



**Family  
Engagement  
in Education**  
*Seven Principles  
for Success*



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER ON

**CHARTER  
SCHOOL**

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE



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This guidebook on family engagement was written by researchers from the University of Southern California's Center on Educational Governance (CEG). CEG combines research aimed at building new theories about what makes schools work with action research and dissemination activities to spread best practices broadly and deeply. With this guidebook, we aim to provide useful information to the many educators and family members across the country who seek ways to work together for the mutual benefit of students, families and communities.

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We dedicate this book to the school leaders everywhere who infuse family engagement as fundamental to the success of their schools, and to the family members whose time and dedication contribute to improving public education.

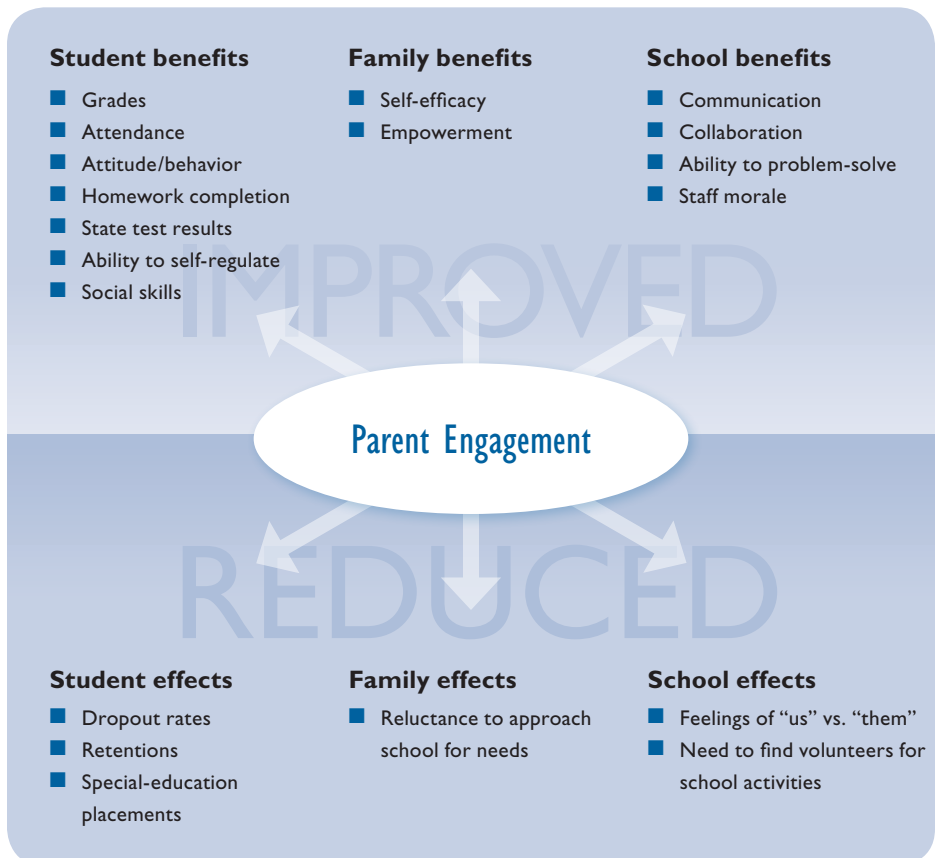
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# Introduction

Families have helped schools and students in schools across the nation in a number of ways. Family members help in classrooms, in the school office, and on field trips. They tutor students, act as mentors, and translate materials for other families. They raise funds for the school, help write grants, and organize activities to promote the school in the community. In the charter school arena, families have helped write charter applications and serve on charter school governing boards.

As a school leader, you may be trying to figure out how to engage parents and families in authentic, mutually beneficial ways at your school. Doing so has been shown to have a range of positive outcomes for students, their families, and the schools. Research has found that when families are involved with their child's school, the school outperforms similar schools without family engagement; teacher morale improves; family members rate teachers more highly; and the school has a better relationship with the community<sup>2</sup>.



