

**Families and schools working together for
the language and literacy development of every child**

For teams who are ready to partner with families

This guide was created by The Ohio Family and Community Engagement Network, led by the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center.

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Ohio Statewide
Family Engagement Center
—at The Ohio State University

Family Engagement in Early Literacy

***A Rubric and Guide for
School Teams***

Your team is ready to partner with families

Purpose

The purpose of this rubric and guide is to provide Building Leadership Teams with information and a consistent way to measure family engagement that directly supports the early literacy development of children pre-K through Grade 3. It was designed to be descriptive and to assist teams with identifying the areas relating to early literacy and family engagement that are well established in their school and those areas that need to be strengthened. Building Leadership Teams can use the rubric on a regular schedule to help track progress and to focus planning for the next stage. There are 6 Key Areas (adapted from Epstein et al.'s 2019 family engagement framework), each with its own page, with space at the bottom of each page for reflection.

Intended Participants

The rubric is designed to be used by a school building team that can focus on implementing system-level changes and monitoring practices on an annual basis to document and celebrate growth. Family members and school administrators are critical members of the team. Families provide the invaluable perspective of families of children in the school for planning. Administrators can offer high-level support and facilitation of the process, connecting this work to schoolwide plans and staffing within the school building.

Using the Rubric

1. Your team should identify a record-keeper for your team discussion.
2. As a team, review the rubric on pages 2-7. Notice the Key Areas on top of each page. These are adapted from the Epstein framework (Epstein et. al, 2019).
3. The levels describe a progression of family engagement from Level 1 (emerging practices) to Level 4 (optimal practices). Team members should read the descriptions at each level, one through four, for each Key Area, one Key Area at a time. Determine which level most closely represents your team's current practices.
4. Discuss the perspectives of team members and come to consensus on the level that best represents your school for each of the Key Areas.
5. Using the reflection questions on page 8 and summary page 9, acknowledge and record evidence of successes for your team. Begin to prioritize the target areas for action for your team and determine which two potential priority Key Areas will be addressed. The summary form in this document is included to guide your team discussion.
6. Once your team has determined appropriate action steps and responsibilities for implementation, include these action steps in your current school plan.

Reference: Epstein, J.L., Sanders, M.T., Sheldon, S.B., Simon, B.S., Clark Salinas, K., Rodriguez Jansorn, N.,... Williams, K.J. (2019). School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Accessibility	All students have access to, participate in, and progress in the general-education curriculum by reducing barriers to instruction. All families understand communications from the school and can participate in events/resources provided by the school if desired.
Big Ideas of Reading	A National Reading Panel (2000) evaluated research and evidence, and concluded that the best way to teach children to read includes: 1) Phonemic Awareness, 2) Phonics, 3) Vocabulary, 4) Fluency, and 5) Comprehension.
Family & Community Engagement for Early Literacy Inventory	This inventory was developed by the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center at OSU. School teams, including families, collaborate to assess the school's current practices and reflect on the level of implementation and effectiveness within three areas of family and community engagement: communication, supporting literacy at home, and strategic community partnerships. Contact OhioSFEC@osu.edu for a copy.
Cultural Competence	The ability to work effectively with people from different cultures. The ability to recognize and use aspects of different cultures (language, identity, and customs/behaviors) in school settings and curriculum resources.
Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy	A student-centered approach. Responding to the individual learning needs of students and using appropriate materials and making changes/additions in the curriculum to make it culturally relevant to all students. Providing equitable learning opportunities for all students and empowering them.
Evidence-Based Strategies	An evidence base develops when researchers use specific methods to study an instructional approach to see if it works on a large scale. Collecting this level of information about a strategy or program reduces the risk of individuals making false judgments about how successful a strategy or program is.
Feedback Loop	Timely, ongoing, and consistent information about something being implemented. For example, when families provide a monthly update to their child's reading teacher about their child's reading progress at home. It is goal-referenced, tangible and transparent, actionable, and user-friendly (specific/personalized).
Language Usage Survey	In Ohio, school districts are required to use a language usage survey with all families. It assesses the communication needs and preferences of parents/caregivers.
On Track/Not on Track	A student is on-track or not on track based on whether or not they were reading at grade level according to the previous school year's end-of-year standards.
Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan (RIMP)	Reading diagnostics determine whether a child is on-track or not on-track in reading. Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans are required for students who are not on track. RIMPs allow teachers & parents/caregivers to work together to understand a student's reading skills and outline reading instruction and support. The instructional services selected for a student who has a RIMP rely on the judgment of the student's teacher and family.
Schoolwide Literacy Plan	An effective schoolwide literacy plan guides action on many levels, focusing multiple activities toward increasing students' reading, writing, and thinking skills. A comprehensive literacy action plan has action steps related to five key areas: strengthening literacy development across the content areas; literacy interventions for struggling readers and writers; school policies, structures, and culture for supporting literacy; building leadership capacity; and supporting teachers to improve instruction.
Two-Way Communication	Correspondence that goes back and forth between the sender and receiver. The sender and receiver are equals. Both listen to each other and share their thoughts or questions.

