

California's Great Start

Family and Community Partnership Toolkit

Aligning Strategies for Partnering with Families and Communities to Support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging from Preschool through 3rd Grade

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond, for setting a vision to leverage historic investments in public education to transform our California schools and ensure equity for all children. This toolkit is intended to support Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) through 3rd grade programs to serve all children well.

Special thanks to Shanna Birkholz-Vasquez, Associate Director, Early Education Division (EED), and external consultants, Beth Meloy, Ph.D., and Raquel Diaz Ph.D., whom partnered in the development of this document.

Thanks are also extended to the following California Department of Education (CDE) staff members for their contributions: Tony Thurmond, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; Mary Nicely, former Chief Deputy; Opportunities for All Branch (OFAB); Sarah Neville-Morgan, former Deputy Superintendent, Opportunities for All Branch (OFAB); Stephen Propheter, Division Director, EED; Stephanie Myers, Education Administrator, Early Education System Improvement Office (EESIO), EED; Nicole Seymour, Education Programs Consultant, UPK Implementation Support Office (UPK ISO), EED; Valentina Ware, Child Development Consultant, UPK ISO, EED; Dr. Lillie Moffett, Education Research and Evaluation Consultant, Director's Office, EED; Joanna Englehardt, Child Development Consultant, EESIO, EED; Kim Taniguchi, Child Development Consultant, Inclusion Support Office; Stacy Anagnostopoulos, Education Programs Consultant, UPK ISO, EED; and Noelia Hernández, Education Administrator, Special Education Division.

Thanks are further extended to our partners who contributed their generous review and helpful feedback, including Heather Snipes (El Dorado County Office of Education), Steven Hicks (Sacramento County Office of Education), Antionette Fabela (Indian Child Welfare Act Consultant & Child Development trainer, California Academies), and Adrianna Diaz (SEAL).

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What is Family Engagement and Why Does it Matter?	3
Moving Beyond Engagement: Why Family Partnership is Our Goal	6
What is Community Engagement and Why Does it Matter?	7
What is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and Why Does it Matter?	9
How to Develop and Implement Effective Family Partnership Policies and Practices	14
Step 1: Assess Current Policies and Practices Related to Family Partnership	15
Step 2: Identify Family Partnership Improvement Goals	15
Step 3: Identify Strategies for Improving Family Partnerships	16
Step 4: Seek Input from Interest Holders	16
Step 5: Identity Implementation Partners and Co-construct a Timeline	17
Step 6: Implement Policies and Procedures	17
Step 7: Evaluate and Improve	17
Conclusion	18
Family Partnership Tools and Templates	19
Family Partnership Policies and Practices Self Assessment Tool	20
Sample Communication to Families (Template)	23
Sample Communication to Educators and Staff (Template)	24
Family Meeting Form (Tool)	25
Sample Family Partnership Orientation Agenda (Template)	28
Sample Family Newsletter (Template)	29
Family Voice Resource (Tool)	31
Additional Resources	33
Resources to Share with Families	33
Staff Professional Development Resources	33
Resources to Support Inclusive Practices for Family Engagement	34
Appendix A: School Readiness and Family Partnership	37

Family and Community Partnership Toolkit

Aligning Strategies for Partnering with Families and Communities to Support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging from Preschool to 3rd Grade

Introduction

The purpose of this toolkit is to support a shared understanding of what it means to partner with families and encourage preschool through third grade (P-3) leaders, educators and staff to build upon the lived experiences and cultural assets of families and communities to create welcoming environments in their schools and programs. This toolkit focuses on supporting UPK programs and elementary schools to engage families in decision-making processes that impact their children. To enable effective family engagement and partnership, this toolkit provides specific strategies for leaders, educators, and staff working with families from historically marginalized communities to partner actively with them in their children’s educational journeys.

This toolkit supports local educational agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage in a process of inquiry and reflection related to family engagement and partnership as well as their approach to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Ultimately, the goal of this toolkit is to support leaders, educators and school or program staff, who are faced with many competing priorities, to partner with families openly and effectively in service of the well-being of young children. This toolkit was developed with input and feedback from key interest holders and offers best practices, strategies, and resources for improving engagement of California’s youngest learners and their families.

What is Family Engagement and Why Does it Matter?

Family and community engagement are critical strategies for advancing equity. Research demonstrates that effective family and community engagement significantly contribute to children’s learning and development.¹ Family engagement is not an isolated event, but an interactive process through which program or school staff, family members, and their children build authentic, positive and goal-oriented relationships.

Genuine and effective family engagement requires a sense of shared responsibility for

¹ Hall, C. M. (2020). The Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement. *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, 22(2), n2; Rudo, Z., & Dimock, V. (2017). How family, school, and community engagement can improve student achievement and influence school reform. *Nellie Mae Foundation*, 269-280.

children's well-being and success and mutual respect among families and schools/programs for the roles and strengths each brings to supporting children's growth and development. Families know their children better than anyone—their strengths, vulnerabilities, talents, and needs. They are experts on their own cultures and traditions and can help educators develop activities that share what they want their children to learn and experience.

Engaging families involves creating opportunities for collaboration with families both inside the home, at the program or school site, and out in the broader community. Activities should be designed to support children's well-being and extend their learning. These activities should foster collaboration with families to meet their children's needs in the classroom or program and at home and provide educators with information about cultural, racial, religious, and other child and family assets to enhance their teaching practices.

Family engagement should elevate and facilitate the role of parents and other caregivers in supporting and advocating for the needs of their children and shaping the policies and practices that guide P-3 educational systems and programs. Inviting family voices to be heard is crucial to ensuring that a child's needs are effectively met and their strengths are effectively built upon. Programs and schools should create meaningful opportunities for families to share both their culture and traditions and their insights, collaborate on decisions, and actively participate in their child's educational journey.

Activities provided by the school or program, for use in the home should build upon family strengths and may include providing resources such as culturally and linguistically affirming books or digital content, in the family's home language, to support learning in the home alongside activities or strategies that support learning and healthy relationships (for example, reading logs, table talk prompts, daily routines, or health and safety activities). It is critical that these activities be supported at no cost to families. School or program-based family engagement activities and opportunities can take many different forms and should take place at different times to engage as many families as possible.

Opportunities may include leadership and governance opportunities for family members, volunteer opportunities in the school or program (e.g participating in assemblies or special events), opportunities to lead classroom activities (for example, a cultural celebration or reading a book to the class), and opportunities to connect with other families in the school or program community (for example, through virtual tools like apps, or family fun nights at the school or program or out in the broader community). Families can also provide support at home in various ways, including helping educators prepare materials needed for class activities, creating visual aids, contributing expertise

(such as sharing cultural traditions) that can enrich lessons, translating materials, co-constructing or providing activities in the classroom and providing feedback.

The relationships between families and educators is critical to the success of family engagement efforts and ultimately child outcomes. Families can only share their knowledge of their children and communities if they feel invited, safe, and welcomed to do so. Educators and school or program staff can only utilize and benefit from this knowledge if they recognize, are receptive, and are supported by site leaders to welcome the contributions of families.

Research suggests that the quality of the family-educator relationship may be especially critical and beneficial for children of color, multilingual children, children living in poverty, children experiencing homelessness, children with disabilities, and children living in rural areas.² The relationship and partnership between educators and families is first and foremost the responsibility of educators and school staff, including leadership. Families contribute their rich histories and unique perspectives, shaped by their lived experiences with government and education systems, to their relationships with their child's educators and school or program staff. It is the responsibility of the educator and school staff to reflect on their implicit and explicit biases, in order to encourage open communication and form genuine partnerships with the families they serve.

