



A Family-School Partnership  
**Workplan for Engaging  
Diverse Communities**  
in Healthy Schools

**ACTION** FOR  
HEALTHY  
KIDS 

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**Partnership is giving, taking, learning, teaching, offering the greatest possible benefit while doing the least possible harm.**

OCTAVIA BUTLER



# Introduction and Background



Family engagement is essential to the healthy development, learning, and educational equity of all students.\* When families and schools form committed partnerships based on trust and shared goals, the whole child thrives. While schools are uniquely positioned to effectively engage families, many have had little to no exposure to examples of strong family engagement and start in distant positions.<sup>23</sup> At times, schools have marginalized and excluded families. Through evidence-based best practices and frameworks, the objective of this workplan is to provide guidance that will challenge and support educators to create, expand, and prioritize family engagement that reflects the full diverse lives of students and families in healthy schools.

In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum (ASCD) and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) called for educational reform by expanding the narrow emphasis in education from academic achievement to the development of the whole child. Seven years later the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model was introduced and provided a framework for addressing child health and learning. One of the model's key components was its attention to the critical role of family engagement in the child's development. As a result, the WSCC model has changed the narrative in education to a holistic approach that defines a multitude of components that contribute to the success of students including family and community engagement.<sup>26</sup>

As educators face mounting pressures, competing priorities, and limited resources, challenges persisted in building important connections with families, thus necessitating further guidance. In 2014, Dr. Karen Mapp and the U.S. Department of Education authored the Dual Capacity-Building Framework that provides the goals and conditions necessary to steer the planning of effective family engagement. Among its most significant and recognizable contributions, the framework defines capacity into the "4 Cs" of family engagement. The framework proved invaluable to shaping and informing family engagement policy, research and practice throughout the field.<sup>23,25</sup>

## THE "4 CS" OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

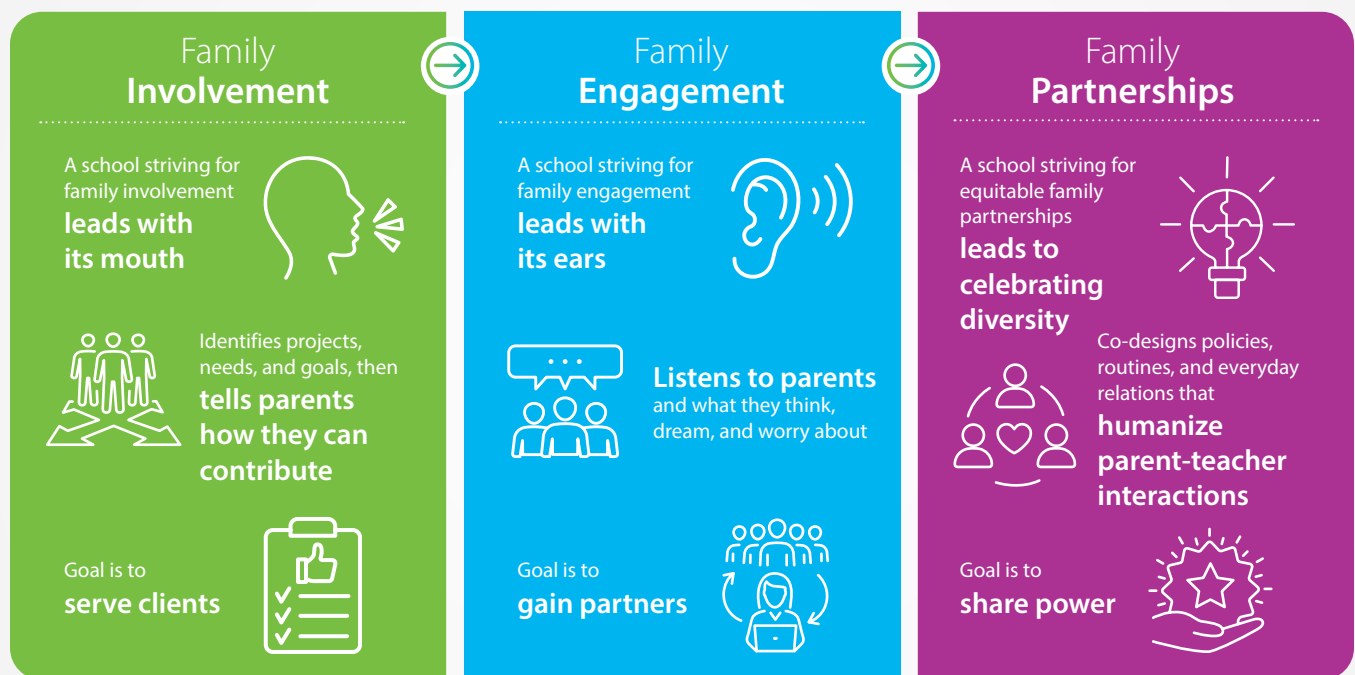
- 1 **Capabilities**  
Human Capital, Skills, and Knowledge
- 2 **Connections**  
Important Relationships and Networks—Social Capital
- 3 **Confidence**  
Individual Level of Self-Efficacy
- 4 **Cognition**  
Assumptions, Beliefs, and Worldview

\*For the purpose of this workplan, the use of the terms family(s), parent and caregiver refers to the adult(s) that are the primary caregiver(s) of a child's basic needs (e.g. feeding, safety). This includes biological parents and family members and nonbiological parents such as adoptive, foster, or stepparents. In addition, terms such as child, children, students and youth are used interchangeably to refer to students in grades K-12.