Summary Page

Key Area	Successes	Opportunities for Growth
Understanding Families		
Communication		
Volunteering		
Learning at Home		
Decision-Making		
Community Collaboration		

Priority Area	Action Steps	Who is Responsible?

Understanding Families

Level 1

In general, teachers are not familiar with the neighborhoods, cultures, or home lives of their students and how the families encourage language and literacy at home.

Level 2

Teachers have some knowledge about families of children in their classroom by requesting information from families about their child's interests. School perceives multiple barriers to family engagement for literacy learning at home and in the school.

Level 3

The school recognizes the positive impact supportive parenting/caregiving has on the development of language and literacy.

- Teachers request information from families about their home lives and incorporate the interests of the children and families in classroom instruction and learning activities for home.
- When the staff identifies barriers to family engagement for literacy learning at home and in the school, the staff takes action to address them.
- The school intentionally builds trusting relationships with families and provides time to committed opportunities that build and sustain trust.
- See [Seven Research Based Ways Families Promote Early Literacy](#)

Level 4

Administrators and teachers work to create accessible opportunities for all families to support their child's learning.

- Staff has a clear understanding of the interests, assets and needs of each family.
- All learning resources for home take into consideration the families' needs for practicing language and literacy skills.
- School and families collaborate to identify barriers and work together to resolve issues, address concerns, and create alternatives.
- The school provides learning opportunities for staff to increase their level of knowledge for partnering with families to support language and literacy for all children and **culturally relevant pedagogy**.
- There is evidence that families are provided the **Big 5 Ideas of Reading** and writing.

You can improve!

How could your school improve upon your understanding of your families this year?

Communication

Level 1

Families are invited to participate in two conferences per year to discuss their child's progress in language and literacy.

Level 2

The school provides all families of children who are "**not on track**" written notification of the student intervention plan and the opportunity to review and sign. The school shares information about grade-level literacy goals and about supports for language and literacy in the school and community. Communication is one way, school to home.

Level 3

There are multiple means for **two-way communication** with families at each grade level.

- Two or more times a year, teachers conference with families and share data about their child's progress in language and literacy (for example **RIMPs**).
- Families are provided with ideas beyond verbal and worksheet-based recommendations for how they can support their child at home.
- Families receive communication about interventions in family-friendly language.
- Families receive information regarding the **Big 5 Ideas of Reading**, writing, Ohio's Learning Standards, and how their child is progressing toward grade-level standards.
- Conferences are offered at different times and locations with a goal of 100% participation.
- Teachers encourage children to share reading and writing progress with their family.
- Building staff consult the results of the [Language Usage Survey](#) to find each family's preferred language. An interpreter is available for families as needed for conferences, and translation of written materials is provided in the home language.
- **School Wide Literacy Plan** is shared with families.
- Data is collected from families to monitor the successes and barriers of the two-way communication plan in their preferred home language and method of communication.

Level 4

There are multiple means for **two-way communication** with families at each grade level and building.

