

Family Engagement Resource Guide to Building Family-Driven Partnerships With Schools

National Center for Healthy Safe Children

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Introduction

The *Family Engagement Resource Guide to Building Family-Driven Partnerships With Schools* can assist schools in developing meaningful partnerships with families that reflect the diversity of their schools and communities. Research has repeatedly shown that family engagement is essential in promoting healthy physical, cognitive, and social–emotional development of children and youth (youth.gov, n.d.a). Strong family engagement happens when families have a primary and meaningful role in all decision making in planning, designing, and evaluating programs, activities, and policies that affect all young people and their families in the school environment. For this reason, schools are encouraged to implement family-driven care principles to guide the work at the state and local levels.

Family-driven care means that families have a primary decision-making role in the care of their children as well as in the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their community, state, tribe, territory, and nation. This includes promoting family partnership in selecting and designing culturally and linguistically competent services, supports, and providers; setting goals; designing, implementing, and evaluating programs; monitoring outcomes; and partnering in funding decisions (Children’s Mental Health Network, 1970). When implemented, family-driven care principles serve to ensure that family members representative of the community’s diversity serve alongside school and community members as equal partners in decision making on comprehensive planning, program implementation, evaluation, expansion, and sustainability.

This resource guide was designed to assist school staff, families, community partners, and the field at large as they develop family-driven strategies to engage parents and families throughout school initiatives. The following section briefly summarizes the growing emphasis on family–school partnerships in the education system and provides exemplars of a similar expansion of family-driven partnerships in key child-serving systems, such as mental health, public health, child welfare, and juvenile justice. The resources included in this guide describe research and effective strategies for building meaningful family engagement and partnerships guided by family-driven care principles.

Moving From Parent Involvement to Family Engagement in Schools

In 2001, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, defined parent involvement in schools for the first time and required the development of state and local plans for parental involvement. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, laid out new expectations, guidance, and definitive terms that underscore an intentional approach to family engagement. The revised policy includes provisions requiring that local education agencies reach out to all families in their district. Furthermore, families that represent the

student population are required to have a meaningful role in district-level planning, decision making, and evaluation regarding the district’s family engagement policy and budget. A key difference in terminology is the use of “parent and family engagement” throughout the Act in place of parent involvement used prior to ESSA.

The benefits of family engagement in children’s education are supported by years of research that substantiates the importance of a family’s role in supporting academic achievement and social–emotional development from early childhood through adolescence (youth.gov, n.d.b). Over the years, the term *parent involvement* has been replaced by *family engagement* to promote more active outreach and engagement of families in decision making (not just passive involvement) and to recognize that extended family, including grandparents, often share responsibility in raising children. In this new approach, *engagement* focuses on the reciprocal process of building stronger connections and relationships between families and schools.

Numerous family engagement trainings, tools, and resources have been created for educators over the past decade. This resource guide features exemplary programs developed by schools to effectively engage families. However, connecting with and engaging diverse families has been challenging. Studies indicate that parents will become involved if schools implement a strengths-based approach (rather than deficit based) to understanding different family cultures, practices, and values (Weiss et al., 2009). The family-driven approach has been highly effective in guiding the development of meaningful family partnerships in the mental health, substance abuse, juvenile justice, and child welfare sectors. Strengths-based, culturally competent strategies to engage families from diverse communities are included in this resource guide.

Building Family–School Partnerships

Promoting family–school partnerships is essential for education reform, and several frameworks have been developed to illustrate and describe expanded roles for family members within the education system. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) propose that family roles in a reformed education system would include supporting learning, collaborating with schools, sharing responsibility for outcomes, and partnering in decision making and governance, as seen in the following table.