A growing body of empirical evidence strongly supports the need for educators and schools to form reciprocal partnerships with families and community partners for the overall health and success of youth. Traditional practices of welcoming and engaging families (e.g., bake sales, parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights), although valuable, have now become uniform and superficial outreach efforts. Parents are uniquely positioned to promote their child’s health and wellbeing at home and within day-to-day routines. Schools have the opportunity to provide the ideal setting for collaboration, integrate positive health-focused practices, and foster a deepened family-school connection.<sup>30</sup> Fifty years of

research has demonstrated that family engagement can positively impact a child’s lifelong health and the development of effective programming.<sup>23</sup> For example, students achieve better grades, attend more days of school, increase in self-esteem, and enroll at higher rates in post-secondary education.<sup>20</sup> Educators experience an increase in job satisfaction and greater success engaging diverse students.<sup>20</sup> Families enjoy stronger ties to their children and educators.<sup>20</sup> When families and schools are connected, have mutual trust and shared responsibility for the child’s health, they form an inextricable partnership with endless opportunity to support children’s successful trajectories into adulthood.<sup>25, 31</sup>

**VISUAL 1: Family School Partnerships Continuum<sup>20</sup>**



## What is family engagement?

It is fundamental to have a common definition of family engagement for consistency, clarity and alignment. Additionally, understanding the elements of family engagement will ease decision-making, increase collaboration and reduce resistance to change.

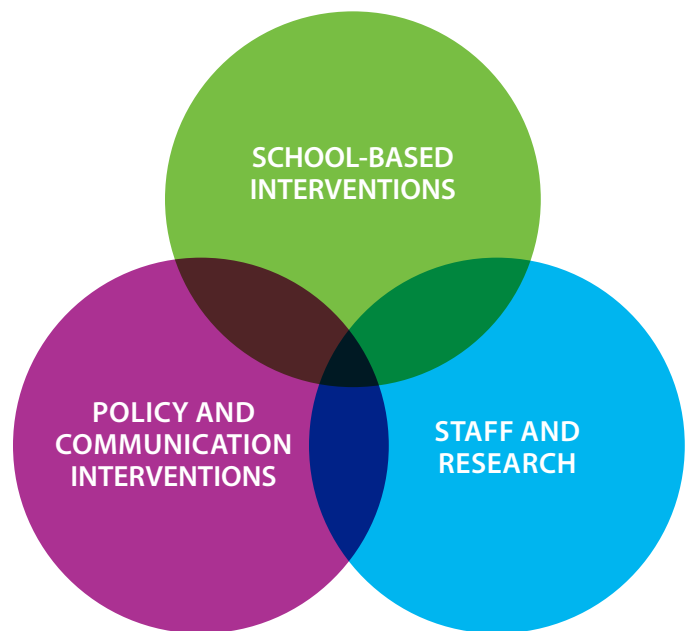
**Family engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development, from birth through college and career.<sup>20</sup>**

Current literature describes “full,” “equal, and “equitable” through the following elements:

- **Full:** Families, community partners, and educators work together as allies to promote children’s learning and development. The goal is for all children to have high quality learning opportunities and the support they need to succeed.<sup>20</sup>
- **Equal:** Families and educators bring equally valuable knowledge to the table. Parents know their children, culture, and community. Educators know curriculum and child development. Those understandings are complimentary and essential to ensure success for all children.<sup>20</sup>
- **Equitable:** Families are supported to work with educators, public officials, and community partners to remove systemic and structural barriers ([Refer to table 3](#)) that perpetuate inequities and injustices. This includes ready access to opportunities that develop their capacity to become full and equal partners. This includes removing and addressing implicit bias and preconceived ideas and attitudes.

At times, the terms “engagement” and “involvement” have been used interchangeably. However, this workplan also considers the notion that family engagement is developed in progressive stages referred to as the “involvement-engagement continuum.” Family involvement, a precursor to family engagement, is school-centered and essentially means schools communicate out to parents to promote ideas to families. Family engagement, however, is parent-centered and is a bi-directional partnership where schools elicit ideas from families, leveraging established relationships to do so.

A clear understanding of these terms ensures that all are working toward achieving the same goal and objective. It streamlines the planning and execution of a family engagement plan that is forged through authentic family-school partnerships designed in nonuniform and nontraditional ways.



# The Purpose and Development of this Workplan



**Family engagement is swiftly becoming a priority for educators across the country. The purpose of this workplan is to offer practical, user-friendly, and evidence-based strategies that the field may adopt and/or align practices within existing family engagement frameworks (e.g., WSCC, Dual Capacity Building Framework, Action for Healthy Kid’s Family-School Partnership Model).**

The overarching objective is to transcend conventional paradigms of family engagement within K-12 educational institutions. It is our intent to cultivate a heightened appreciation for family-school partnerships that not only acknowledge caregiver interactions but also profoundly respects the narratives, voices, and collaborative efforts of caregivers to promote better outcomes for children, particularly within the context of diverse communities.

## Developing this Workplan

The “Family-School Partnership Workplan for Engaging Diverse Communities in Healthy Schools” was developed by Action for Healthy Kids, guided by the WSCC model and widely recognized family engagement models, and informed by current evidence-based best practices.

For over 20 years Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK) has fostered family-school partnerships to improve student nutrition, physical activity, and social emotional wellness. AFHK’s Family-School Partnership Model is predicated on the need for all stakeholders to have a voice in decision-making that affects children’s health and education. The program design, inclusive of intervention strategies and evaluation methods, places community voice at the center, cognizant that childhood healthy habits and lifestyles are driven by the adults and environments in which children are raised.

AFHK continues to fulfill its mission to mobilize family-school partnerships to prepare kids to be healthy in body and mind by partnering with communities and districts with concentrated inequities. It achieves this goal in part through the AFHK District Equity Index. Developed by the organization, the index is comprised of weighted indicators that address poverty, race, population density, student disabilities and per pupil expenditures to acknowledge characteristics in communities that result in health and educational disparities.