Despite the numerous benefits of family engagement, barriers continue to exist, particularly for urban, low-income, immigrant, minority and working-class families. Language barriers, work schedules and a sense of disenfranchisement have generally resulted in lower levels of engagement by working-class parents in urban schools; in particular, those from ethnic and racial minorities. At the same time, research shows the best predictor of urban family involvement at the K–8 level is what the school does to promote this involvement. Knowing what to do will help educators be more effective in promoting family engagement.

The growth of the charter public school movement has been seen as an opportunity for parents and families to play a more central role in their child’s education. In 15 of the 41 states with charter school legislation, the opportunity for enhanced parent and family participation is one purpose behind the adoption of the charter school law. In addition, many state charter school laws include additional provisions around parent engagement, such as:

- Requiring signatures from a certain percentage of parents in order to convert a traditional public school to a charter public school;
- Requiring evidence of parent support during the application phase;
- Including parent engagement plans in the charter application;
- Requiring the schools to be in “regular communication” with parents;
- Giving enrollment preference to students whose parents were active during the application phase;
- Requiring schools annually to assess parent satisfaction with the school;
- Giving parents a vote on decisions related to school closure; and,
- Requiring the school’s governing board to include parents.

Although these laws would seem to facilitate family engagement, a recent study found that many charter school leaders struggle to engage families, despite the legislative intent and their own hopes<sup>3</sup>. With these challenges in mind, and the many benefits associated with family engagement, researchers from the University of Southern California’s Center on Educational Governance interviewed leaders from 18 charter schools across the county with notable family engagement practices—nominated by the authorizers who oversee the schools—in order to identify strategies for how to involve families in meaningful and inclusive ways.

All school leaders interviewed were from charter schools, but many of these strategies are applicable to traditional public schools as well as to independent schools. The aim of providing the best educational opportunities for all students is universal; finding new ways to engage families can help schools attain that goal. Further, many schools have

strong participation from a small number of families: the strategies included here can help schools move from ad hoc involvement to a robust and meaningful set of structures and processes that enable family engagement. As you consider your plans and ideas, you can learn from others' experiences to help guide your practice.

Before we begin, it is important to note that the term “family engagement” encompasses a wide range of activities conducted at the school, at home and in the community and is often called parent or family involvement. We use the term family engagement to include anything that better prepares students to learn, and families' and schools' support of that learning.

The school leaders we interviewed reported a range of family engagement activities, but felt that more important than any specific activity were the strategies used to foster high levels of participation. Rather than adopting a “if you build it, they will come” approach, the school leaders in our study attributed their success to their methods of making parents and other family members feel welcome at the school, providing multiple opportunities for families to get involved, and enabling participation from families who juggle the many responsibilities and pressures of work and family. This guidebook focuses therefore on strategies for engagement, not specific activities.

Specifically, this guidebook explores the following seven family engagement principles:

*Principle One: Be Prepared*

*Principle Two: Be Respectful*

*Principle Three: Be Specific*

*Principle Four: Be Strategic*

*Principle Five: Be Flexible*

*Principle Six: Be Creative*

*Principle Seven: Be Collaborative*

These principles emerged from our interviews with leaders from charter schools around the country—and we know they work because they come straight from the schools that use them. We hope their experiences help you create opportunities to engage the families of all children at your school in meaningful efforts to benefit children, families, schools and communities.



*Principle One*  
**Be Prepared**



The first step in fostering family engagement is understanding that the school can have a major positive impact on participation. For example, Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minn. starts every school year with individual student-family-faculty conferences to plan for the upcoming year, to learn more about the student and family, and to insure that the very first contact between home and school is a positive one. Questions asked in these conferences include:

- a. What are major things the student and family did in the summer?
- b. What is one thing the student wants to learn this coming year?
- c. What is a major priority for the family, in terms of what this student needs to work on in the coming year?
- d. What is one thing that the family can do to help the school?

Starting off by building rapport between the school and family helps establish a spirit of collaboration. Some families face numerous challenges when it comes to getting involved, however. Schools should be prepared to meet and address these challenges. Preparation for family engagement includes the following strategies:

- Address language barriers;
- Provide families with resources and support; and,
- Utilize a family coordinator.