Expanded Roles for Families in Schools	
➤ Decision maker of various options for their child	➤ Supports and encourages learning
➤ Participant in learning opportunities to support their child	➤ Trainer and leader to other parents
➤ Advocate for proper programming and placement for their child	➤ Advocate for improvements in schools and districts
➤ Decision-making and leadership role in school governance	➤ Collaborator with school staff

Family–school partnerships require meaningful engagement of families in system reform efforts within schools, agencies, communities, and states to improve child, youth, and family outcomes. The partnership approach has been found to improve school climate and support educational success from early childhood to college. The implementation of family-driven principles has been transformative in system improvement initiatives, not only in schools but also in other child-serving systems. This guide includes resources that describe how education, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice agencies implemented a family-driven approach in practice, program, and policy, resulting in more effective and culturally responsive service delivery systems. Family-run community-based organizations can serve an important function in supporting family–school partnerships. They have experience in family outreach, leadership training, family networking, and enabling family members to advocate effectively on behalf of other families in the community. In the Family–School Partnership Resources subsection in the Education section of this guide, several resources describe strategies for strengthening family engagement and provide examples of family-run organizations.

Family–school partnerships are most effective and sustainable when implemented as a collective effort between families and school staff—one that is fully integrated with the school’s overall mission and goals, supported by leadership, and provided with sufficient staffing and funding. When family members are meaningfully engaged, supported, and respected as equal partners, their “voice” and experience are invaluable in creating innovative solutions that support healthy childhood development at home, at school, and in the community.

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Purpose

The resources in this guide were selected because they closely align with the family-driven guiding principles and approaches to family engagement. They are designed to provide guidance to school teams, community and systems partners, and family members, and offer strategies for developing and implementing family partnerships at the state and local levels. These resources comprise toolkits, tip sheets, briefs, reports, and related documents and materials that demonstrate how to meaningfully engage family members at the preschool, elementary, and secondary school levels. Many of the resources describe the fundamental interconnection between family partnership and cultural and linguistic competence. They provide guidance for moving beyond basic parent participation in a child’s education to building and supporting family leadership and the representation of family voice at the policy, program, and practice levels. This guide is not meant to be an exhaustive collection of the many excellent

resources in the field; rather, it offers a selection of key resources and tools relevant to the development of school–family partnerships.

How to Use This Resource Guide

This resource guide is organized into two broad categories: (1) resources that directly discuss the role of family engagement and family partnership within the **education** system and (2) resources that focus on family engagement and voice in other child-serving systems, including **mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice**, followed by a section of **family organization** resources. The **family–school partnership** resources primarily address practices, programs, and research and focus on what can be implemented by an individual school, district, or local education agency. The **child-serving system resources** emphasize family engagement strategies and policy. The resources **topics** are identified in each resource to help the reader locate resources of particular interest or relevance to a given situation.

Education

Family–School Partnership Resources

- **Family–School Relationships Survey**

Panorama Education (2023)

Key Topics: Data Driven, Family Engagement, Family–School Partnership, School Climate

This survey tool is to help educators gather feedback and engage families in their school communities. The Family–School Relationships Survey allows schools, districts, and networks to assess the attitudes of families toward their school community as well as how to build family capacity to support student learning outside of school.

- **English Learner Family Toolkit**

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2023)

Key Topics: Teacher-Family Guidance, Enrollment, Attendance, Safety, Health, Supports

The English Learner Family Toolkit was created to help families choose education services that meet their child’s needs. U.S. educators, elementary and secondary school teachers, principals, and other school staff can also share the toolkit as a resource for English learners and their families.

- **Newcomer Toolkit**

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2023)

Key Topics: School-Family Guidance, Safety, Mental Health, Supports, High-Quality Instruction

The Newcomer Toolkit is designed to help U.S. educators (e.g., elementary and secondary teachers, principals, and other school staff) who work directly with immigrant students—including asylees and refugees—and their families.

- **[Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for Schools to Enhance Relationships with Families](#)**

Office of Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center Collaborative (2023)

Key Topics: School-Family Partnership, Effective Family Engagement Strategies and Practices

Students deserve inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments where all children can thrive. To achieve this goal, it is critical for educators and families to have opportunities to form relationships built on mutual trust and respect. Relationships that benefit both educators and families can set the stage for robust, meaningful two-way communication between school and home. An effective partnership can lead to decreased student disciplinary issues, improved parent–teacher and teacher–student relationships, and an improved school environment.