Every family is unique

It is important to recognize and embrace the diversity of family structures, including multigenerational families, LGBTQ+ families, single-parent families, foster families, multi-ethnic families, unhoused families, and other unique family dynamics. Each family brings its own culture, traditions, strengths, challenges, and needs, and acknowledging these differences ensures that we provide tailored opportunities and create inclusive environments where every family feels valued and understood. Providing opportunities for families, especially in the first years of school, to be actively engaged in their child's education is key. Regardless of family structure, ensuring opportunities to contribute, participate, and feel invested in their child's educational journey from the very beginning is essential to fostering strong family partnerships.

² Boomer, A. (2023). Striving to Increase BIPOC Family Participation in Early Childhood Family Education; Cummings, K. P., Hardin, B. J., & Meadan, H. (2017); Witte, A. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2011). Family engagement in rural schools. *Handbook on family and community engagement*, 153-156; Moody, S. M., & Matthews, S. D. (2022); Reading without words: Cultivating bi/multilingual family engagement. *The Reading Teacher*, 76(2), 122-130; Garbacz, S. A., Herman, K. C., Thompson, A. M., & Reinke, W. M. (2017). Family engagement in education and intervention: Implementation and evaluation to maximize family, school, and student outcomes. *Journal of school psychology*, 62, 1-10.

Educators and school staff will benefit from intentional support and professional development to identify and address both implicit and explicit biases, empowering them to build stronger, more effective, and more transparent partnerships with the families they serve. In addition, many school or program leaders, educators and staff will need support to reflect on and address their own biases and recognize the importance of acquiring knowledge and expertise about their communities including the languages, cultures, values, and interests of the children and families they serve.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Black/African American Families

Welcoming and partnering with Black/African American families means fostering spaces where Black/African American families feel heard, valued, and welcomed. Creating a climate that facilitates partnership requires schools and programs to recognize the unique language, traditions, and cultural strengths and contributions that Black/African American families bring to the school community. It also requires programs and schools to actively seek their input in decision-making processes. Schools and programs must move beyond surface-level engagement to build deep, authentic, trust-based relationships that honor Black/African American families as essential partners in their children's education.

Partnering with families starts with recognizing everyone has a shared interest in the success of children. When you acknowledge and affirm the assets, progress, and excellence of every child, you set the stage for genuine partnership where communication and interactions are centered on empathy and sincere dedication to the well-being of Black/African American children. True partnership involves listening with humility, being accountable for change, and implementing practices that center transparency, equity, justice, and inclusion in every aspect of education. By doing so, schools can begin to build or rebuild trust and celebrate the brilliance and joy of Black/African American children, families, and communities.

Moving Beyond Engagement: Why Family Partnership is Our Goal

While terminology is important, it is far outweighed by the impact of effective practices in educating young children and supporting their families. For many years, including families in education, from early learning to kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) settings, was called family involvement. This term was used when the school setting was generally seen as the central learning environment for children. Families were

given opportunities to be involved in learning by being invited into the classroom or school setting, where the majority of learning was thought to take place.

In recent decades, the term family involvement was abandoned by practitioners in favor of family engagement. Shifting terminology accompanied a shift in philosophy and practice, where working with families became bidirectional. The goal was to move beyond simply involving families in the school setting, to extending children's home life—their culture, language, and traditions—into the classroom. Family engagement also focuses on supporting families to bring the school context, with resources to support learning opportunities, into the home.

Now, we are entering a new era in transforming our educational systems, and the state of California is embracing another shift, this time towards family partnership. Partnering with families means not only working with families bidirectionally and providing all of the opportunities that family engagement embraces, but also encouraging families to lean into their critical importance as their children's first and most important teachers and advocates. By focusing on providing the space for families to play this role, we are able to focus on disrupting long-standing barriers, particularly for historically marginalized communities, embedded in our educational systems. In order to partner effectively with families, we must ensure that all families are invited, welcomed, feel they belong, and are able to use their voice to influence the educational opportunities their children receive.³ This means taking responsibility for actively building relational trust, to enable authentic partnerships with families.

What is Community Engagement and Why Does it Matter?

Research also suggests that community engagement is linked to family and child wellbeing.⁴ Community engagement requires programs, schools, and districts to make intentional efforts to partner with community agencies, local governments, and Tribes so that they can benefit from community resources aligned with child and family needs to improve outcomes.

When schools or programs partner with their communities, they can support access to a variety of community resources and assets including relationships between community members, opportunities to build those relationships, and services and supports (such as social services, transportation services, cultural services, health services, parks, libraries, informal learning institutions, and community centers) available to families in

³Lee, S. M., Chang, Y. E., & Park, J. Y. (2011). A study on effective early childhood and elementary character education through family-school partnership: Based on parents' satisfaction and needs. *Journal of Families and Better Life*, 29(4), 35-47.

⁴Rudo, Z., & Dimock, V. (2017). How family, school, and community engagement can improve student achievement and influence school reform. *Nellie Mae Foundation*, 269-280; Kirby, M. M., & DiPaola, M. F. (2011). Academic optimism and community engagement in urban schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(5), 542-562.

the community. Like family partnership, moving towards community partnership is especially critical for families of color, linguistically diverse families, immigrant families, families of children with disabilities, and families living in poverty and experiencing homelessness, and families living in rural communities.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Families in Rural Communities

It is critical that schools or programs and the leaders, educators and staff who work with rural families understand that rural families may have different priorities and perspectives than urban or suburban families, and tailor engagement strategies accordingly. Rural families bring a host of assets that schools or programs can leverage and nurture in the partnerships they seek to form with them. Families in rural communities are just as interested in and valuable to the learning journeys of their children as families in urban and suburban communities.

Specifically, rural areas often have a strong sense of community where families know and support each other. Many families in rural communities are extraordinarily resourceful and resilient, emphasizing the value of hard work and self-reliance. Many rural families also have a deep connection to our natural environment, and they may have strong oral traditions that rely on stories and shared experiences. Understanding these unique characteristics, which are most prevalent among the families that a school/program serves can help leaders, educators and staff partner more genuinely and effectively with their families.

It is also important for schools or programs to understand and actively work to address the unique characteristics of rural life that can introduce barriers to family partnership. Specifically, families in rural communities may have time limitations and/or work conflicts that make participation in school or program or classroom activities more difficult. Rural families may live far from the school or program their child(ren) attend and may work exceptionally long hours during specific months of the year (especially in farming communities). Addressing these constraints may require schools or programs to offer extra support (such as transportation or childcare) and flexible hours when family participation on campus is needed.

Families in rural communities may also lack access to internet or phone services. Addressing these constraints may require schools or programs to embrace informal networks and flexible communication methods, such as phone trees, home visits, mailed communications, or print-outs sent home with students. Partnering with families in rural communities, as with other families, is most effective when the families themselves are involved in co-creating engagement and partnership strategies. Schools or programs should prioritize getting input and feedback, by whatever means necessary, from families on how best to engage and support them and their children.