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### Address Language Barriers

Many schools communicate primarily in English, while their students' families may not. Language barriers are one of the most common hindrances to parent engagement, but also one of the easiest to bridge. Translating materials sent home into the families'

native language and providing translators for school meetings is an easy yet powerful solution. Family members, teachers, or even students can act as translators, minimizing the cost to the school. As one principal reported, “We have a newsletter that goes to the parents once a week, which is translated into six languages.” Another principal described the use of headsets during school meetings so that interpreters can do “real-time translation.” Other schools tailor their voicemail messages and e-mails to the families’ native languages.

Addressing language barriers not only ensures better communication but also allows dialogue between the school and families about how best to support student learning. At the beginning of the school year, Donoghue Elementary School’s staff conducts a needs assessment and an asset assessment with families. Not only do they find out what they can do to support the families but they also learn ways in which families can support the school. Similarly, other charter schools survey parents (in the parents’ home language) at the start of the year to determine their availability in order to plan meetings and activities.

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## Provide Families with Resources and Support

Once you are able to communicate better with parents, you may find some struggle to meet their children’s basic needs. In response, several of the schools we studied offered “wrap around” services. “[If families] have housing needs or food needs, we provide them,” said the leader of a charter school started by a social service provider. Some schools hold discussions on topics relevant to families’ needs, such as qualifying for home loans, setting up a college savings plan, resumé writing, interviewing skills, disciplining children, and creating the necessary environment at home for homework. As one principal noted, “We’ve found that just having a space where parents can communicate

“We have gotten one of our Hmong staff people who will be facilitating the Hmong group, and we’ll also have a group that’s in Spanish, and an English group, and we’re going to be offering several nights when families can come in to discuss various portions of the book.”

their needs with other parents has been a really vital resource.” This also helps the family members become more comfortable in their children’s school environment, encouraging their engagement and increasing their self-efficacy.

Several schools offer GED, English as a second language, college-credit and parenting classes for families after school hours. One principal described a book study created by the school that focused on parenting techniques: “We have gotten one of our Hmong staff people who will be facilitating the Hmong group, and we’ll also have a group that’s in Spanish, and an English group, and we’re going to be offering several nights when families can come in to discuss various portions of the book.” Another principal described the opportunity for networking: “So many new families have moved into the neighborhood, and so the school has really become a hub to answer questions like, ‘How do I find a good grocery store? What are the child care options after the school day?’” Several schools in the study also provide transportation to school meetings and offer child care and meals to increase the accessibility of engagement opportunities.

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## Utilize a Family Coordinator

Providing families with resources and support can be facilitated by utilizing a family coordinator. Family coordinators, also called family liaisons, come in various manifestations. Some schools include in their operating budget a designated staff member to serve as the point person between the school and families. Other schools find a volunteer who is willing and able to serve in that role. One school in our study splits the position among teachers and assigns bilingual teachers to families with specific language needs in order to provide support accordingly.

## Question: What is the family coordinator's role in facilitating family engagement at your school?

**A:** “The parent coordinator really acts as an advocate for parents to come and be part of their kids’ education by encouraging parents to volunteer at the school. We have a lot of school-wide events that happen during the day and in the evenings where we need a lot of volunteers, and so the parent coordinator does a lot of outreach to parents to get them to come in and volunteer for those events. And that person does a lot of communication: newsletters and things like that that go home to families.”

**A:** “In the past, parents were able to get together once a month, but we really felt like it was important to have somebody on our staff who was a parent who could be the liaison between the school itself and the parents. So last year we budgeted a position for a parent coordinator.”

**A:** “I know it’s a luxury to have somebody whose sole position is dedicated to parent engagement, but it’s great to have somebody who part of their time can be dedicated to that, to really getting parents involved, and somebody who is a parent herself, who can relate to the difficulties and challenges that parents are facing.”

**A:** “She is a critical link to the families, and she’s critical in helping us to build relationships with them. The parents all trust her and love her; she’s been working in that position since we started this school in 2002, and so that is one of the reasons why parents feel comfortable being involved.”

**A:** “Our parent coordinator has been essential in that it is somebody who can relate to parents, who understands that some parents need to be working, that they may not be able to make it [to school events] and who can accommodate that.”