- **[Joining Together to Create a Bold Vision for Next Generation Family Engagement: Engaging Families to Transform Education](#)**

Carnegie Corporation of New York (2018)

Key Topics: What’s Worked in Family Engagement, Examples From the Field, Effective Strategies

This brief focuses on bringing together families, communities, students, educators, policy makers, and the public in support of an equitable and high-quality education system. All these perspectives are needed at the table if we are to create and advocate for the kinds of student-centered learning experiences that allow all students to master academic content aligned with the standards; gain future-ready knowledge, skills, and dispositions; and succeed in postsecondary learning and careers. It’s time to empower all stakeholders to drive change and demand more equitable policies and practices that prepare all students to be active participants in a robust democracy and dynamic global economy.

- **[Digital Communication Tools Target ESSA Parent-Engagement Mandate](#)**

Schwartz, S. (2017)

Key Topics: Data Driven, Family Engagement, Monitoring Outcomes, Technological Responsiveness

This article discusses how school districts face new demands under federal law to show that they are engaging parents in students’ education. Education tech companies are promoting platforms to strengthen and streamline school-to-family connections. Schools are advised to evaluate whether tech tools will end up bolstering parent engagement or do so in only limited and superficial ways.

- **[Family and Community Engagement in Addressing Childhood Trauma \[Webinar\]](#)**
 Institute for Educational Leadership (2017)
Key Topics: Community and Family Engagement, Childhood Trauma
 This webinar explores how schools and community partners can engage and work with families to address childhood trauma and how to help reduce the impact of trauma on children. The webinar addresses the importance of recognizing trauma, responding to traumatized students in their classroom settings, and knowing where to access supports.
- **[Handbook on Family and Community Engagement](#)**
 Academic Development Institute (2011)
Key Topics: Family–School–Community Partnership, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, Family Engagement, Family Leadership
 This comprehensive handbook for educators, community leaders, and parents comprises a compendium of articles organized into four sections on family engagement in schools: (1) framing the discussion, (2) families and learning, (3) families and schools, and (4) suggested practices. The handbook emphasizes innovative strategies and promising practices, including illustrative vignettes and “action principles” to guide successful implementation of family–school–community partnerships.
- **[The Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit: Planning and Implementing an Initiative to Support the Pathway to Graduation for At-Risk Students](#)**
 United Way Worldwide and Harvard Family Research Project (2011)
Key Topics: Family Engagement, At-Risk Youth, Family–School–Community Partnerships, Data Driven, Monitoring Outcomes, Strategic Planning
 This toolkit features the work of 15 pilot sites across the nation, each of which developed a comprehensive family–school–community engagement initiative to keep at-risk youth on the path to graduation. The toolkit presents a structured, data-driven planning and implementation process to build family engagement and to strengthen school–family connections and partnerships. A chart for planning continuous improvement in family engagement is provided, and lessons learned are summarized.
- **[Partnering With Parents and Families to Support Immigrant and Refugee Children at School](#)**
 Kugler, E. G. (2009)
Key Topics: Family–School Partnership, Immigrant and Refugee Families, School-Based Mental Health, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, Eliminating Disparities
 This position brief focuses on immigrant students and their families. Guidelines are described for establishing successful partnerships to support school-based mental health for

immigrant and refugee youth and their families, with examples from several model mental health programs across the nation. An overview of the challenges in providing school mental health for immigrant families is included.

System and Policy Resources

- **[Policy Statement on Family Engagement From the Early Years to the Early Grades](#)**
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2016)
Key Topics: Family–School Partnership, Family Engagement
This policy statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education provides recommendations to early childhood systems and programs regarding the essential role of families as partners in children’s learning and development. Family engagement refers to the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including in the planning, development, and evaluation of such activities, programs, and systems.
- **[Parent and Family Engagement Provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)**
The Leadership Conference Education Fund (2016)
Key Topics: Family–School Partnership, Family and Community Engagement
This brief provides an overview of ESSA’s requirements and opportunities for parent, family, and community engagement. Since ESSA’s inception, the intent of the law has been to raise achievement for low-income and otherwise disadvantaged children. Gaps in educational opportunity and achievement will be remedied only when those closest to the affected students—parents, families, and communities—are driving decision making.
- **[Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement Through an Equity Lens](#)**
California Department of Education (2017)
Key Topics: Family Leadership, Family Engagement, Family–School Partnership, Policy Change, Workforce Development, Strategic Planning
The Family Engagement Toolkit addresses the importance of integrating family engagement within each district’s context and student learning goals and to include an explicit commitment to equity in every phase of family engagement. The types of diversity among students and families include different racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, as well as 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.