- All families consistently receive updates on their child's developing literacy skills. Ideas for how families can help their child at home are sent at least 4 times each year. These ideas relate to the **Big 5 Ideas of Reading** and writing with a summary of what their child is excelling at, and how the school is targeting skills with instructional interventions.
- There is a written protocol describing how families can contact their child's teacher and building. All teachers coordinate to provide a similar level and methods of communication across subjects and grade-levels.
- There is proactive protocol in place to offer interpreters, translation and services, and there is a written protocol describing how to request an interpreter or translation.
- There is a consistent method of **two-way communication** in the building and communicated to all staff.
- Families of children on **RIMPs** receive monthly updates.
- The school ensures open lines of communication with all families and views them as experts on their child and requests feedback from families.
- Multiple means for communicating with families are used and evaluated to ensure all families have access to information about their child's progress, resources available and how they can help their child in a format they can use.
- The school persists in initiating **two-way communication** with families, even when families do not respond. Data is reviewed to remove barriers and proactively monitor/update the **two-way communication** plan.

You can improve!



How could your school improve communication with families this year?

Building Leadership Team Reflection Questions

Record responses on the Summary Page

1. For each of the Key Areas:
 - a. What is going well and how do you know?
 - b. What are some ways your team can improve your practices?
2. What two areas are your priority areas for action planning?
3. Brainstorm action steps that will move your literacy practices to a higher level of family engagement.
4. Select action steps and determine details for implementation including key persons responsible.

What is high quality family engagement in Ohio?

Ohio's families are diverse and may speak a host of languages. Family members include parents, caregivers, grandparents, friends, and relatives. Families may live together or apart, may change housing frequently or never, and may include many generations or just a few. Schools that build successful family engagement recognize the strengths of each individual family and the hopes and dreams they hold for their children. There are many terms associated with family, school and community partnerships. Engagement entails commitment, synchronization, working together, support, and action. It is through engagement with families, schools, and communities that Ohio's students will receive the support they need for a bright future.

Community Collaboration

You can improve!

Level 1

The school does not collaborate with community groups or agencies to support literacy development in the school, home, or community.

Level 2

The school has a partnership with at least one outside organization or agency that directly supports the development of language and literacy skills for children. Families and teachers are notified of this resource.

Level 3

The school maintains partnerships with community groups and agencies that offer language and literacy supports for children and families.

- Supports provided by the school may include: access to books, family-literacy programs and adult literacy classes. These resources are advertised to families throughout the year and at specific times during the year such as prior to summer break.
- When families or teachers identify a need for resources, support, interventions or information they are able to connect families with local resources.
- Regular literacy collaborative programs, services, workshops, etc. are offered to meet needs identified by families.
- Special supports for families and students who are English Learners or with identified literacy needs are available in the school and community.
- The school acknowledges community partners annually.
- There is evidence of the collaborative relationship both in the school and the community.

Level 4

Community partnerships supporting language and literacy are strategic and aligned with the **School Wide Reading Plan.**

- Resources and supports are offered at the school and in the community.
- Resources and supports have clearly identified outcomes and are monitored and evaluated.
- There are formal and informal Memoranda of Understanding between the school and community agencies to support early language and literacy development.
- The community and school publicly support language and literacy across the community.
- The school provides resources to the community and vice versa.
- The school has a staff member and/or set team time to clearly identify and coordinate linkages for language and literacy between the school, families and the community.
- The school publicly recognizes community partners throughout the year.
- Partnership information is provided through multiple means on-line, paper, district website, etc.

How could your school improve community collaboration to support literacy this year?

Volunteering

You can improve!

Level 1

There are no clear opportunities for family or community members to directly support their children's language and literacy skill development.

Level 2

There are volunteers who directly or indirectly support language and literacy instruction for some classrooms. Opportunities for families to volunteer in the school's literacy programs are limited to the school building during the school day.

Level 3

Volunteers have a regular schedule and have enough training and resources to be effective in supporting literacy.

- There is a school-wide plan for coordinating, training and recruiting volunteers to implement evidence-based language and literacy interventions with children.
- Volunteer opportunities complement and do not compete with core instruction.
- There is a written protocol describing how to become a volunteer and the volunteer opportunities available with job descriptions.
- A variety of meaningful opportunities for volunteering are available to families, in direct support of student learning.
- Teachers are in close contact with volunteers to ensure they can meet the needs of the children with whom they work.
- All staff welcome volunteers.
- The school gathers feedback from volunteers about their experience.
- Volunteers are recognized at the end of the year.

Level 4

Volunteering opportunities are available in the school and outside of the school (after school, summers, etc.).