In 2020 AFHK Family Connect launched with a team of Family Connectors — trusted parents, caregivers, and trained members of the community to facilitate family-school partnerships that improve kids’ health — in communities across the country.

AFHK also convenes the National School District Wellness Coalition (NSDWC), bringing together leaders from more than 40 urban, suburban, and rural school districts in the U.S. representing more than 7,500 schools and 5 million students. The coalition’s goal is to translate the components of the WSCC model into actionable and realistic policy, programs, and practices for the advancement of the field.

This workplan was designed to motivate and challenge educators to align, advance and/or adopt effective evidence-based strategies to foster authentic family partnerships—the wellness and success of our students relies on our action.

This workplan was informed by a 2023 environmental scan of existing literature on family-school partnerships, family engagement, and family partnerships. The environmental scan included 65 programs and articles. Among the full pool of studies collected, the criteria below were used to determine the 21 programs which evidence-based best practices could be included in the workplan.

### Inclusion Criteria for Full-Text Evaluation of Best Practices and Effectiveness

- The study was published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- The study involved students in preschool through Grade 12.
- The study occurred within the context of a naturalistic setting (i.e., not a contrived or lab setting).
- The study presented the results of a family engagement intervention focused on school/ student health.

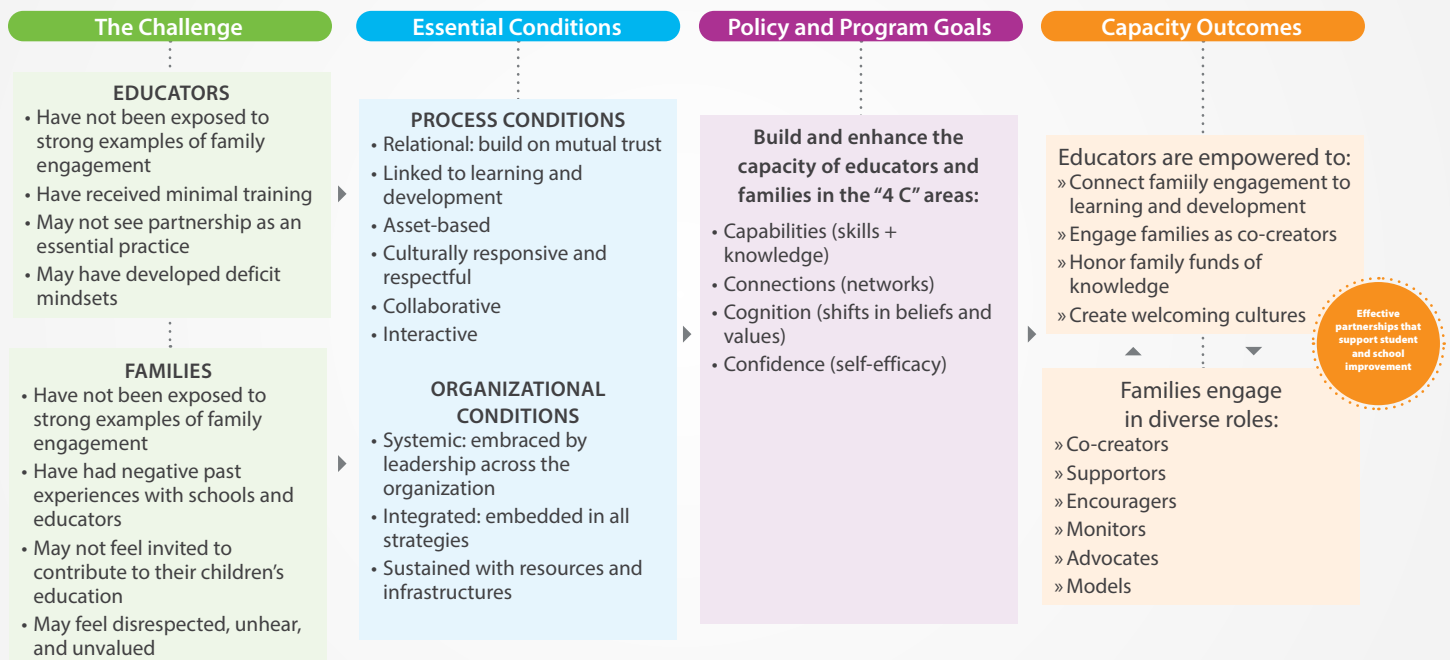
**Programs:** 21 programs and articles are included in this workplan; see complete listing of programs and articles included in the References section.

**Setting:** School, Community

**Age:** PK-12

**Race/Ethnicity:** All

**VISUAL 2: Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (version 2)**



Source: L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2). Retrieved from: [www.dualcapacity.org](http://www.dualcapacity.org)

# Defining School Health Environments and the WSCC Model

Although a healthy school environment encompasses numerous aspects, the CDC concentrates on key areas such as the school nutrition environment and services, physical education and physical activity (comprehensive school physical activity programs), tobacco-free living, and the management of chronic health conditions in schools through health services. These domains are particularly significant as they have a lasting impact on students' health from childhood into adulthood. Additionally, all four areas offer practical actions that can be undertaken both at home and in school to empower students to make healthy choices.

Involving parents in school health activities emerges as a valuable strategy to encourage schools to establish healthy nutrition environments and services, promote physical activity throughout the school day, maintain tobacco-free settings, and offer health services and support to students with chronic health conditions. Schools serve as ideal settings for students to acquire and practice healthy behaviors, with encouraged promotion and reinforcement by families in the home and other out of school settings.

The following sections provide a deeper look into family engagement practices that complement school health practices to strengthen positive family and caregiver partnerships.