- **Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships**
Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013)
Key Topics: System Reform, Family–School Partnership, Family Engagement, Workforce Development, Strategic Planning
This publication presents a framework to help educators and families work together to develop family engagement strategies, policies, and programs to support student achievement and school improvement. Several helpful graphics are provided to guide the process. Three case studies and recommendations for achieving family–school partnership goals are described.
- **Reimagining Parent Engagement in California: Moving From 1.0 to 2.0**
Families in Schools (2013)
Key Topics: System Transformation, Outcomes, Capacity Building, Parent Engagement, Family–School Partnership, Family Driven
This document, produced by family engagement advocates from California, outlines a family-driven set of indicators to measure effective parent engagement practices in schools. The priority indicators are organized into six categories: (1) a welcoming environment, (2) effective school–family communications, (3) meaningful resources for families, (4) shared leadership, (5) conflict resolution, and (6) adequate financial resources to support the implementation of these practices. A comprehensive and detailed approach is provided for schools to evaluate their progress toward building true family–school partnerships.

Mental Health

- **Supporting Family Engagement with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: A Scoping Review**
Waid, J., & Kelly, M. (2020)
Key Topics: Children, Engagement, Families, Interventions, Mental Health, Scoping Review, Services
This study undertook a scoping review of the empirical literature aimed at identifying key factors in the social ecology of families that influence family engagement with child and adolescent mental health services and identifying and describing models of intervention designed to help facilitate access to care.
- **Family-Driven Care: Are We There Yet?**
Duchnowski, A., Kutash, K., & de la Parte, L. (2007)
Key Topics: System Transformation, Family–School–Community Partnership, Family Driven, Family Voice, Promising Practices

This document provides a road map for implementing family-driven systems and school-based mental health services in partnership with families and community mental health agencies. The resource addresses the needs of both systems, such as mutual understanding of approach, language, theories, and perspectives. It discusses how positive behavior supports, wraparound, and response to intervention are evidence-based frameworks that have served to unify the efforts of education staff, mental health practitioners, and families to improve child outcomes. This resource also includes a Compendium of Evidence-Based Behavioral Health Programs that have a family component (Appendix C, p. 44).

- **Working Definition of Family-Driven Care**

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (2008)

Key Topics: Family Driven

This web page features the definition of *family-driven care* and associated 10 principles of family-driven care developed by the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. The role of families as primary decision makers in the care of their own children is described. Policies and procedures for caring for all children in the community, state, tribe, territory, and nation are recommended.

Child Welfare

- **Family Engagement: Partnering With Families to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes**

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2021)

Key Topics: Family Engagement, State and Local Policy, Promising Practices

This bulletin provides an overview of the foundational elements of the family engagement approach, followed by strategies—including state and local examples—and promising practices for implementing this approach at the case level, peer level, and systems level.

- **Lessons From the Field: Successful Strategies for Implementing Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM)**

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Family Centered Practice, 2017

Key Topics: Family Engagement, Challenges and Strategies for FGDM, Family-Centered Agency Culture

This resource guide provides resources and strategies designed to assist child welfare agencies and organizations seeking to start a new FGDM program or improve an existing program. It describes the six elements that have been deemed critical to FGDM success. It outlines common challenges FGDM grantees encounter and corresponding strategies to address those challenges.