Community schools⁵ offer a model for how to effectively engage communities in the program or school environment, activities, and decision-making. Community school strategies can be an effective approach to (1) mitigate the academic and social impacts of emergencies, such as natural disasters, that affect local communities, and (2) organize school and community resources to address family needs that create barriers to learning. Even schools and programs without access to community school funding can adapt and implement community partnership strategies modeled after those used by community schools.

Community School Strategies Worth Replicating:

- Community schools utilize a “whole-child” approach, with “an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.”⁶
- As a school improvement strategy, community school initiatives enable the school to work closely with educators, school or program staff, children, and families to understand and address the unique needs, assets, and aspirations of the community through a lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Community schools are designed to intentionally and collaboratively address the economic and social barriers families face.
- Community schools partner with CBOs and local government agencies to align community resources to realize a shared vision for supporting all children and families in their communities.
- Community schools meet the needs of children by building a positive school climate and trusting relationships with families, along with rich learning opportunities that prepare all children to succeed in college, career, and life.⁷

What is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and Why Does it Matter?

Extensive research evidence indicates that young children and their families encounter disparities in access to and learning experiences in preschool and elementary school based on their intersecting identities, such as their race, language, immigrant status,

⁵ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/ccspp.asp>

⁶ Coalition for Community Schools: Community Schools Fact Sheet. https://www.communityschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/CS_fact_sheet_final.pdf.

⁷ Learning Policy Institute, Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement. June 2017. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-equitable-improvement-brief>.

ability, income, geography, family composition, and adverse experiences (for example, familial mental health, drug or alcohol abuse, incarcerated adult, homelessness). These disparities in children’s opportunities, based on their identities and experiences, are key drivers of child outcomes from P-3 and beyond.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Families of Multilingual Learners

Partnering with families of multilingual learners is similar to partnering with other families in that it begins by setting a foundation of understanding and respect for their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. One fundamental step towards engaging and partnering with multilingual families is to provide communication and resources in the family's home language to ensure accessibility and inclusivity, and whenever possible, use the family's home language to communicate with them in person. In order to build strong, trusting relationships with families, educators and school or program staff must create a supportive environment where parents feel their voices are invited and their perspectives are valued and heard. While this can be more difficult when there is a language barrier, the effort is worthwhile. Using a family's home language may require enlisting the support of an interpreter. Remember that families with Deaf or Hard of Hearing caregivers and/or children are also multilingual families and may require the support of an ASL interpreter.

Knowledge is power, so the more information we can provide about English Language Learner (ELL) supports and processes, especially in transitional kindergarten (TK) through third grade, the more able families will feel to advocate for their children. Schools or programs should share information, ideally in the family’s home language, about how multilingualism is supported, how children are assessed in TK, Kindergarten, and beyond as well as what ELL status will mean for their child, and how their children will be supported to engage fully in every educational opportunity. Educators should also share information with families of multilingual learners that reinforces the asset their children are poised to possess through multilingualism. It is critical that these families are encouraged to continue supporting development of their children’s home language and understand that doing so will support their children to thrive, long-term.

Building these collaborative relationships will serve as a strong foundation to ensure multilingual children thrive in school and beyond.

For UPK programs and elementary schools to mitigate against long-standing systemic inequities and injustices, they must address the past and present racism, ableism, and

other forms of bias through the policy- and decision-making process, and justify any and all revisions, including protocols and procedures for the implementation of anti-bias and anti-racist practices. “Equitable learning systems provide access to resources, opportunities, and experiences to children and families [and create the conditions for] positive outcomes that are not associated with children’s demographic characteristics. [These are systems that] actively and continuously identify and intentionally eliminate manifestations of systemic racism and other forms of oppression.”⁸

By focusing on intentionally cultivating diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, UPK programs and elementary schools can ensure children’s early learning opportunities are not shaped by oppression or impacted by racism, ableism, or other forms of bias. The first step toward intentionally cultivating and promoting these qualities in programs and schools is for leaders, educators, and staff to engage with families and communities to collaboratively define these principles and explore how to support them through their practice.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Tribes

Programs and schools can partner with Tribes to support family engagement by inviting them to co-create strategies that respect and incorporate Tribal languages, culture, traditions, and values. This invitation can include outreach to consult with Tribal leaders and Elders in decision-making processes, working together to:

1. provide cultural competency training for school or program leaders, educators, and staff,
2. organize events that celebrate Tribal cultures and traditions, and,
3. ensure communication in Native languages where appropriate.

To build trust and collaboration, schools should work together with Tribal families to establish regular and open communication channels.

Consider providing training or professional development opportunities to educators and staff to support their understanding of the perspectives that Tribes and Tribal families bring to the education system, including the history of trauma that the U.S. government has inflicted on Native peoples. Working with Tribal families to engage them in UPK and P-3 school settings requires a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges this history and centers the value that Tribal culture and families bring to the education of their children.

⁸ Stipek, D., Iruka, I., and Phillips, D. (2024) Defining Child-Centered Quality: Research Evidence and Considerations. Memo prepared for the California UPK Mixed Delivery Quality and Access Workgroup. [Defining Child-Centered Quality- Research Evidence and Considerations Memo \[CET\].pdf](#) Page 2.

Diversity. Diversity is the celebration of the differences in people, whether those differences are visible or unseen (for example, religion, nationality, ability, or sexual orientation). Embracing diversity in early childhood and elementary settings means treating all children and families, regardless of their backgrounds, with respect and providing opportunities for them to celebrate and share their identities, cultures, and traditions with other members of the school or program community. These opportunities are especially important for children and families from backgrounds that may be underrepresented or marginalized in education systems or the broader community.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Families of Children with Disabilities

Supporting the full and meaningful engagement of children with disabilities in educational settings is critical to ensuring all children have access to the learning opportunities they deserve—and to which they have a legal right. Families play a crucial role in advocating for their children and partnering with school and district staff to support their child’s educational journey.

The eligibility meeting for special education services is one of the first opportunities for district special education staff to establish a rapport with families and can frequently be a stressful and emotional time for parents. When learning that their child might have a disability, parents may experience shock, confusion, or even denial. Approaching this situation with compassion, sensitivity, and open communication is crucial. If program staff are not intentionally supportive during this stage, it is a missed opportunity to engage with families of children with disabilities and may cause some negative feelings that could be harder to repair in subsequent years.

Once a child begins receiving special education services, fostering strong partnerships with their family becomes even more essential. Key strategies for engagement include maintaining open communication through tools like newsletters and parent-teacher conferences, involving parents in goal-setting for their child and communicating regularly about progress, fostering safe spaces for open dialogue, where families can share concerns or feedback, promoting inclusive participation in school activities, providing resources on advocacy and community support, and offering direct assistance during crises to ensure families feel valued, supported, and empowered.

Equity. Equity is both a process and an outcome. It includes the fair treatment, access, and advancement of all individuals. Embracing equity goes deeper than ensuring equality. Equality in education is providing the same opportunities and support to all

children and families. Equity involves identifying and eliminating barriers that have prevented children and families from historically under-served, underrepresented, and marginalized backgrounds from accessing the early learning opportunities available to their peers. Sometimes this means increasing or tailoring opportunities to children and families in order to cultivate their unique strengths and meet them where they are. Equitable practices play an integral role in providing children and families with opportunities to thrive.

Key Considerations for Partnering with Immigrant Families

Creating welcoming and inclusive environments for immigrant families involves several key considerations. Programs and schools should prioritize language access by providing materials and communication in families' preferred languages to ensure accessibility and inclusion. It is equally important to foster cultural understanding among school staff, helping them recognize and respect cultural differences and diverse traditions.