Generally speaking, the purpose of a family coordinator is to be the bridge between the school and families by actively seeking parent input and participation rather than hoping parents will approach the school on their own. This person's responsibilities may include conducting a needs assessment, creating avenues for family members to get involved at the school, tracking participation, and creating opportunities to meet the needs of both the school and the families. In order for the family coordinator to be effective, he or she must understand the community being served and be committed to building lasting relationships with families. Several schools we studied noted that the importance of the family-coordinator role merits investing in comprehensive, ongoing training so that they are effective communicators with families and have a clear understanding of their role.

In some cases, schools opt to have room parents in addition to or instead of a family coordinator. Room parents are more directly connected with the needs of one classroom; they may be present in the classroom for a few hours a week or help out daily. As one school leader described, "Something that we've tried to start this year is room parents, and it's just an idea of having parents in each classroom that teachers can really reach out to in order to help build the culture of the classroom."

## Spotlight on Room Parents

The principal at Dolores Huerta Learning Academy described the approach of having room parents at their school:

**Q: Tell me about room parents at your school.**

**A:** We call them parent leaders and we have them in all grades, K–8. The parent leaders in each classroom are in charge of collaborating with the teacher. If it's a lower grade, say K–3, the parent leaders help prepare the snacks, they help the teachers with field trips, they organize bake sales, and one parent leader in each classroom participates and collaborates with the rest of the parents in the classroom. Every classroom has a monthly meeting to talk about different issues they have in the classroom, so we encourage our parents to be leaders in each classroom: That's why we call them parent leaders.

**Q: Is there more than one parent leader per classroom?**

**A:** We limit it to two parents per room. Sometimes we have three or four and it's hard to manage. Everybody wants to be a leader!

**Q: How often do the parent leaders change?**

**A:** It changes every school year, or if it's needed in a particular classroom, say the other parent's not able to participate any more, then we change during the school year, but we try to keep the parent leaders for a year.



*Principle Two*  
**Be Respectful**

## Be Respectful

Many schools, especially in urban areas, serve diverse student populations. Their families have a variety of cultural backgrounds. Often these families speak a language other than English in the home, celebrate unique cultural traditions, and have various levels of access to professional and financial opportunities. In order to facilitate their engagement, school administrators and staff should be aware and respectful of potential cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic differences. When schools respect family backgrounds, they create a link between school and home. Schools in our study facilitate respectful relationships with families primarily through four strategies:

- Have an open door policy;
- Reach out to “high need” families;
- Value families’ cultural backgrounds; and,
- Utilize family input.

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### Have an Open Door Policy

A common barrier to participation from some families is the perception that student learning is solely the domain of school personnel. Some families hold a cultural perspective that they should defer to the teacher in all academic matters. Other families develop the feeling through previous school experiences that classrooms are simply “off limits” to visits or observations. Family members who struggled themselves as students may view their child’s school as a place where they are unlikely to fit in or feel welcome.

Schools can remove these “invisible barriers” between families and the school by welcoming families while respecting their attitudes and beliefs. One principal stressed, “Parents are encouraged to come sit in a class and observe.” Not only does this allow family members to watch their children participate in classroom activities, it provides them informal face-to-face interactions with teachers and administrators.



This can help wary parents become more comfortable establishing long-lasting relationships with school personnel, as well as other families. Thus, as family members become more comfortable navigating their school community, they are more likely to participate in school events. As one principal noted, “The one thing that we tell all of our parents is after the third time you’ve come to observe, we’re gonna put you to work.”

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## Reach Out to “High Need” Families

Some school personnel mistakenly believe that a family which does not respond to requests from teachers is simply uninterested in their child’s education. In these cases, school personnel may not realize the possible socioeconomic and linguistic barriers to participation. For instance, some families do not have phone lines due to limited financial circumstances. Some parents do not read or write in their native languages, while other parents work multiple jobs or hours that make attendance at events during business hours difficult. Whether or not a family member feels comfortable participating, the logistics may be extremely challenging.

A home visit demonstrates that each family is an integral part of the school community and shows that the school is willing to put in the extra effort to include every family in its child’s education.

