



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

State Policy

Recommendations

WHILE FEDERAL, STATE, DISTRICT, SCHOOL, AND CLASSROOM POLICIES ALL IMPACT STUDENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, STATE LEADERS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN SUPPORTING DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS IN ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THEIR WORK TO SUPPORT THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS. State legislatures, state school boards, and state education agencies must provide adequate resources to help district and school leaders to meaningfully and equitably engage students, families, and communities to improve student outcomes.

The following are state policy recommendations to support family engagement and ultimately improve school climate, statewide assessments, and early childhood development.

1. **Collect and regularly review data to understand the needs of families and educators and publicly report information about family engagement, disaggregated by demographics**

- States should provide evidence-based guidance and funding to help district and school leaders engage families in school and collect and publicly report data about family and community engagement. There are many publicly available examples of family engagement surveys that state and district leaders can use to better understand the needs of families and educators:
 - The U.S. Department of Education has a series of [school climate surveys](#), one of which is designed for parents. That [survey](#) includes questions related to family engagement that ask about cultural and linguistic competence, connections to the school community, and participation.
 - The [5Essentials](#) survey, developed by [UChicago Impact](#), also has questions related to family engagement, including questions on school communication about events and academic progress, belonging, and barriers to engagement.
 - [Panorama Education](#) has developed a survey to understand family-school relationships, which includes questions about family engagement, barriers to engagement, and gives parents opportunities to say exactly what they want/need and elaborate on their answers to the specific questions asked.
 - [DC Public Schools](#) conducts a family and student survey, which district and school leaders use to evaluate their progress, set goals, and decide on new interventions to improve school climate and social emotional learning.

2. Reduce barriers to engagement and think beyond old strategies that require parents to come to the school.

- Most parents and families want to actively engage with their children’s schools, but old methods of communication make it difficult. Many families cite child care, parents’ busy schedules, and transportation as [barriers to family engagement](#).
 - As part of New Mexico’s statewide [community schools initiative](#), state leaders held conversations with local communities, in which parents said that they wanted to be engaged in their children’s learning but didn’t feel welcome at school. State leaders made relationship-building a priority in the New Mexico’s community schools, providing resources for “advisories,” which ensure that every student has a teacher-adviser who takes their attendance each day. Parents were immediately notified when students were absent, and advisers served as a primary and consistent contact person for parents at the school, for both academic and non-academic supports. This advisory system is buttressed by other family engagement practices at community schools, such as home visits, communications in parents’ native languages, community events, and opportunities for parents to lead student activities or share their expertise with groups of students.

3. Ensure that engagement strategies and the curriculum incorporate the language, culture, history, and lived experiences of all students and families in the community.

- Improving student learning and students’ school experiences is nearly impossible without authentic collaboration with families. Research shows that cultural beliefs influence parents’ school engagement; thus, schools and districts should use culturally relevant engagement strategies to better reach all parents and families.
- Schools and district leaders working toward education equity must integrate family engagement into their agenda. For staff, this may mean unpacking some of their own biases and presumptions about students and their families, developing an asset-based mindset, and recognizing and working to dismantle power imbalances between families and school staff, as well as between parents.

4. Include student, family, and community engagement as part of a state’s strategic or ESSA plan.

5. Create within the state department of education an office of student, family, and community engagement that carries out multiple activities, such as professional development for school and district staff, home-based programs, information dissemination, or collaboration with community organizations.

- Arizona created a Family Engagement Center, a resource for families that includes free family literacy resources, a parent-to-parent portal, and a new parent information data tool, Explore Arizona Schools, to help parents make informed choices about their child’s school. The virtual center is part of the Statewide Family Engagement Center Project. Partners include: [National Center for Families Learning](#), [Read On Arizona](#), [Arizona Department of Education](#), [Make Way for Books](#), [Southwest Human Development](#) and [Unite for Literacy](#).

6. Offer ongoing professional development to educators at all levels on fostering student, family, and community engagement and integrate engagement into teacher evaluation rubrics.

- School-based administrators and district level support need effective training to build their capacity in understanding [the power of family engagement](#) as a strategy and in leading the work. When leaders prioritize family engagement, their communication and practices will align in their decision-making. This will support the overall implementation of the family engagement strategy.
- Educators are important for family engagement. To be effective, teachers must be given the resources and time to learn about evidence-based strategies and implement them, as well as set up other structures and supports to facilitate engagement with families. For example, view [DC's IMPACT](#) teacher evaluation rubric.

7. Intentionally incorporate family and community voices in decision-making by creating a parent advisory council or other state-level task force. That group would be responsible for providing recommendations to assessment developers that meet their state's specific context to ensure [racially and culturally inclusive curricula and assessments](#).

8. Establish evidence-based guidance on student, family, and community engagement at all levels of the P-12 system that includes information on funding and how schools and districts should engage the communities that are most often underserved and left out of family engagement initiatives (e.g., multilingual families, Native families, families experiencing homelessness, families impacted by the criminal justice system, rural communities).

- [California](#) developed a set of guidance for ways to ensure that districts and schools use federal and state resources to support equitable student and family engagement.