Building trust is essential, especially for families who may have experienced systemic discrimination or trauma. This requires creating a safe and welcoming environment that focuses on cultivating and maintaining strong, positive relationships. Implementing trauma-informed practices is crucial. Additionally, schools should actively involve immigrant families in decision-making processes and plan events that consider their availability and unique needs.

Furthermore, immigrant families face different barriers and challenges depending on their immigration status. Undocumented families may need connections to local resources and support networks, including legal resources, that can offer comprehensive support to help them navigate school systems and respond to any policy changes at the federal or state level. In California, the rights of all children to access a public education is protected, regardless of the immigration status of their parents. See CDE Letter on the CDE Website [Reminder of Obligation to Protect Immigrant Families' Rights to Access Public Education](#) issued January 21, 2025.

By addressing these areas, schools can build meaningful partnerships with immigrant families and create a strong sense of belonging within the school community.

Inclusion. Inclusion means providing opportunities for all children and families to engage meaningfully and completely in the program or school, regardless of their differences. Inclusion is often used in reference to children with disabilities because they

have frequently been systematically excluded from many of the educational and enrichment opportunities available to their peers. However, the principle of inclusion applies to all differences in children and families. Inclusion means actively inviting and partnering with all families in school decisions and activities, ensuring everyone has a voice and feels involved in the learning community. It is critical that elementary schools and UPK programs create inclusive environments and cultivate a culture that facilitates appreciation and celebration of differences and provides the opportunity for all children and families to be full and active members of the school or program community. There are many tools that can support schools and programs in their work to embrace inclusion, including Universal Design for Learning, which is discussed in greater depth below.

Belonging. Belonging is the result of environments and school or program cultures that instill each child and family with the trust and comfort to bring their whole and genuine selves to learning and to their active involvement in their entire learning experience. Belonging is accomplished by cultivating psychological safety and a sense of appreciation among all school staff, families, and children for each other and the community. Building a sense of belonging for everyone in UPK and elementary school programs starts with acknowledging the exclusion and marginalization that many children and families have historically experienced and disrupting longstanding practices that contribute to this exclusion. Like diversity, equity, and inclusion, promoting belonging in UPK programs and elementary schools requires a commitment to examining and addressing bias, both explicit and implicit, so that all children and families are embraced and welcomed by the school or program community.

How to Develop and Implement Effective Family Partnership Policies and Practices

A successful approach to family partnership requires schools and programs to focus on implementing policies and practices that enable leadership, educators, and school or program staff to:

- Engage in self-reflective practices to identify and address implicit biases while acknowledging how systemic biases perpetuate the oppression of historically marginalized groups.
- Create the conditions for educators and school or program staff to succeed by building leadership buy-in.
- Foster strength-based and trauma-informed family/educator bidirectional relationships and cultivate welcoming environments that enhance trust.

- Leverage the transition to elementary school to initiate the engagement process.
- Build community partnerships to enhance engagement, provide supportive resources and ensure community assets are reflected in the program or school environment.

As a district, school, or UPK program, it is important to follow a series of steps to develop and implement family partnership policies and practices. Doing so leverages the deep knowledge of educators, school staff, school leadership, and families within your learning community, ensures acknowledgement of the barriers you face, and supports alignment of new and existing strategies with the needs of the children and families you serve. Processes like these are helpful across many policy and practice areas. Below, you will find suggested steps for establishing effective family and community partnership policies and practices.

Step 1: Assess Current Policies and Practices Related to Family Partnership

In this step, you will assess your current policies and practices to identify any bright spots or gaps. Compare your current policies and practices against the best practices outlined above for partnering with families.

During this step, it is critical to talk to and collect relevant information from families, leaders, educators, and school or program staff (including your student services and special education staff), and community partners (or potential partners) about current policies and practices related to family partnership and their effectiveness. This information gathering may take place during one-on-one conversations, focus groups, or through surveys that include staff and families. As part of this process, you should determine what your current policies and practices are and what impacts they may be having on children, families, and staff. Consider if and how your policies and practices have worked well in partnering with families in the past and how they can be further improved. See the Family Partnership Policies and Self-Assessment Tool on page 21.

When you reflect on participation in the activities or opportunities that you provide for relationship building with families, engagement with school and district decision making, or other areas of engagement or partnership, take stock in not only how many families are engaged, but which families. Never assume that families are not engaging out of disinterest. Instead, look inward to evaluate whether the opportunities you offer may pose logistical challenges for families. Consider the tone, frequency, and method of communication about opportunities and whether you may be inadvertently alienating specific families or groups of families. Consider whether you have provided a translator if needed or if there are other accommodations that need to be in place. All families want to see their children succeed, and every family member deserves genuine

opportunities to contribute their knowledge, culture, and lived experience to the education and overall success of their children.

Step 2: Identify Family Partnership Improvement Goals

Ask yourself what your goals are, how you can best support your staff to achieve those goals, and how you, as a school leader, can guide and empower your team in this process.

It is critical to consider how to collect information from across your community to inform your practices and the goals you set. It may be helpful to reach out to community members, local Tribes, district partners, families, educators, and school or program staff in this information gathering process. Think critically about your current policies and whether your perspective is influenced by biases related to race, socio-economic status, or culture. It is important to challenge our biases in order to make decisions that benefit all children and families.

Utilize the information you gather to prioritize improvement goals linked to changes you want to make to your policies and practices. Allocate time for collective reflection at your district, school, or program site. It is essential that you establish a shared vision with clear goals that all interest holders understand and feel invested in. Take care to ensure all staff understand your school or program's vision for family partnership, how it is defined, and what role they play in fostering it. Before moving to the next step make sure to follow up with those who provided the information to ensure you have accurately captured their input and insights

Step 3: Identify Strategies for Improving Family Partnerships

Identify the strategies that will be most effective for your program, school, or district at this time, while acknowledging any challenges you face. For example, if your school or program serves a community that historically mistrusts educational systems or government entities, consider strategies to create a welcoming environment such as increasing the visibility of your school's administrator, and ensuring frequent and effective communication about "open door policies" and availability to hear from and work with parents, formally and informally. See the self-assessment tool and other helpful resources included below for ideas about strategies to consider.

Ensure your selection of strategies is supported by robust community engagement with attention to the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, multilingual learners, Tribal children, refugee children, and children who experience racial bias and discrimination and their families.

Once key strategies are determined, you may need to identify related funding needs,

opportunities, and any gaps. In many cases, the activities may not require additional funding, though they may require a shift in how existing funding is leveraged.

Step 4: Seek Input from Interest Holders

This critical step will ensure all relevant parties are involved in the selection of strategies and development of policies that could affect them. Having all interest-holders collaborate provides critical opportunities to create welcoming environments and partner with families. Relevant parties might include district administrators, union representatives, principals, educators, school or program staff, community-based prekindergarten (PreK) directors and staff, expanded learning directors and staff, parents and caregivers, students, regional centers, resource and referral agencies, Tribal leaders or Elders, local religious institutions and faith-based leaders, organizations supporting refugee and new immigrant populations, or other important groups in your community, such as community and cultural leaders. Think carefully about how to involve members of communities that may not typically be represented in these conversations, especially representatives from Tribes and Tribal Nations, communities with families who speak a language other than English at home, families experiencing homelessness and other historically marginalized communities.