- **[2023/2024 Prevention Resource Guide](#)**
 Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (2023)
Key Topics: Family Resilience, Protective Factors, Proactive Child and Family Well-Being Systems
 This resource guide is designed to support communities, organizations, and families with addressing the root causes of child abuse and neglect. It highlights innovative techniques for communities and organizations to help children and families thrive. It also provides protective factors to help children, youth, and families build resistance and promote family engagement.
- **[Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative: Approach to Capacity Building](#)**
 Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative (2015)
Key Topics: Complex Adaptive Systems in Child Welfare, Capacity Building, Planning and Designing Services, Delivering Services
 This brief highlights complex adaptive systems to help child welfare agencies appropriately respond to internal and external challenges they face. It applies research, data, and expert knowledge to help child welfare and legal professionals and organizations build the capacity necessary to strengthen, implement, and sustain effective child welfare practices and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- **[Thriving Families, Safer Children, Supportive Communities: Investing in Children and Families \(2023 Signature Report\)](#)**
 Casey Family Programs (2023)
Key Topics: Investing in Families, Widening the Lens of Well-Being, Engaging Effectively with Lived Experience
 This signature report highlights examples of how community organizations are collaborating with families to use new tools and approaches to better address the needs of families and children and invest in safer, more supportive communities.
- **[In-Home Services for Families of LGBTQ Youth](#)**
 Elze, D. E. (2012)
Key Topics: Child Welfare Services, Family Centered Services, Out-of-Home Care, Equity
 This brief focuses on service providers fully engaging with the family members of LGBTQ youths as potential allies capable of increasing their support and acceptance of their LGBTQ children. It describes the need for early intervention to strengthen families of LGBTQ youth and prevent out-of-home placement, runaway behavior, and youth homelessness.
- **[Safety, Fairness, Stability: Repositioning Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare to Engage Families and Communities](#)**
 Pennell, J., Shapiro, C., & Spigner, C. (2011)

Key Topics: System Reform, Family–School–Community Partnership, Promising Practices, Family Engagement

This resource provides a review of family engagement practices, processes, and outcomes in juvenile justice and child welfare. Strategies to reform practice and policy as well as tools to systematically engage families and youth in partnership across all child-serving systems are described.

Juvenile Justice

- **Family Engagement in Juvenile Justice**

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2018)

Key Topics: Juvenile Justice Research, Policies, Practices, Family Engagement

This literature review focuses on synthesizing descriptions of the role of family engagement for youths involved in the juvenile justice system; research documenting how jurisdictions have attempted enhanced engagement, including policies that encourage family engagement; resources that help families to understand the juvenile justice process; practices such as parent training, family therapy, and family visitation; and outcome evidence for programs with family engagement strategies as key components.

- **An Advocate’s Guide to Meaningful Family Partnerships: Tips From the Field**

National Juvenile Justice Network (2010)

Key Topics: Family Leadership, Family Advocacy, Family Voice, System Reform

This resource describes the role of families as the most compelling spokespeople for change in the juvenile justice system. It addresses how professional advocates and family members can work in partnership toward systemic reform. Though it was intended for a juvenile justice practitioner audience, recommendations serve to inform family advocacy in general.

- **Family Involvement in Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System**

Luckenbill, W., & Yeager, C. (2009)

Key Topics: Family Engagement, Policy Change, Promising Practices, Family Leadership, System Reform, Monitoring Outcomes

This monograph features Pennsylvania’s Model for Change–Family Involvement with examples of strategies used to support family involvement at the state and local levels. It includes the definition and principles of family involvement in the juvenile justice system that were developed through this initiative. Strategies and measures to assess the impact of family involvement are offered.

- **Family Engagement Toolkit**

The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (2022)

Key Topics: At-Risk Youth, Family Engagement, Tools for Families, Tools for Facilities, Community-Focused Youth Engagement

This toolkit provides useful templates for facilities to use to engage families in their child's education. It includes several tools that are intended for distribution to students' families and additional tools intended for use by facility staff. All tool/templates are customizable to meet the unique needs of each facility and the families it serves.

Family Organizations

- **National Standards for Family-School Partnerships**

National PTA (2022)

Key Topics: Family Engagement, Best Practices, Family-School Partnerships

The National Standards for Family School Partnerships has transformed family engagement across the country for more than 20 years. The Standards give schools guidance on how to improve family-school partnerships and set the bar for best practices around six key tenets.

- **National Federation of Families Resource by State Directory**

National Federation of Families (2023)

Key Topics: Resource Directory, State Advocacy Organizations, State Legislation

The National Federation of Families Resource Directory provides accessible links to Child Advocacy Organizations and State Legislation for each state in the United States. This resource can be used to assist advocacy work on behalf of families and caregivers in all states.

- **Standards of Excellence for Family-Run Organizations**

Family Run Executive Director Leadership Association (2015)

Key Topics: Family Organizations, Sustainability

These Standards of Excellence are intended to support the development and sustainability of family-run organizations and their role in strengthening family engagement in the community.

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