To address this challenge, some schools utilize home visits as a way to reach “high need” families. One principal commented, “We do home visits since there are a handful of families that are hard to communicate with due to certain barriers that they face.” In another case, teachers at a Chicago area school visit families after school and on weekends to share their child’s success with them, to help them develop strategies to assist their children with homework assignments, and to encourage them to participate in school activities to support their children’s academic achievement.

Home visits establish a link with “high need” families, who otherwise may find any engagement with the school difficult. A home visit also demonstrates that each family is an integral part of the school community

## Supporting English Language Learner Families

English Language Learners, the largest growing segment of the student population, have increased in all states over the last 20 years. To better integrate these families, schools can:

- Support the implementation of traditional parent engagement programs that are culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate;
- Fund the implementation of non-traditional parent engagement programs that reflect a reciprocal engagement in the school/parent community;
- Support the professional preparation of teachers who can identify community funds of knowledge for curricular development and school outreach;
- Support community-based education programs that inform parents about school values and expectations and work with parents to help them become advocates for their children.

Source: <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/promoting-ell-parental-involvement-challenges-contested-times>

and shows that the school is willing to put in the extra effort to include every family in its child's education. This gives families the understanding that their engagement is a necessary part of a successful and thriving school community.

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### Value Families' Cultural Backgrounds

The schools in our study recognize diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as valuable resources. These resources can be used toward students' academic achievement. One principal noted that native language instruction is "essential for success in our increasingly global society." Thus, the school runs a home language development program through which students acquire a second language. To facilitate this program, the school hired and trained members of the parent community to become home language tutors. According to the principal, "The home language program is an important component of our family involvement, not only that we've

“The home language program is an important component of our family involvement, not only that we’ve brought on and hired parents and family members, but also in that the program itself values the home culture and the home language.”

brought on and hired parents and family members, but also in that the program itself values the home culture and the home language.” In states where there is a movement away from bilingual education towards English immersion, the tacit message can leave non-English speaking families with the expectation that their children should leave their home language and culture at their doorsteps. A home language program and other parent-run resource programs communicate the opposite, that home language and home culture are valued and seen as resources that can help improve student outcomes.

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## Utilize Family Input

The needs of diverse student bodies can overwhelm schools if they believe they have to take on the challenge by themselves. In contrast, some schools in this study have active family groups that meet weekly or monthly to assess school needs and determine how they can contribute. For example, at Community Montessori, family members can serve on one of six different committees, including publicity and facility management. The school offers parent workshops and trainings specific to the committee on which they serve.

At another school, the principal reported that the school created parent groups to address specific school or family needs. One group of parents meets regularly to talk about, plan, and make suggestions to school personnel regarding the transition from elementary to middle school. Another group of parents tackles the various needs of their special education students. A future parent group will address the challenges that their children face in math.

These need-oriented groups offer family members a chance to form relationships with other families. In addition, it helps families see more clearly their role as problem solvers in their school community.



*Principle Three*  
**Be Specific**

Schools should not assume that families know how to get involved; parents often need ideas for what they can do to support their children’s education. The schools we studied made explicit the family engagement expectations through three main strategies:

- Incorporate family engagement into the school’s mission;
- Provide family orientations; and,
- Utilize parent contracts.

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### Incorporate Family Engagement into the School’s Mission

As noted earlier, several state charter schools laws include increasing parent engagement as one purpose of the law. Similarly, several of the study schools’ mission statements mention the importance of families and community. For example, Erie Charter School’s mission includes the desire “to foster a community where students, parents and educators work together to develop children who are confident in their culture and ethnic origin, bi-literate in Spanish and English.” Community Montessori’s mission notes the aim of providing “families a vehicle to learn cooperatively, have fun, and promote peace with their children.” Donoghue Elementary’s mission includes the goal to “provide academic and social support by offering community programming for student and families beyond the school day.”

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### Provide Family Orientations

Many school leaders we interviewed emphasized the importance of providing a family orientation before their child begins at the school. This orientation often includes the mission and philosophy of the charter school, the academic program, and non-academic aspects of the school. At the San Carlos Charter Learning Center, new families are paired with current families for a “buddy” system. Every family has

another family to turn to with questions and to guide them through the orientation process. Students are also paired with buddies to help them acclimate to the school.