**VISUAL 3: Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model**





# Using this Workplan



**This workplan was developed for educators, district staff, families, professional development providers, and key stakeholders working in schools and districts to establish, expand, and/or evaluate effective family engagement. By sharing research that identifies best practices through practical examples of successful programs, the workplan may be used by:**

- Educators, district staff, and family liaisons in schools to evaluate their practice and engage in dialogue with school and community leaders around equitable family-school partnerships.
- Principals (school leadership), professional development providers, and family engagement district coaches/staff to help structure the scope and sequence of strategic initiatives and continuing learning opportunities.
- Nonprofit organizations, associations, and community organizations to develop family liaison advocacy programs for high-quality education in school districts and communities.

## Recommended Strategies

The literature revealed common family engagement strategies that demonstrated to be highly effective. When family-engagement strategies impacted these three areas:

- 1) school-based interventions,
- 2) policy and communication interventions, and
- 3) staff and research,

they increased student and school success and the community's capacity to advocate for better schools<sup>17</sup>. In addition, the following five strategies, when used to impact school-based interventions, policy and communication interventions, and staff and research, were key to effective family engagement ([see Table 1](#)).

The recommendations presented here draw from expert insights and practical experiences but are not intended to be ranked in importance or exhaustive. Since each school's circumstances are unique, some of these suggestions may be more effective in specific school districts or educational institutions. Nevertheless, sustaining parental involvement can prove challenging, especially as children progress into adolescence and transition to middle and high school.

Review the following strategies listed below. Evaluate where your school, staff, or intended audience falls within the family school partnership continuum, as referenced in Table 1. It's worth emphasizing that these strategies aim to enhance existing family engagement practices with the intended north star of embracing a comprehensive family partnership approach.

**Strategy 1 — Build Family and Educator Capacity**

Coach educators and families on developing asset-based mindset and beliefs towards one-another while differentiating each group unique skillsets and critical roles in youth development. Retain teacher commitment through allocating planning time, professional learning opportunities, and resources for school leaders and staff to implement authentic and constructive family engagement practices.

**Strategy 2 — Share Decision Making Power with Families**

Prioritize family engagement as a shared responsibility between all stakeholders: superintendent, educators, school boards, parents/caregivers. Parents and families play a key role in contributing to successful initiatives within the school community; leveraging family voices, experiences, and expertise through a shared decision-making approach leads to increased engagement, and better alignment to family needs and interests. Strive for district infrastructure to sustain family

advocacy initiative that can focus on school health and policy reform.

**Strategy 3 — Re-imagine parental allyship to support student health and achievement**

Re-imagine how educators engage parents/caregivers within the classroom that supports positive and authentic relationship building. Re-imagine how families/caregivers can be seen and utilized as natural allies in school environment, working together, in partnership to build and sustain effective strategies and practices to support student health and achievement.

**Strategy 4 — Integrate and Co-design Culturally Sustaining School Culture Practices**

Acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate the strengths and diversity of student and families by integrating cultural experiences that honor marginalized and non-dominant students. Co-design school improvement plans with family and community voices systematically prioritized. [Refer to Visual 6.](#)

**Strategy 5 — Strengthen school health outcomes through targeted school health evaluation**

Identify your schools' strengths and weakness, define goals suited for school and district needs, and document actionable next steps to show progress by using school health data assessments.



# Developing School Health Lens for Family Engagement Practices

Family engagement plays a pivotal role in enhancing both educational and health outcomes for youth. While family engagement initiatives can be comprehensive, incorporating a school health perspective into these practices can help ensure alignment with school health policies and practices, thus simultaneously magnifying educational and health impact in youth.

To enhance parental involvement in school health initiatives, schools must establish positive connections with parents and offer a diverse array of activities and frequent opportunities for comprehensive parental engagement. Since each school possesses unique characteristics and requirements, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing a standardized family engagement plan. As you continue reading the workplan, Table 1 outlines examples of how these strategies can be integrated in varied family engagement practices.

**TABLE 1: A Closer Look into Family Engagement Impact Areas**

Area of Impact	Strategy	Example(s)
<b>School-based intervention</b>	Build Family and Educator Capacity  Re-imagine parent allyship to support student health and achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide Professional Development and Co-learning Opportunities focused on key topics, such as:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connection between Student Health and Academic Achievement</li> <li>Developing and reviewing your school health and wellness policies</li> <li>Creating culturally responsive spaces for relationship-building. <a href="#">See Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates.</a></li> </ol> </li> <li>District Programs where parents have designated physical space in schools and time for families to meet and build relationships. See Irving School District - <a href="#">See LA School District-Office of Student, Family and Community Engagement.</a> <a href="#">See Fresno, CA School District - Fresno ISD Parent University.</a></li> <li>Tailor conversations with parents that are grounded in structured topics and active listening to support student learning (<a href="#">reference Check-in Questions on page 14</a>).</li> </ol>
<b>Policy and Communication</b>	Share Decision Making Power with Families	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give parents opportunities to be involved in developing or reviewing school health and safety policies, such as policies pertaining to alcohol, drug, and tobacco use prevention; injury and violence prevention; foods and beverages allowed at school parties; frequency of class celebrations involving unhealthy foods; and non-food rewards. Refer to AFHK School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide (SHI). <a href="#">Action For Healthy Kids School Health Index</a></li> <li>Invite community partners who provide health services for students or parents to school or parent meetings to talk about their services and seek input on ways they can collaborate with the school and students' families to best meet their needs. <a href="#">See New Rochelle ISD.</a></li> <li>Create a Family Advisory Board where families can serve on school-based committees and district councils to lend parent and family perspective.</li> </ol>
<b>Research and Development</b>	Integrate and Co-design Culturally Sustaining School Culture Practices  Strengthen school health outcomes through targeted evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower principal leadership practices that creates "community-ready" schools in which educators see themselves as part of the neighborhood.</li> <li>Review all marketing and communication language grounded in assets-based rhetoric to create champions and advocates of school health versus listeners and digesters of school health information.</li> <li>Seek partnerships with research organizations like colleges and universities for additional support. Perhaps in exchange for professional development and staff training partners can conduct research in the school. <a href="#">See University of Washington's College of Education .</a> <a href="#">See UCONN-Department of Educational Psychology.</a></li> <li>Use School Health Assessments that can provides valuable insight into the health of your school. <a href="#">See Action For Healthy Kids Resources.</a> <a href="#">See Healthier Generation Resources.</a></li> </ol>