Step 5: Identify Implementation Partners and Co-construct a Timeline

Implementation partners should include the staff who will be implementing the policies and practices (for example, principals, directors, educators, staff, external consultants, and of course families). Consider whether county or regional organizations are positioned to support your implementation plan as facilitators or partners. A timeline of activities can be developed with a small group of partners representing the various interest-holder groups. The timeline should be clear, attainable, and complimentary of the work individuals are already conducting.

Step 6: Implement Policies and Procedures

Based on the timeline outlined in Step 4, key partners will need to formalize policies and procedures to support agreed upon strategies. A clear vision and consistent communication about the agreed upon strategies, policies, and practices is critical.

Step 7: Evaluate and Improve

The process of family partnership is not a one-time initiative. It must be an ongoing effort that is embedded as a lasting and sustainable part of each school or program's culture.

Using formal and informal feedback from families, staff, and other interest-holders, such as community organizations and union representatives, is critical throughout the entire process. It is important to regularly collect and review this information to inform

continuous improvement. This process may include:

- Conducting focus groups of parents and other family members, staff, and community partners;
- Disseminating periodic surveys in their preferred language to families, staff, and community partners and analyzing the results; and,
- Developing, implementing, and evaluating an improvement plan annually.

It is also important to share findings with relevant interest holders, including teachers and school or program staff, families, and community members. In sharing your findings, it is also important to share what actions you plan to take as you begin Step 1 in the cycle again and work to continuously improve.

Conclusion

Sound family partnership policies and practices are investments in children's success in school and beyond. The mission of both early childhood and TK-12 educators is to support children to grow and thrive. By intentionally partnering with families during the critical early years to support children, we are partnering to lay the groundwork for the foundational learning of early elementary school and set children up for success in whatever path they choose. When families are embraced as equal and genuine partners in their children's journey early on, they are better equipped to support their children's engagement with the education system throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

This toolkit was designed to support school/program leaders, educators, and staff in implementing effective strategies that welcome all families as partners in their children's education.



Family Partnership Tools and Templates

Within this section, you will find resources such as tools and templates to support your engagement with families. These tools and templates include:

- [**Family Partnership Policies and Practices Self-Assessment Tool**](#)
- [**Sample Communication to Families**](#)
- [**Sample Communication to Educators and Staff**](#)
- [**Sample Family Meeting Form**](#)
- [**Sample Family Partnership Orientation Agenda**](#)
- [**Sample Family Newsletter**](#)
- [**Family Voice Resource**](#)

Family Partnership Policies and Practices Self Assessment Tool

This tool will help programs, schools, or districts evaluate their current policies and practices and identify priority strategies to improve family engagement and partnership in their school/program. It is critical that the self-assessment process include perspectives of educators, staff, and families, in addition to school/program leaders. You should consider how to include these perspectives in your self-assessment. For example, this self-assessment could occur at an open meeting with leadership, educators, staff and families, or could be completed by multiple interest holders, separately, and then reconciled to support a plan of action.

Create the Conditions for Family Partnerships	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Using inclusive language and implementing policies that recognize diversity in family structure and ensure opportunities for all families to contribute, participate, and feel invested in their child's educational journey.			
Inviting all families, specifically Black/African American families, Tribal families, Families of Children with Disabilities, and non-English Speaking families, through a variety of communication and interpersonal mechanisms to co-create family partnership opportunities and provide input on key decisions for the school or program.			

Support Educators and Staff to Engage in Meaningful Partnerships with Families	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Encouraging and providing support (e.g. scripts, activity templates, training) for staff-facilitated activities focused on partnering with and engaging families.			
Providing staff with training on strategies for engaging families, incorporating family cultural traditions in the program or classroom, and using effective communication strategies.			
Providing staff with training on recognizing and responding to signs of family stress or trauma in order to offer support to families in need.			

Support Effective Communications and Information Sharing	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Creating a welcoming environment that reflects the languages and cultural traditions of the families served in the school or program and sharing this approach with families through orientations, school or program-wide meetings, newsletters, and other communications.			
Using a system of communication that includes multiple modalities (such as email newsletters, text messages, mobile apps, social media posts, or in-person communication) to ensure accessibility for all families.			
Encouraging consistent, two-way communication between families and school or program leadership, educators, and staff. Considerations may include: (a) offering multiple options such as email, phone call, text, or virtual meetings; (b) identifying preferred methods of communication for each family; (c) establishing designated times for connection such as office hours; and (d) utilizing school websites or apps.			
Providing information to families in their home language.			

Support Learning Environment, Materials, and Instruction	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Providing opportunities for families to share their cultural traditions, languages, experiences, and strengths to enrich the learning environment and classroom or program activities.			
Providing opportunities for input and participation from families in the classroom and program environment, such as cultural and linguistic representation in materials, lessons, and ways to make the space more inviting.			
Ensuring classrooms and school or program sites display signs and other important information in the languages spoken by the families served.			
Ensuring that facilities, equipment, and materials are accessible to all children including children with disabilities, in line with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines. This includes providing adaptive learning tools and sensory areas, and ensuring physical spaces are free from barriers.			

Support Learning Environment, Materials, and Instruction, continued	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Sharing, ideally in the family's home language, information that reinforces the asset of multilingualism, how multilingualism is supported in the school or program, how ELLs are assessed (if applicable), what ELL status will mean for their child, and how their children will be supported to engage fully in every educational opportunity.			
Regularly communicating about learning materials (for example, curriculum updates, newsletters) and child assessment information to families in their home language, to ensure accessibility and promote meaningful family engagement.			
Providing opportunities for families to be involved in goal-setting for their child and communicating regularly about their child's progress towards those goals.			

Seek Continuous Improvement and Feedback	Developing	Progressing	Excelling
Developing a clearly communicated system for interest holders (including community members and families) to provide ongoing, formal and informal feedback on programs, policies, and practices. These can include surveys and focus groups.			
Using educator, school staff, and family or caregiver input to improve engagement strategies and meet the evolving needs of families.			
Creating a plan to analyze the data, being sure to include strategies for disaggregating the data by subgroup to ensure you can identify trends, gaps, and areas for growth—particularly in addressing the needs and experiences of historically marginalized groups.			



Sample Communication to Families (Template)

Dear Families,

As we start this exciting new chapter in our school year, I want to take a moment to share our sincere commitment to building strong, meaningful partnerships with each and every family in our community.

At [School or Program Name], we believe that partnering with families is crucial to the success and well-being of our students, your children. By working together, we can ensure that every child receives the support and encouragement they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Your role as primary caregivers and your child's first educator means that you are extremely important to your child's educational journey and the information you hold about your child(ren), culture, and community is critical for educators and program or school staff to understand. Throughout the year, we will be hosting a variety of events and programs designed to bring families into our learning environment, including *[Add your own: open houses, parent-teacher conferences, workshops, volunteer opportunities, and so forth]*. However, we recognize that many families may have other commitments and may not be able to join those events and invite you to partner with us in ways that work for you.

We hope that you will feel at home at our school [program] and we encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas with us at any time. We value your partnership and believe that you play a vital role in shaping your child's learning experience. To ensure your voice is heard, there will be regular opportunities to share your thoughts and ideas through *[Add your own: parent-teacher conferences, surveys, other feedback channels, and so on]*. Your input will help us create a supportive and enriching environment, together, where your child can thrive.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we can create a nurturing and engaging learning environment where all our students feel they belong and are valued.

