to break a potential "cycle of blame" for student learning challenges. It is important to note that this approach requires school staff to be trained in specific protocols and interpersonal communication techniques to ensure that home visits are meaningful and conducted in a respectful manner (NEA, 2012; Raymond, 2015). Likewise, home visits need to be structured in a way that is meaningful without being burdensome for school staff or families (e.g., scheduling visits during times that work with family schedules, providing support for school staff around the time and resources needed to conduct home visits).

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
DCPS conducts home visits to help school staff listen to the perspectives of, and establish positive rapport with, families. These visits are not assessments of families; rather, they focus on building school staff's understanding by asking families to share expectations and goals for their child, the child's learning strengths and challenges, and other key insights. School staff set goals for the number of home visits to be completed by various points in the school year (e.g., by the end of the first quarter), typically working to visit the homes of all students at least once over the school year. Over time, these home visits led to increased parent engagement in other events (such as conferences) and more positive perceptions of families by school staff (SEDL, 2013).
South Bend Community School Corporation (Indiana)
The district uses home visits as a strategy for addressing barriers related to language, emotions, or socioeconomic factors. These home visits have led to better communication, increased trust, and increased parent engagement in conferences and volunteer events (Hanover Research, 2016).

Engage with community organizations. Families may engage in learning activities that occur outside of school, such as community-based enrichment or tutoring programs. Some of these programs are evidence-based and beneficial to students, but school staff are often not aware of student participation in these activities unless notified by family members (Stephens & Pate, 2015). Schools may benefit from networking with local churches, community organizations, and neighborhood libraries, leveraging existing programs and events to share information with families and show support for learning activities that happen outside of school. Some family members may also feel more comfortable engaging in a peer group and in a neutral, trusted space (Finigan-Carr, Copeland-Linder, Haynie, & Cheng, 2014).

<i>School and District Examples in Practice</i>
Chicago Public Schools (Illinois)
The district has a Safe Haven program in which schools partner with faith-based organizations to provide safe spaces during high-violence periods in the community and engage students in workshops around conflict resolution and anger management. Faith-based organizations host safe spaces for students after school, during school breaks, and over the summer. Students and families can access these safe spaces at any time, enabling the program to serve over 12,000 students per year (Chicago Public Schools, 2018).
Federal Way Public Schools (Washington)
The district hosts specific meetings for community-based organizations (in addition to separate meetings with families) to learn about community perspectives on school support systems and ways to improve them (Washington State Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds, 2017).
High Line Public Schools (Washington)
The city of White Center has a long-term initiative called White Center Promise, in which family and community members work to align services and support across key community organizations and High Line Public Schools (Ishimaru & Lott, 2014; White Center Promise, 2016).
King County (Washington)
In the southern part of King County, there are many community organizations that engage families on their sites, in close collaboration with area school districts. These organizations include the Coalition for Refugees from Burma, Somali Youth and Family, and Para los Niños.
Seattle Public Schools (Washington)
The district works closely with the Somali Parents Education Board to host engagement events, share information, and support families in advocating for their children (Somali Parents Education Board, 2018).

Considerations for Implementing Equitable Family Engagement Strategies

Schools and districts can successfully make family engagement more equitable and effective by implementing strategies that reflect the needs and values of the community. These strategies may need to be modified as community needs change over time, especially considering that community demographics and culture can change rapidly. By engaging in regular needs assessment or reflection activities, schools and districts can capitalize on interim success and modify strategies as needed. Schools and districts can also work together formally (e.g., as part of a consortium) or informally (e.g., communicating with neighboring or similar districts in their region) to share lessons learned and effective strategies. Schools and districts may consider partnering to share personnel and fiscal resources dedicated to equitable family engagement. By strategically planning and refining family engagement approaches over time, schools and districts can ensure family engagement is equitable and effective for all families.

Resources

Culturally Competent Crisis Response (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/cultural-competence/culturally-competent-crisis-response>)

The Key Aspects of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (<http://www.nccrest.org/the-key-aspects-of-culturally-responsive-pedagogy.html>)

PACER Resources (<http://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/national-practice-guides.asp>)

Response to Intervention as a Culturally Responsive Framework (http://www.nccrest.org/professional/culturally_responsive_response_to_intervention.html)

Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports to Children and Their Families (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/cultural-competence/self-assessment-checklist>)

Washington State Family and Community Engagement Trust (<http://www.wafamilyengagement.org/about.htm>)

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