# Involvement, Engagement, and Collaboration Practices

This section provides additional examples of family engagement practices. Understanding that creating equitable partnerships among families, schools, and communities is a gradual process, this is an initial step of presenting a series of overarching recommendations. The goal is to scaffold parent, educator, and school environment leadership that can ultimately sustain parent/caregiver partnerships. This progression can be illustrated visually, with family involvement at one end and comprehensive family partnership at the other. By recognizing where you fall on this continuum and actively working to move towards the family partnership end, we can maximize the benefits of collaboration between schools and families, promoting holistic student well-being. The examples listed in the next section provide actionable steps that can move you through from family involvement to family partnerships.

## Examples of School Health and Family Engagement Practices

1. Offer a variety of opportunities to parents on activities centered around school nutrition, physical education, and health and wellbeing conditions specific to school and district needs.<sup>26</sup>
2. Collaborate with your school health team to prioritize a list of school health activities and events your school and/or district is committed to each school year. Share these initiatives at the top of the school year to incentivize parent participation and commitment.<sup>26</sup>
3. Empower families and caregivers by including them in crucial decisions, such as shaping school health policies, safety plans, curriculum choices, and more. For guidance, consult CDC's School Health Index.<sup>26</sup>
4. Try Fundraising! Work with community partners to organize events with marketing efforts that promote healthy schools. Create an agreement with community partners to develop and support school health programs and activities.<sup>26</sup>
5. Establish a dedicated team or committee to oversee parent engagement. This committee can be formed through the PTA, the school wellness committee, or other school-parent groups. It's essential to ensure that this committee includes a diverse representation of parents who reflect the demographics of the school community.<sup>26</sup>
6. Join the Active Schools network and support the implementation of an physical education and physical health programming on your school campus.<sup>26</sup>
7. Translate health-related materials into different languages or provide bilingual interpreters to assist non-english-speaking families at school health events and provide sign language interpreters for those who have an hearing impairment.<sup>26</sup>
8. Host parent-only social events at the school focused on information to parents on how the school works and how the school and parents can work together to promote the learning and health of their children.<sup>26</sup>
9. Give parents who have children with special health care needs (e.g., asthma, diabetes, or food allergies) opportunities to help develop and shape staff professional development events (e.g., educational sessions related to specific chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or food allergies).<sup>26</sup>
10. Support learning at home through hosting discussions about how parents can support healthy behaviors at home.<sup>26</sup>

11. Create community learning hubs that are grounded in data driven initiatives.<sup>2</sup>
12. Conduct Empathy Interviews to build trust with families/caregivers and gather data to encourage family voice for future guidance on major school changes.<sup>5</sup>
13. Parent Support and Student Life Transitions
  - a. Transition to Middle School is a four-week program that enables parents to gain confidence in guiding and monitoring their child’s educational and social development during the important transitional stage between elementary and middle school, so the child is prepared for and ultimately successful in college. The programs provide interactive lessons about the importance of education, adolescent social development, academic success strategies, and college preparation.
14. TryParent — Teacher Home Visits learn more about the positive impacts of PTHV’s Five Non-Negotiables approach.<sup>20,22</sup>
15. Integrating Family Culture and Experiences in Classrooms.<sup>22,32</sup>
  - b. Picture Collages of all families.
  - c. Family Conferences led by students and parents that support youth and parents as experts in the room.
16. Equip families to navigate the system — parents learn how to express their ideas and concerns to teachers and staff — encouraging advocacy and problem solving.
17. Establish ongoing two- way communication with families (Student led conferences, workshops, zoom check-ins, social media, sms messaging).
18. Partner with parents and community members to host SEL workshops to promote health beyond the 4 walls of the school.<sup>37,19</sup>
19. Provide multiple opportunities to increase family engagement that foster parent-to-parent networks and parent leadership on various topics.
20. Host Family Engagement Listening Circles to establish a meaningful, symbiotic relationship between families and their schools, it is essential to begin building a trusting, inclusive, equitable culture for families.<sup>37</sup>



For schools and educators to do this work well, there needs to be a full support system from the district and allocated resources dedicated to family engagement. One of the first steps towards developing your vision is to conduct a needs analysis; these check-in questions will equip you to gain a better understanding of the state of your family engagement program and policies.

### Check In Questions to Connecting Parents

Here are some sample questions that can be used for action planning.

- Which new strategy, action, activity, or policy change would be the most feasible and appropriate for our school (or district) to implement?
- Is the school actively engaging parents in school nutrition, physical activity, or health services-related initiatives? For instance, does the school promote parental involvement in activities like having breakfast or lunch through the school meals program in the cafeteria or participating as volunteers in the walk/bike to school program? How does the school communicate these participation opportunities to parents?
- How can parents provide input regarding their preferences for participating in school health activities? Does the school transparently communicate how it incorporates parental feedback into its plans and initiatives?
- Is there a dedicated committee at the school comprising teachers, administrators, and parents that collaboratively oversees the planning, execution, and ongoing enhancement of parent outreach efforts and the overall quality of parent engagement activities? Who will serve as the team lead for coordinating, refining, implementing, and evaluating the Action Plan?
- How does the school establish communication with parents who have unconventional work schedules and those who are English language learners? What contacts or professional expertise does our team need to help move the Action Plan forward?

