

Establish a Team of Family Engagement Partners

Your family engagement team may be a group of parents and caregivers, a group of educators, parents and community representatives, or another combination. Most importantly, the family engagement team gives families a voice and ownership in decision making and planning. Families bring perspectives and knowledge that will benefit planning and programs for their children, and for other families in their community. This guide provides the Why, What Who, and How steps for establishing and growing family engagement teams. While written in a broad way, it is appropriate for each team to be more narrowly focused on their region and their specific purpose. For example, a school district Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) team or District Leadership Team (DLT) may establish a subgroup charged with focused planning and action for engaging families. At a broader level, regional/county initiatives (such as Safe Schools Healthy Students) might use this guidance to establish teams of partners for planning and implementing family engagement strategies. Once a family engagement team has been started, members can re-examine and revise the team purpose, meeting times, members and other aspects that this guide helps establish. Throughout this guide you will find questions for discussion to assist with your team development.

Getting Started

First impressions are important. For the initial meeting of your family engagement team, the primary goal should be to establish positive relationships between team members, to make members feel their contribution to the team is valued for the perspectives they bring.

This is especially important for parent/caregiver and student representatives. Consider holding an orientation for the parent/caregiver and student members to set them at ease, clarify the importance of their perspectives and role on the team. If there is information that will be helpful for group members to understand in order to fully participate in the meetings and planning, take time to provide that information for members to read (view on video, listen to recording, etc.) before the first working meeting.

Be sure to allow time for team members to be introduced, to clarify the purpose and expectations of the team and the expectations of the group members. Take time to let members share their hopes for the team.

You can take time to let the group decide on their group norms for how they will function as a team and ensure that dates and times for meetings are set.



Why:

Family engagement is what families do to support their child's healthy development and education birth through adulthood, and what communities and schools do to partner with families and strengthen support for the child. Strong parent engagement is a characteristic of successful mental health programs and high performing schools.

The involvement of parents and families in schools is often cited as one of the most important ways to improve outcomes for students, both academic and behavioral.

Family engagement is a strong determinant in school readiness, graduation rates, and student's decisions to pursue higher education. A significant body of research indicates that students, pre-K through adulthood, who have families who are engaged as partners with their teachers and service providers experience improved educational outcomes and healthy emotional growth, self-esteem and behavior.



Why is engaging families crucial to achieving your goals?



What:

Begin by clarifying the family engagement team's intended purpose. The team's purpose might be to engage families in the local effort to improve access to mental health services to prevent violence and promote the healthy development of children and youth. Or, the team may be focused on engaging families as partners to support students' positive behavior at school, home and in the community. A family engagement team can develop:

- A heightened sense of community ownership of the team's purpose.
- The capacity for focused action to achieve this purpose.
- A vehicle for planning, implementing and evaluating actions designed engage families to achieve this purpose.



What is your family engagement team's purpose?



Considerations for Inviting People to be On a Team



What message will you use to invite partners to join your family engagement team? The prompts that follow can help you create your invitation message.

- Name of potential partner
- Partner's role or organization
- Name of the family engagement team
- Purpose of the family engagement team (The purpose drafted above might be fine-tuned to speak to the interest of the individual/organization being recruited)
- The value of participation for the partner (Be specific about "what is in it for them", that is what they stand to gain from participation.)
- The requested commitment of the partner (Be specific about what he/she will be asked to contribute as a member of the team)
- Time commitment
- Length of commitment
- Variety of activities in which he or she will be asked to engage (For example: attend meetings, develop a plan for activities to engage families, participate in or lead trainings, be a voice for your stakeholder groups, implement planned activities)
- Method for extending the invitation (Identify how the potential partner will be recruited, for example phone call, individual meeting, small lunches, formal orientation meeting. More personal methods are most appropriate for parents/caregivers and for partners with which there is no existing relationship.)
- Extending the invitation (Identify who you believe is likely to persuade the potential partner to participate. Consider who has an established relationship with the invitee.)
- Consider developing a work plan that documents tasks to be completed, by whom and by when to ensure the team is formed in a timely fashion. This information can be documented on the work plan template below.



Work Plan for Family Engagement Team Planning

Proposed Activity	Person(s) Responsible	Due Date	Comments/Status