

Texas System of Great Schools Network Engages and Empowers Families

Two Texas Education Agency (TEA) initiatives, the Texas System of Great Schools (SGS) and the Effective Schools Framework, use well-designed approaches supported by evidence to address TEA Strategic Priority 4: improve low-performing schools. This brief discusses the SGS initiative.

Texas Education Agency | Strategic Priority 4






The Texas [System of Great Schools \(SGS\) Network](#) is a school improvement initiative being implemented by Texas districts to prepare every student for success in college, career, the military, and life, particularly students who come from families with a low socioeconomic status.¹ The initiative focuses on four key levers: managing school performance; expanding great options; improving access to options; and empowering autonomous schools.

The SGS model involves a methodical approach in planning and implementing strategies and tactics to promote innovation and systemic change that creates high-quality best-fit school options for children and families. Notably, this model promotes family engagement and empowerment as a success factor. SGS districts must implement community engagement processes that inform families about the need for change and the proposed changes before they happen. School change or moving to a different school is a complex issue for families with school-aged children. SGS promotes transparency and communication to keep families and stakeholders informed. For example, [Midland ISD SGS](#) conducted listening sessions with over 500 parents, students, and other stakeholders who prioritized the need to “cultivate and sustain ongoing two-way communication between the district, individual campuses and families.”² The [San Antonio ISD SGS](#) Initiative focuses on connecting with families and holding districts accountable for ensuring families have the information they need to select best-fit school options but also have access to their school choice within the district, including transportation and language support. Families will also have access to school performance data to inform decisions about school selection and to continually monitor their student’s progress. For these reasons, districts are also charged with establishing a family resource center, providing learning opportunities and materials, and developing supports for families so they can fully participate in the SGS Network.

To attain the goal of creating high-quality school options, SGS districts must invest in the empowerment of families and communities to elevate them as partners in education system decision-making.

Adapted from B. Trusty, Pathways to Success, 2017

Strategies and Actions Great Schools Use to Engage and Empower Families

 Districts	 Schools/Educators	 Families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide families with options for high-quality schools and programs. ▶ Improve equitable access to high-quality great school options by providing family-friendly data and reports to students and families to inform their decisions. ▶ Establish a family resource center. ▶ Support families in navigating a unified enrollment process and system to assure families have equitable access to high-quality options. ▶ Create supports for families to make “best fit” school choices by ensuring families have access to the information they need, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the difference between district-run vs. charter schools; • Being fully aware of all their school options; and • Being well informed about quality measures and timelines. ▶ Invest in empowering and engaging families as partners in district and campus decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop and implement school-level family engagement strategies. ▶ Provide easy access to a school’s quality report to enable families to compare performance across schools. ▶ Annually evaluate school quality, neighborhood needs, and parent demands to inform school strategic improvement plans. ▶ Offer family education courses and other relevant training opportunities. ▶ Provide training to faculty and staff to increase their competence in working with all families and their understanding of families’ strengths, backgrounds, cultures, and expectations of children. ▶ Support families to engage in planning and implementation of activities to address family needs and interests, such as collaborating with local social service agencies. ▶ Involve teachers, family, and local community members in school-level decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Utilize SGS quality reports, available supports, and tools to compare school options and discern which option best fits a child’s needs. ▶ Participate in learning opportunities to build a knowledge base on how to make an informed decision about school choice. ▶ Reach out to the Family Resource Center (FRC) for information, training, and resources. If needed, request materials in English or other languages according to family needs. ▶ Request contact information for the district SGS ombudsman and learn how the ombudsman assists and supports families. ▶ Ensure school supports and materials are family-friendly and culturally and linguistically responsive. ▶ Consider serving on SGS district and campus decision-making committees to represent family needs and interests.

Family Engagement Tools and Resources

- ▶ The Role of Parents in High-Achieving Schools Serving Low-Income, At-Risk Populations: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249682257> The Role of Parents in High-Achieving Schools Serving Low-Income At-Risk Populations
- ▶ School Performance Framework: <https://www.systemofgreatschools.org/spf-resources-1>
- ▶ Powerful Parents Transform Schools: <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/powerful-parents-transform-schools/>
- ▶ Engaging Families to Transform Education: https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/f8/78/f8784565-4bd6-4aa3-bd80-2b98fd43380e/parent-engagement-2018.pdf

¹ Trusty, B. (2017, June) Pathways to success: Providing more children access to great public schools. Memphis, TN: Education Cities. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588873.pdf>
² Midland ISD SGS. (2017). Listen and Learn tour. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/midlandisd.net/midlandonthemove/listen-learn-tour?authuser=0>