Best,

[Your Name]
[Your Position]
[School Name]
[Contact Information]

Sample Communication to Educators and Staff (Template)

Dear Educators and Staff,

As we continue our mission to provide the best educational experience for all our students, it is essential that we reaffirm our commitment to fostering strong family partnerships with each and every family in our community. The collaboration between educators, staff, and families is vital in promoting a supportive and enriching learning environment. We know that families alone hold invaluable information about their children's experiences, culture, community, strengths, and needs. It is only through genuine partnership with families that we will be able to support every child to thrive in our school or program, both academically and emotionally.

To this end, I want to reiterate that I am dedicated to implementing initiatives and strategies that encourage more active participation and meaningful interactions with families throughout the school year, and I am asking you to join me in this effort.

Specifically, we will focus on the following in the coming school year [adjust to reflect your priorities]:

1. **Respect:** We will demonstrate how much we value the perspectives of families we serve by actively engaging and incorporating their voices and insights throughout our school or program, starting with each and every classroom.
2. **Communication:** We will ensure regular, clear, and open communication channels between school and home. This can include newsletters, meetings with caregivers, and communication on digital platforms to keep all families informed and engaged.
3. **Inclusivity:** Our programs will strive to be inclusive and culturally responsive, recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds of our families, educators, and school/program staff.
4. **Supportive Resources:** We are committed to providing resources and professional learning that inform families to help them support their children's learning at home and at school. We also aim to learn from our families and welcome any shared resources from the families we serve in our school or program.
5. **Collaborative Events:** We will host a variety of events that bring together educators, program or school staff, students, and their families to build community bonds and celebrate achievements.

I invite you to share your ideas and suggestions on how we can further enhance our family partnership efforts together. Your insights and experiences are crucial to creating a nurturing and collaborative educational environment. Thank you for your continued dedication and passion. Together, we can make a lasting impact on our students' success and well-being.

In partnership,
Administration Team

Family Meeting Form (Tool)

Note: This form is meant to provide a guide for how to foster family partnership through conversations and support educators to understand a child's background, strengths, and growth areas from the family's perspective, as well as listen and learn from families about their needs and priorities for their child. We recommend sharing the form with families to ensure their voices were captured and heard.

School/Program Site:	Educator:
Child Name:	Parent/Caregiver Name:

Educators will share information with families about how critical they deem partnerships with families to be for a child's success and well-being. Although ongoing, reciprocal communication is recommended throughout the year, educators will meet formally with families at the start of the year in order to gather their input on a child's background, strengths, and potential growth areas in the coming year.

Topic 1: Ask the parent/caregiver to share their child's strengths. Encourage them to think beyond traditional academics and include thoughts about their children's personalities, skills, and so forth. Ask the parent/caregiver family member to share what they hope their child will learn or experience in your classroom this year. Finally ask the parent/caregiver what needs to be done to help ensure their intended hopes come true (both by the school and by them).

Notes:

Topic 2: Ask the parent/ caregiver their biggest fear or concern about their child this year. Ask the parent/caregiver what you can do to help address their concern or alleviate their fear. Discuss strategies that they use at home to support their child and share strategies you might implement in the classroom to get their thoughts and feedback.

Notes:

Topic 3: Ask the parent/caregiver about holidays they celebrate or cultural traditions that are

important to them. Explore whether there are ways to incorporate one or more aspects of the family's culture into your curriculum.

Notes:

Topic 4: Ask the parent/caregiver how they would like to be involved in the school or program and the best ways to support their engagement. Share opportunities for the parent/caregiver to partner, both academically and socially, with the school or program and classroom in the coming year and solicit the family or caregiver's feedback on whether those opportunities will work or if they have other ideas or suggestions to be involved. Together, determine the best way to partner with families and ensure they feel welcome and are able to participate if they wish.

Notes:

Topic 5: Ask the parent/caregiver what is the best way to communicate with them about their child's progress. Share how you were considering communicating information about the child's progress, activities, strengths, and needs throughout the year. Together, determine the best way to stay connected and revisit communication strategies as needed throughout the year.

- Newsletters
- Emails/text messages/messages via a school-wide platform
- Mobile applications (e.g. Parent Square, Class Dojo, etc.)
- Office hours __ In Person ___ Virtual (Teams or Zoom)
- Parent-teacher conferences (share schedule in advance):
___ In Person __ Virtual (Teams or Zoom) __ Phone Only
- Other _____

Notes:

Language Needs or Preferences for Communications

- English
- Spanish
- Chinese _____(Dialect)
- Other _____

Additional Notes:

Preferred method of communication:

- Phone call or text (*circle one or both*) _____
- Email _____
- Parent communication application two-way chat (*Parent Square, Learning Genie, Class Dojo, and so on*)
- Informally at arrival or dismissal
- Notes sent home

Sample Family Partnership Orientation Agenda (Template)

Note: This template agenda is a guide for how to build an effective family orientation agenda that fosters family partnership and is tailored to the families in your community.

Agenda

1. **Welcome and Introductions** - Leadership should make a statement about the school's or program's commitment to family partnership and the value of family perspectives and support. Be sure to acknowledge any prominent cultures or languages shared amongst families in your community and establish your commitment to working with ALL families.
1. **School or Program Policies and Opportunities for Family Involvement** - Share key information with all families about school or program policies, how these policies are decided and how families can get involved, if they wish. This is a great place to share information about parent advisory councils, school site councils, and parent-teacher associations.
2. **Program or Classroom Volunteer Opportunities** - Share information with families about how to be involved in the program/classroom. It is important that families understand any policies or restrictions for volunteering in the classroom or joining in community events. For opportunities that require fingerprinting, consider covering this cost for parents/caregivers.
3. **Communications** - Invite families to share their preferred ways to receive communications. Share with families how you will be communicating with them. Transparency is key. If you share weekly newsletters, or have monthly assemblies, make sure that families know, in advance, what to expect. Communicate with families about the expectations you have for classroom educators (if applicable) and invite them to collaborate with you, the educator and school staff if they ever have concerns. Let them know your school/ or program is always available to problem-solve together to ensure their child's needs are being met.
4. **Discussion** - Provide an opportunity for families to ask questions and *provide input* on what you have shared thus far. It is important to show you are open to suggestions to improve your policies and procedures.
5. **Community Resource Sharing** - Use this time as an opportunity to highlight information about relevant community resources. This could include Health Clinics, Before and After School Programs, Translator services, Immigration Support services, and so forth. Provide an open floor to families who may have connections to other community resources that could support your school community.
6. **Other Topics** - There may be other topics you wish to cover in your Family Partnership Orientation meeting, be sure to think about your own community and the families you serve and include opportunities to share information on these topics and hear input from families.
7. **Closing with Gratitude** - Thank families for taking the time to join the meeting, be sure to acknowledge their critical role in each child's success and reiterate your commitment to partnering with every family. If you received feedback on how to alter your approach or policies to better serve the community, be sure to share a concrete step you will take to follow-up on this feedback.



Sample Family Newsletter (Template)

Dear Families,

Welcome to our [Month] edition of the Family Partnership Newsletter! This newsletter shares information about upcoming school or program events, volunteer opportunities, and community resources or events that may be of interest to you. *Note If this is a classroom newsletter, you may wish to include:* This newsletter also shares the activities we have planned for your children this month!

As always, I value your ongoing support and look forward to strengthening our partnership.