### Check In Questions to Sustain Parent Engagement

- How many parent engagement activities include strategies to address barriers to parent engagement?
- Has there been an increase, decrease, or relatively consistent number of parents participating in school nutrition, physical activity, or health services-related events or activities compared to previous periods?
- How many of these participants are newcomers to school engagement efforts?
- To what degree do the parents involved in school groups reflect the diversity present in the student body?
- How can we create a culture of professional learning in family engagement practices for all educators?

### CHECK IN QUESTIONS

A good starting point to create productive and targeted conversation with school and district leaders around family engagement practices.

These family engagement school teams may also be called:

- school wellness teams
- parent advisory councils
- school health teams.<sup>26,30</sup>

# Top Current Barriers to Effective and Equitable Family Partnerships

Schools can also ensure the continued involvement of parents by addressing common challenges that hinder initial and sustained engagement. The table below outlines common barriers that schools may face, along with suggestions to overcome these barriers and ensure supportive, effective, and equitable family engagement practices.

## VISUAL 4: Four Barriers to Family Engagement

1



### English Focused Events, Meetings, and Gatherings<sup>26,20</sup>

- » Provide translators at school meetings and activities (volunteer or paid).
- » Ask parents or students (if appropriate) to volunteer as translators at school meetings and activities.
- » Offer educational programs in families' home language.
- » Provide school publications and Web site resources in multiple languages.

2



### Lack of funding and resources<sup>26,20,33</sup>

- » Engage PTA and local colleges to write grant proposals.
- » Designate a professional staff to fundraise and solicit funds from community partners.
- » If the school is a Title 1 school, pursue funds from the 1% set-aside for parent engagement. Find more information at [www.ed.gov/](http://www.ed.gov/).
- » Partner with a local PTA to apply for a healthy lifestyle's grants.
- » Advocate for financial support from local, statewide, federal funding to carry out parent education and family engagement best practices.

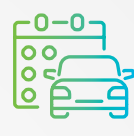
3



### Traditional Communication Methods<sup>26,20</sup>

- » Provide alternative ways for parents to access information and communicate with school staff, aside from attending meetings and activities on school grounds.
- » Be aware of the accessibility challenges that families may encounter due to the absence of internet access or technology devices. Offer alternative methods of digital communication to ensure that information reaches all members of the school community.
- » Use forms of social media such as creating a secure Facebook page for the school, sharing updates via Twitter, and/or getting already involved parents to blog about school events.
- » Ensure family-friendly language is used throughout family communications, that is free of educational jargon, acronyms and at a reading level that parents can easily understand.

4



### Time and Transportation<sup>26,20</sup>

- » Hold events off site, based in a central community location, or virtually online.
- » Go places where families will already be such as community centers, community organizations, neighborhood centers or housing projects, libraries, and churches. Host online meetings with live feed (e.g., webinars). Create a podcast of a meeting and archive it online.
- » Conduct home visits to build trust and establish parents and equal partners in student development.
- » Be mindful of event and meeting times to suit the schedules of working parents and caregivers, along with the provision of on-site childcare during parent/adult-focused functions within the school, ensuring access to childcare can alleviate other childcare-related barriers.



Overcoming the multitude of barriers that schools and families may encounter requires increased awareness, creative problem-solving, and thoughtful planning. Understanding that working together alongside families to identify prospective barriers to family engagement and ideally reaching family partnerships is the key to troubleshooting barriers that may arise. As we address barriers we simultaneously create more successful, and inclusive, family engagement opportunities for families to be equal partners in this work.





# Conclusion

The workplan provides a comprehensive examination of how collaborative efforts involving parents, schools, and communities play a crucial role in establishing an environment conducive to the healthy development of children and adolescents. A central theme that emerges from this workplan is the shift from traditional, one-size-fits-all engagement models to a partnership approach that recognizes the unique strengths of each family in contributing to student success.

The workplan outlines five evidence-based strategies, categorized into three impact areas: school-based interventions, policy and communication, and staff development and research. These strategies aim to drive systematic change within a school district. Importantly, it acknowledges that each school district and school may have a different starting point in this journey and may face varying family engagement challenges.

Our collective objective in implementing this workplan is to provide evidence-based, practical strategies, and support to facilitate equitable collaboration in family-school partnerships.

**Partnership is giving, taking, learning, teaching, offering the greatest possible benefit while doing the least possible harm.**

OCTAVIA BUTLER



## Key Terms

**Child:** In addition, terms such as child, children, kids, students and youth are used interchangeably to refer to students in grades PK-1230.

**Educator:** Refers to teachers, school leadership including district level persons.

**Liberatory:** Free of dominance; the re-imagining of one's assumptions and beliefs about others and their capabilities by interrupting internal beliefs that undermine productive relationships and actions.<sup>22</sup>

**Equity:** Equity recognizes each person has different circumstances and needs. (Hong 2019)

**Belief:** Something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion.<sup>20</sup>

**Mindset:** A way of being; a mental attitude or inclination.<sup>20</sup>

**Allyship:** The actions, behaviors, and practices that leaders take to support, amplify, and advocate with others, most especially with individuals who don't belong to the same social identities as themselves.<sup>22</sup>

**Family:** We emphasize family over parents to honor all adult family members — siblings, grandparents, aunts, friends and neighbors — contribute to a child's development.<sup>20</sup> For the purpose of this workplan, the use of the terms family(s), parent and caregiver refers to the adult(s) that are the primary caregiver(s) of a child's basic needs (e.g. feeding, safety). This includes biological parents and family members and nonbiological parents such as adoptive, foster, or stepparents.<sup>30</sup>

**Non dominant:** Nondominant families who are marginalized and undervalued from the impacts of systemic oppression.<sup>20</sup>

**Multilingual:** Students who are proficient in more than one language.<sup>20</sup>

**Equity Driven:** Giving all children what they need to succeed. In schools that use high impact. practices, students receive the level of support and intervention that their needs require.<sup>22</sup>

**Culturally Sustainable:** Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy views schools as places where the cultural ways of being in communities of color are sustained, rather than eradicated.<sup>28</sup>

**Parent Advisory Committee:** provides advice and assistance to school administrators and educators relating to the Academic Achievement Plan, programs, activities, resources and services in order to help the school attain its goal of providing each child with the best education possible.