- The school reaches out to all parents and caregivers (grandparents, fathers, foster parents) and community members – advertising clearly, attractively, and effectively about volunteering options.
- Volunteers are supported by the school in understanding and meeting all district security policies, including background checks.
- The volunteer process is monitored and evaluated for its effectiveness in contributing to student learning.
- The school continuously improves the volunteer activities based on data and student needs.
- Volunteers are celebrated throughout the year by all staff. They report that they feel appreciated and valued.
- Volunteers feel empowered to train families and recruit others to build capacity.
- Volunteers are willing to support multiple grade-levels, and help the school and families connect to community resources.

How could your school improve volunteer opportunities this year?

Learning at Home

Level 1	Language and literacy instruction is seen as the responsibility of the school. School personnel may not view the role of families as essential to supporting their children's language and literacy development.
Level 2	Families are provided with general information about how to support language and literacy at home. Families are expected to complete language and literacy activities at home as provided by the teacher. School's efforts to engage families in supporting literacy at home is limited to what is required by state and federal law/policy.
Level 3	<p>School-wide, teachers send home information about grade level standards and expectations for language and literacy learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers help all families to understand how they can implement evidence-based practices and strategies, such as shared reading, for supporting individual student learning needs. Information about the importance of language and literacy development and evidence-based strategies for supporting language and literacy development at home is shared and modeled quarterly. Teachers share home literacy experiences that are engaging, meaningful and enjoyable and easily embedded in daily routines. The school requests feedback from families and children on the evidence-based strategies provided by the school for use at home, ensuring that they are engaging, meaningful, enjoyable, and aligned to classroom experiences and the child's skills. All families have physical access to resources, such as books, to help support language and literacy development in their home environment. When providing resources, accessibility as well as the families' language and literacy needs are considered. As children are identified as "not on track," teachers ensure that families understand their child's progress and learning goals for language and literacy.
Level 4	<p>The school reaches out to the families of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers among their student population and the larger community to encourage language development and literacy at home.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and teachers function as partners and work together to enhance children's learning. Evidence-based strategies provided to families to use in their home are sustained over time by families, teachers, and the school in general, encouraging and supporting what families do at home to build literacy learning. The school and community collaborate to provide targeted resources and training based on the language and literacy needs of families to build their capacity to support their child at home. All families are valued as essential partners in the development of early language and literacy and are included in every aspect of early literacy instruction within the school (data, policies, and programs). Evidence-based strategies in early language and literacy are modeled through multiple means and shared with families (face to face, on-line platforms, video, etc.) throughout the year and monitored and evaluated quarterly using multiple feedback loops and data sources.

You can improve!



How could your school improve supports for learning at home this year?

Decision-making

Level 1	Families are not included in planning decisions or development of literacy programs or interventions for the school or their child (non-compliant with RIMP).
Level 2	<p>Families of children who are "not on track" receive written notification about their children's progress and learning needs related to language and literacy and the school's plans for interventions (RIMPs).</p> <p>School-wide or classroom reading goals are communicated to families.</p> <p>When families ask questions about their child's progress, teachers or the principal take time to listen and make themselves accessible.</p>
Level 3	<p>Schools seek input regarding RIMPs and School Wide Reading Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are consulted and their ideas are included when teachers create RIMPs for children "not on track" or who demonstrate concerns in one of the Big Ideas of Reading. There are representatives from families included in the Building Leaderships Team or other school work group that develops the School Wide Reading Plan. The School Wide Reading Plan includes action steps for equipping, informing, and encouraging families to support language and literacy in the Big Ideas of Reading that are designed to reach all families. The school uses surveys, focus groups, or other methods like the Family and Community Engagement for Early Literacy Inventory, to gather and share annual feedback from families about literacy experiences, resources, and communication.
Level 4	<p>Families provide an active voice as equal team members in decisions for the school and their individual children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are invited to literacy Professional Development to build their capacity to serve on literacy teams. The school seeks feedback from families at least twice a year and includes the data from families in developing and revising the goals, strategies and action steps of the School Wide Literacy Plan and other decisions. Teachers and school staff seek input from families in the creation of children's RIMPs and other literacy interventions. For students needing Tier II & III instruction, families and teachers work together in planning home activities to move children toward literacy goals. There is evidence of written protocols or procedures regarding how families contribute to language and literacy decisions.

You can improve!



How could your school involve families in decision-making in more ways this year?