Warm regards,
[Principal/ Program Director/ Educator's Name]

This Month in Our Classroom (If Applicable)

- *Share the focus of the upcoming curriculum as well as any special activities or events in the classroom. Pictures or work samples can help families connect to the classroom.*
- *Consider highlighting how each one connects to a specific standard, objective, or goal—helping families see the purpose behind the learning and the skills their children are developing.*
- *Provide simple ways families can continue fostering this learning at home through everyday experiences.*

Upcoming School or Program Events

- **Parent Advisory Council or School Site Council Meeting**
 - *Date, Time, Location*
 - *Description*
 - *Virtual option to attend (if applicable)*
- **Spring Festival**
 - *Date, Time, Location*
 - *Description*

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

We are always looking for volunteers to help with classroom activities, events, and field trips. If you're interested, please contact [Volunteer Coordinator's Name] at [email] or [phone number]. We understand that many families may not be able to volunteer during the school day, but there are still plenty of meaningful ways to support our students outside of school—through community projects, fundraisers, or extracurricular activities. Your involvement, in any form, is always invited and deeply appreciated.

Remind families of any policies or procedures for being able to volunteer.

Specifically, in our [school/program/classroom] this month:

- ***Provide a description of each volunteer opportunity, time commitment, and how to sign up.***

For example:

- Parents are welcome to come read a book about [Black History Month, Asian American and Pacific Island Heritage Month, Women's History Month, and so forth] or about [Upcoming Holiday]. (*Note: make sure these opportunities are inclusive of all holidays celebrated by members of your community*). Wednesdays at 9 a.m. or Fridays at 2 p.m. Sign up at www.schoolsignup.com

Reminders

- **School or Program Closed: April 3, 2025**
 - Please note that school or program will be closed for a professional development day.

Closing with Gratitude

- Close your newsletter with a heartfelt expression of gratitude. Consider sharing a meaningful quote, a note of appreciation, or a special recognition to celebrate the support and dedication of families and the growth of their children.

Note: This resource is available to schools or programs who wish to share it in direct communication with families.

Family Voice Resource (Tool)

Creating a strong foundation for your child's education begins at home. As a parent or caregiver, you play a vital role in shaping your child's learning experiences and attitudes toward education. Your school or program and your child's teacher (educator) are responsible for informing you about your child's progress and activities while at school and should seek to actively partner with you. However, you can also play a more active role in your child's school or program and classroom, if you wish. This resource is designed to support you and give you tips on different ways to partner with your child's teacher and school. By encouraging curiosity and supporting a true love for learning, you help your child shine. Together, we can unlock your child's full potential, help them reach their goals, and set them on a path of lifelong learning and success.

Your child's educator and school staff recognize the valuable role you play and will work with you to create a partnership that helps your child succeed. There are things that you can do to help support an active and genuine partnership. Specifically, the following strategies can help you form a strong relationship with your child's educator, school administration, and school staff:

1. **Communicate:** While your child's educator is expected to regularly communicate with you, you should feel welcome to reach out and start a conversation, especially when you have questions, concerns, or want to offer insights. Regularly communicating with your child's educators will help you stay updated on your child's progress. Teachers love hearing from parents and caregivers about how to best support their children. Reach out in the way that best works for you, whether it's through email, a phone call, chatting at pick-up or drop-off, or through other communication apps the school uses.
2. **Participate:** If your schedule allows, consider attending school events or volunteering in your child's classroom. If you are unable to participate in the program/classroom, let your child's educator know, and if you are interested, ask if there are other ways you can support them.
3. **Empathize:** Just as your child's educator and school or program staff should approach conversations with you with empathy and understanding, it is important that you take the same approach when communicating with them.
4. **Collaborate:** Work together with educators and school staff to address any academic or behavioral concerns by sharing what works for you at home. Your ideas are valuable to the school and will help your child succeed.

5. **Stay Informed:** Keep up with school policies and any classroom changes to understand expectations. Know your rights to ensure your child is included and supported. If your child has additional needs, reach out to your school or program or district for resources to help you understand your rights and your child's rights.
6. **Support Learning at Home:** Your child's time at home with you is just as important as their time at school. You can reinforce what is being taught in class by providing a supportive learning environment at home and working with your child's educator. Reading together is one of the best ways to support your child at home.
7. **Provide Constructive Feedback:** If you are unhappy about or uncomfortable with something your child's educator, school or program leadership or school/program staff are doing, you should speak up. Your voice and perspective are valuable. When you share your concern or idea for improvement, try to provide feedback in a way that is helpful and constructive (for example, "I've noticed that you appear to be struggling to get my child to pay attention in class, can I share a strategy that has worked for us at home?"), focusing on how both your family and schools or programs can support your child's, the classroom's or your school's success.
8. **Appreciate:** Your child's school or program values your opinion, and your appreciation is meaningful to them. We encourage you to let them know when you feel they are doing a great job. Expressing your gratitude (for example, "I'm so impressed with how well you have supported my child to build new friendships") can also help to build trusting relationships where everyone is more open to giving and receiving feedback.

Additional Resources

These resources can be repurposed for your use or can serve as models for developing your own resources, with your specific program or school's context in mind.

Resources to Share with Families

[First 5 California: Early Childhood Resources for California's Children](#) This resource is for families to learn more about staying engaged in their child's development from birth to age five.

[National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\) Resources for Families](#)

Resources on this web page are helpful parent education tools on how families can support learning and development at home.

[Be A Learning Hero](#) This web page includes templates that help parents create a positive relationship with their children's educators (Dear Teacher letter, parent-teacher conference conversation starter, and so on.

[CAPTA Family Engagement in Schools Matters](#) Information for families to guide their active participation in their children's education.

[Communicate with Families](#) [Comunicación con las familias .pdf](#) This resource describes the importance of oral language communication in children and gives parents ideas on how to strengthen their children's oral language development.

Staff Professional Development Resources

[National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement Core Competencies](#) The purpose of the Family Engagement Core Competencies is to create a nationally agreed-upon and unifying set of professional competencies for the family engagement field.

[Quality Counts California Family Engagement Toolkit](#) This web page houses training modules for early care and education staff to support them in their efforts to engage families.

[Professional Development - Brazelton Touchpoints](#) This 16-hour course offers participants practical opportunities to reflect deeply upon their own reactions to children's behavior, regulate their emotional reactions, and engage families to mutually understand the reasons for their children's behavior. Participants learn strategies that support the child's learning and development, along with their relationship with the child and their relationships within their family.

[Engaging with Families While Accounting for Trauma](#) How can educators use

trauma-informed strategies as they work to engage with the families of their students? In this podcast, they dive deep into the transformation of family engagement in education amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.

[Family Engagement: Authentically Integrating Essential Competencies](#) This brief presents evidence-based key insights for family-facing practitioners to support and cultivate high-quality, equitable family engagement through culturally responsive practices. It asks: What are some ways educators can build partnerships with families that invite knowledge-sharing and collaboration? How might families and school-based educators learn from each other? What actions can be taken together?

[CA Early Childhood Online \(CECO\) Professional Development Modules](#) These free early childhood professional development modules are based on state-of-the-art information and best practices in one centralized location to meet the ever-changing needs of the early childhood field.

[CA Preschool Instructional Network Family Engagement Resources](#) This web page provides a collection of resources from several sources that can support educators in their family engagement efforts.