**School Wellness Teams:** is an action-oriented advisory group that focuses on the health and well-being of students, staff, and families in a school community. The school wellness committee implements the district wellness policy and leads other health-related initiatives.

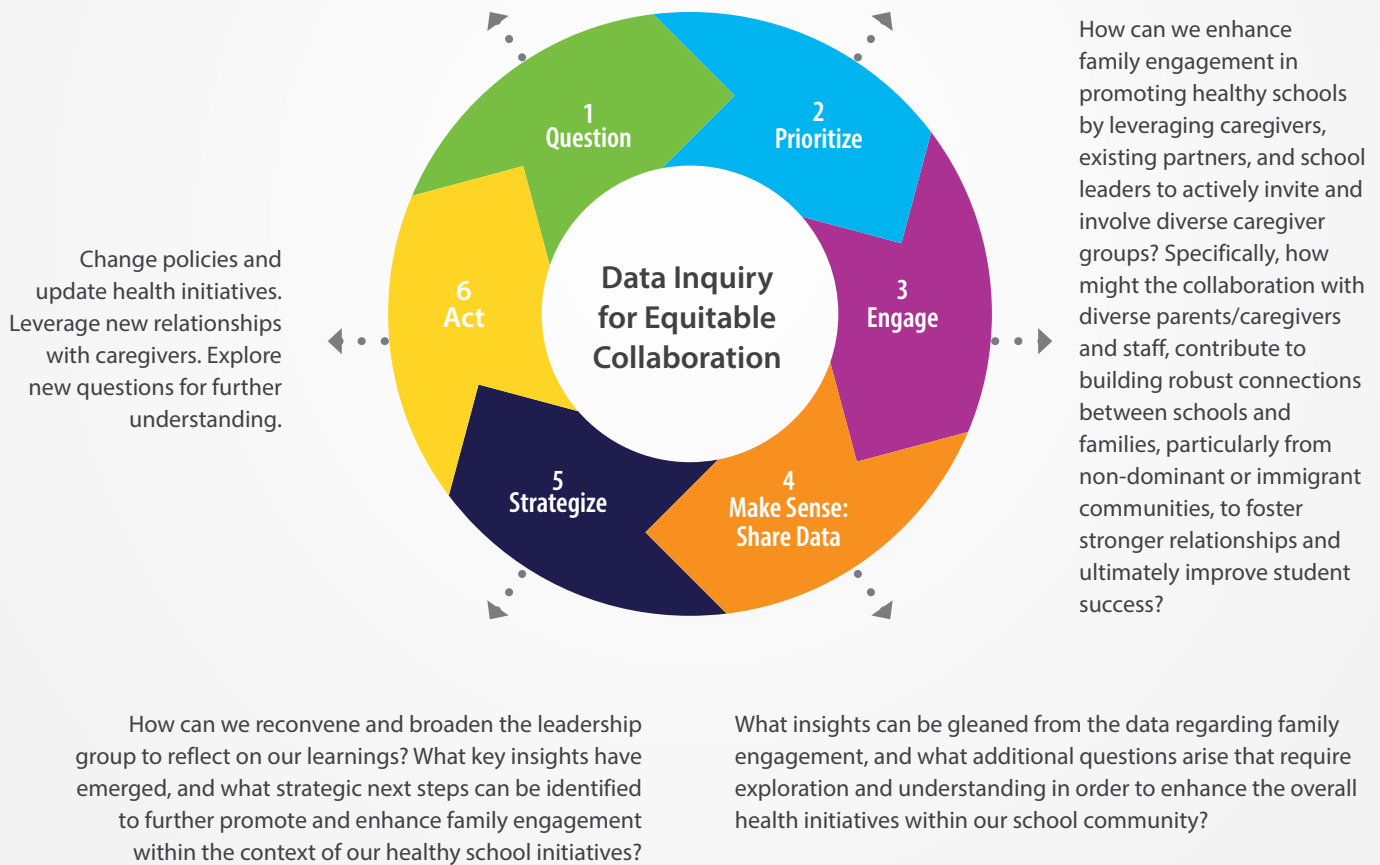


## VISUAL 5: Data Carousel — Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration

The six-step Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration process, which is based on the data carousel, is an example of one form of equitable collaboration available to schools, organizations, and communities. This process helps guide community leaders and organizations on how to raise questions, make sense of data, improve programs, and strengthen relationships and trust between the organization and its community.

Convene a leadership group to initiate the process of promoting family engagement in creating healthy schools. Why is fostering family engagement important in the context of healthy schools? With whom do we need to collaborate to enhance family involvement? What key questions do we have about family engagement, and how will the insights gained be applied to improve our school's health initiatives?

Which specific data sets or methodologies are most relevant to understanding and fostering family involvement in our school's health initiatives? How can these insights be effectively utilized to enhance family engagement and contribute to the overall health and well-being of our school community?



Source: Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration: The Case of Neighborhood House's Data Carousel.20,29

**TABLE 2: Everyone Wins — Essential Conditions and Recommendations for Successful Family Engagement<sup>20</sup>**

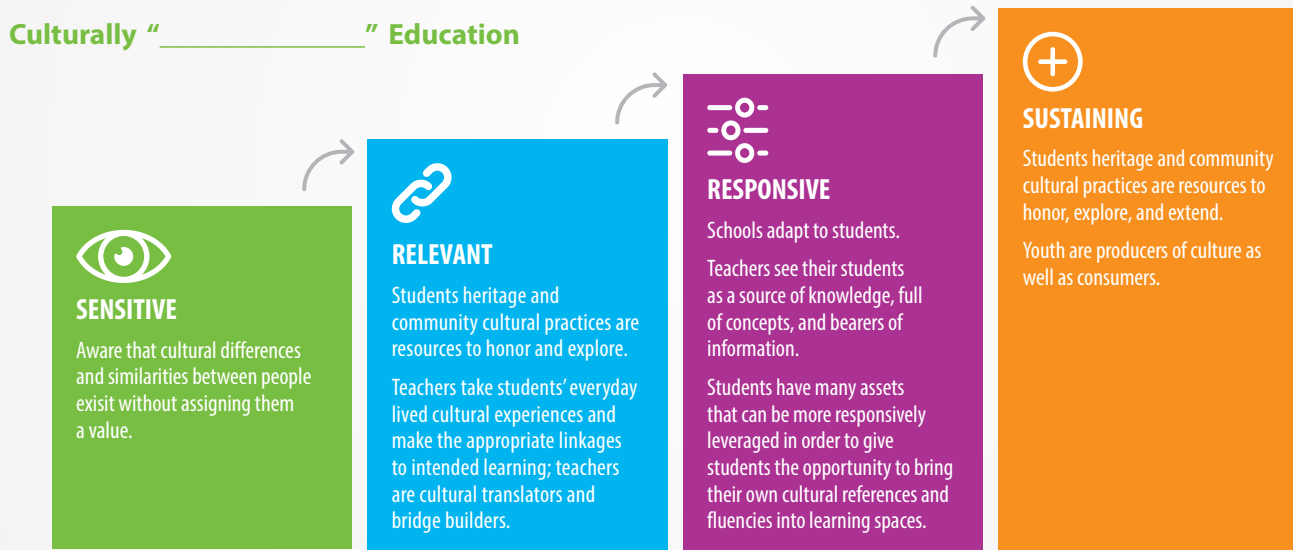
This table reviews a summary of essential conditions and recommendations that can create a culture of positive family and school partnerships. When family engagement is prioritized as an essential strategy in district and school plans it is a powerful tool to that creates more equitable environments for youth and families.

Essential Conditions	Recommendations
1 <b>Strong, trusting relationships among families, schools, and communities lay the foundation for all other efforts to succeed.</b>	Intentionally cultivate relationships of trust and respect
2 <b>Authentic two-way communication is key to developing trusting relationships and deeper understanding.</b>	Start family engagement practices early
3 <b>Family-school-community partnerships can be transformative at both the personal and institutional level.</b>	Communicate clearly and continuously
4 <b>Meaningful family engagement practice must be systemic and sustained through resources, leadership, support, and infrastructure.</b>	Focus on equity
5 <b>When family engagement is a core value of school systems, it is a powerful equity strategy.</b>	a) Prepare educators at all levels to work with families b) Extend networks and partnerships

Retrieved from *Everyone Wins!*

**VISUAL 6: Culturally Sensitive, Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Assessment**

The icons featured in the illustration aim to clarify the distinctions between these terms. It’s important to observe that these terms are depicted in a hierarchical manner, resembling a step ladder. Specifically, it emphasizes that for instruction and assessment to be culturally sustaining, they must first embody qualities of cultural sensitivity, relevance, and responsiveness.<sup>28</sup>



**TABLE 3: Systemic and Structural Barriers to Family Engagement**

This table outlines ten systematic obstacles within a school district, which could potentially contribute to the adverse experiences that parents and caregivers encounter throughout the academic year.<sup>20</sup>

Systematic Barriers	Family Engagement Strategies
<b>Access to Quality Education</b>	Many families in underserved communities may have limited access to quality educational resources. They can work with educators and community organizations to advocate for improved funding for schools, updated curriculum materials, and better-equipped classrooms.
<b>Digital Divide</b>	The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide, with some students lacking access to technology and the internet for remote learning. Families can collaborate with schools and community organizations to provide devices and internet connectivity to underserved students.
<b>Transportation Challenges</b>	Some families face transportation barriers that affect their children's attendance and participation in school activities. Communities can work on providing safe and affordable transportation options to ensure students can get to school and extracurricular activities.
<b>Inequitable Resource Distribution</b>	In some cases, schools in lower-income areas may receive fewer resources than their wealthier counterparts. Families can join forces with community partners and advocate for fair funding formulas and resource allocation that ensures all schools have access to essential.
<b>Special Education Services</b>	Families of students with disabilities may encounter challenges in accessing appropriate special education services. By working closely with educators, they can ensure that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are tailored to their child's needs and that necessary accommodations are provided
<b>Health and Nutrition</b>	Access to healthcare and proper nutrition can impact a student's ability to learn. Families can partner with schools to establish school-based health clinics, nutrition programs, and resources to address students' physical and mental health needs
<b>Language Barriers</b>	Families with non-English-speaking backgrounds may face language barriers when engaging with the school system. Schools can provide translation services, bilingual staff, or community workshops to facilitate communication and ensure that all parents can participate in their child's.
<b>Cultural Insensitivity</b>	Schools may sometimes lack cultural sensitivity, which can alienate students and their families. Parents can collaborate with educators to promote culturally responsive teaching practices and curriculum that reflect the diverse backgrounds of students.
<b>Discipline Disparities</b>	Some students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, may face harsher disciplinary actions compared to their peers. Families can work with educators to implement restorative justice practices and policies that address the root causes of behavior issues rather than relying solely on punitive measures.
<b>Limited Extracurricular Opportunities</b>	Not all students have equal access to extracurricular activities due to financial constraints or lack of transportation. Families can advocate for affordable after-school programs, scholarships, and improved transportation options to ensure all students can participate.

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