Resources to Support Inclusive Practices for Family Engagement

[Seeds of Partnership](#) is a CDE project that supports educators, administrators, department of education staff, parent center directors or staff, technical assistance partners, families, and young adults with disabilities across California.

[High Quality IEPs | Supporting High Quality IEPs](#) is excited to serve families and LEAs across California by providing training and resources to support meaningful engagement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

[Family Voice and Choice in the Individualized Behavior Support Process](#) Empowering families to be active and valued participants in the Individualized Positive Behavior Support Plan (IPBS) is foundational to Pyramid Model implementation. This set of tips and strategies helps families ensure their values, assets, perspectives, and preferences are included in individualized support for their children.

[Family Centered Goal Setting-Strategy Description-K-6-Master](#) The website emphasizes the importance of partnering with families in the goal-setting process for students. By involving caregivers, educators can improve goal-setting effectiveness and foster better support for children's learning.

[Family Engagement • Home Language • Multilingual Learning Toolkit](#) This resource web page provides a toolkit for engaging with families of multilingual learners.

[Parent Resource: Benefits of Bilingualism and Supporting Home Language Development for Children in Transitional Kindergarten \(TK\) – Early Edge California](#) This resource shares information on the benefits of bilingualism, the important role of the

home language in English language development, and offers tips and strategies for supporting the home language at home. This resource is meant to be shared with parents who speak a language other than English at home in order to support their child's language development.

[SWiFT Education Center Rightful Presence Implementation Guide](#) The Rightful Presence Implementation Guide by SWIFT Schools offers strategies for creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and have equitable access to education. It provides practical steps for schools to promote belonging, dismantle barriers, and foster meaningful family and community partnerships.

[National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations Family Engagement Resources](#) The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) offers resources to support the social-emotional development of young children and address challenging behaviors. Their tools include evidence-based practices, training materials, and family resources to promote positive learning environments.

Resources for Leaders

[California Safe and Supportive Schools](#) The Resource Library is intended to help state and LEA leaders as they develop practical strategies and programs to address student mental health needs and improve school climate. This library offers guidance documents, toolkits, briefs, research studies, and more that draw on current research in education, school psychology, and other related disciplines.

[National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#) This rubric is designed to provide school leaders with an assessment of their leadership actions toward cultivating a school culture that prioritizes strong family-school partnerships. The rubric is both a reflection tool and a roadmap for school leaders that identifies specific actions leaders can take to create a school culture of partnership with families.

[Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades](#) This policy statement from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) provides recommendations to early childhood systems and programs on family engagement.

[Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California Schools](#) This Family Engagement Framework is intended to provide guidance to educators, districts, schools, families, and communities as they plan, implement, and evaluate strategies across multiple programs for effective family engagement to support student achievement and close the academic achievement gap.

[National Disability Rights Network \(NDRN\) Accessibility Guidelines](#) These guidelines are designed to help any entity ensure that its documents, presentations, videos, virtual and in-person meetings are as accessible and as inclusive of people of all backgrounds, communities, and identities, especially those of marginalized groups, as possible.

[Communications Best Practices Guide for Building Family Engagement Awareness](#) This guide is designed for all Communications teams, educational leaders, and family engagement champions to inform family engagement communications campaign planning.

Appendix A: School Readiness and Family Partnership

CDE’s Transition to Elementary School Toolkit⁹ put forward a definition of **school readiness that emphasizes supporting all children’s success** across multiple dimensions—Ready Schools, Ready Communities, and Ready Children (supported by Ready Families). This definition, explored in greater detail below, applies not only to elementary schools, but to high-quality preschool programs as well. Families and communities play an integral role in children’s school readiness and success. It is only through active, bidirectional communication and partnership with families and communities that UPK programs and schools can foster children’s growth, development, and long-term success.

Ready Schools

Ready schools, among other key characteristics, are schools that welcome every child and their families. They work to facilitate the transition between home and school and strive for continuity between Early Learning and Care settings and elementary schools. Ready schools recognize families as their child’s first and most important educator and actively partner with families, including through relationships with preschool and child providers, to support each child’s transition to school. Ready schools are culturally affirming and actively work to create a welcoming and positive school climate that promotes a sense of belonging for all children and families from the moment the families enter the school campus. Ready schools understand, acknowledge, and take action to nurture and build upon the cultural, linguistic, and other assets children bring, while also addressing areas for growth.¹⁰ Ready schools recognize that children with disabilities and multilingual learners will need additional support to successfully engage in the learning environment and acknowledge that partnering with families is key to providing this support. Ready schools are committed to the success of every child as well as every educator and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.

Ready Communities

Communities also have incredible value and a wealth of information to offer UPK providers and P-3 Elementary Schools as they prepare to support younger learners. Community partnerships provide valuable insights into cultural and community factors that shape children’s learning and engagement, equipping educators and school or program staff with the understanding needed to foster meaningful and supportive relationships with families. UPK providers and Elementary Schools have a responsibility to intentionally reach out and welcome input and collaboration from community

⁹ Note: The link to CDE’s Transition to Elementary School Toolkit requires a free account on California Educator’s Together. You can sign up for an account at: <https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/#>

¹⁰ California Department of Education. (2022). *Equitable Learning Environments for Young Boys of Color: Disrupting Disproportionate Outcomes*, Sacramento, CA: Author.

members, and to utilize any insights they have to offer related to children and families' context and culture. In communities where Tribal Nations are present, schools and districts must be intentional about enhancing the well-being of American Indian and Alaskan Native children and families by embracing core values of respect for Tribal sovereignty and other local Tribes, integrity, and transparency.

Ready communities build upon the strengths families bring and help ensure families and the community at large have access to the resources and services they need to engage in the smaller school community and support children's readiness for school. Ready communities are communities that have been engaged in developing policies to support their own children's school readiness, influence positive school climate, and feel a sense of partnership among schools and families. UPK programs and Elementary Schools have a responsibility to intentionally reach out and welcome input and collaboration from community members, including community-based service providers, who must likewise be committed to working together to ensure the partnerships flourish. School readiness is enhanced when schools, families, and community members work collaboratively to ensure that every child is ready for and actively engaged in learning.¹¹

Community engagement can support this work by ensuring that the assets of the community are integrated into school policies, practices, and activities. Community partners can make the work of family engagement and culturally responsive practices easier for schools and UPK programs by bringing the wealth of experience and expertise into the school. Schools within ready communities leverage community assets to create welcoming environments and nurture the development of all children.

Ready Children Supported By Ready Families

Finally, ready children are supported by ready families. Supporting school readiness and success for all children requires UPK programs and elementary schools to understand the role of both schools and families, and their partnerships with each other, in supporting children's learning and development across PreK, TK, and into early elementary school. Proactively partnering with families is essential to ensuring children feel safe, welcome, and supported. Having practices in place to support dialogue with families early and often are key to ensuring open and effective communication and connections between the school and home environments. Schools and programs should work with families to understand each child's context and history. Families have invaluable insights into what routines have looked like for a child in the past and what strategies have been most successful in engaging and inspiring them in learning.

¹¹ Kauerz, K., & Schaper, A. (2021). Transition to kindergarten: Findings from recent research. National P-3 Center at University of Colorado Denver and Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from: [Transition-to-K_Recent-Research_2021.pdf](https://www.nationalp-3center.org/Transition-to-K_Recent-Research_2021.pdf) (nationalp-3center.org).