A detailed orientation provides families not only with an understanding of the mission and operations of the school but includes them as partners in their child's education. One school leader said, "We really feel like that's a big part of our success, parents really talk on and on about how welcome they feel, about how we meet parents exactly where they are, and find ways that they can be engaged in educating their kids." Some schools create a catalog of opportunities for family engagement, which is shared at this orientation.

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## Utilize Parent Contracts

A parent contract is an agreement between the school and the family that outlines the expectations for family engagement. While some contracts include schools' responsibility towards families, most detail what families are expected to do to support their child and the school. These contracts are generally not "enforceable," that is, charter school laws in many states prohibit charter schools from using contracts as a requirement for enrollment or noncompliance as a means for dismissing a student. Rather, charter schools tend to use contracts to clarify the family engagement expectations.

Parent contracts offer a medium where specific requirements, namely what families are expected to do with their child and how to do it, are spelled out. As the principal at one school noted, "One of the things that we mandate is that our parents read for 45 minutes a night with their children and check homework, and that's regardless of the academic experience or academic level that the parents may have. We can give you the help to help your kids, and that's something, as

## Point-Counterpoint: The Pros and Cons of Parent Contracts

**Pro:** “The parents commit to get their kids to school on time every day; to bringing them in uniform every day; and to helping them with their homework every night. The students and teachers make similar commitments, so each party is accountable.”

**Con:** “It requires time and energy to keep track of the hours parents spend volunteering, and often enforcement of the parent contract is not possible.”

**Pro:** “This strategy provides schools with resources (the parents) and allows parents to participate in their children’s education.”

**Con:** “Some schools find that mandating volunteer hours through a parent contract does not align with the schools’ philosophy. They prefer building a community that encourages parent engagement without requiring it. Once you say it’s a requirement, it defeats the purpose of encouraging the parents and teaching them the importance of being involved.”

**Pro:** “A contract defines expectations for parents and requires accountability on the part of parents to participate in their child’s education.”

## What's in your school's parent contract?

"We have a contract for the new families that enroll here that says they need to volunteer 40 hours during the school year."

"The parents have to sign a compact that they will be involved in the activities of the school and in the education of their children. Now there are some pretty obvious things, like they have to attend at least one parent/teacher conference per year, but we have all sorts of events also that are available for parents to not simply meet, but network and create that community we keep talking about."

"Basically that they will make sure that their child does their homework and reads for 20 minutes every evening. . . . They're expected to have their kids in uniform and agree to help enforce the school-wide honor code and core values."

"It specifies the number of hours parents are required to be involved with school activities whether at the school or at home."

"One of the things that we mandate is that our parents read for 45 minutes a night with their children and check homework. . . . We can give you the help to help your kids, and that's something, as a school, that we're managing our resources so that that can happen."

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As part of the Accelerated School model, community members work in a cadre and are charged with, among other things, monitoring that families are fulfilling the terms of the parent contract: families monitoring families.

Although parent contracts may help spell out family engagement expectations, they are not without their detractors (see Point-Counterpoint).





*Principle Four*  
**Be Strategic**

## Be Strategic

**B**eing strategic about family engagement means purposeful planning, not just hoping it will occur naturally. One way to do this is to schedule opportunities for engagement on a variety of days and at different times, allowing for, as one leader explained, “different opportunities where the parents are given a really meaningful way to participate in the life of their child’s education.” In addition, families often benefit from being trained in how best to help their child at home. This section discusses two strategic strategies:

- Schedule strategically to increase participation; and,
- Provide training for family members.

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### Schedule Strategically to Increase Participation

The school leaders in our study stressed the need to be strategic in scheduling meetings and events at the school. For example, one principal noted, “You have to think about a lot of different things when you’re thinking about scheduling such as making sure you can provide child care so that the families can attend a workshop, having different workshops or different opportunities at different times of the day, and on different days of the week. Our families face a lot of challenges, and one of the things that I’ve seen in the six years I’ve been here is that when we give families the opportunity, they will be involved in their children’s education. But I think that you have to make sure that you’re thinking critically about all of the different obstacles and barriers for the families you serve, and make sure that you’re thinking about those proactively so that you can create multiple entry points for families.” Another school leader echoed this: “One of the things that we did in our opening year was we had community-building Saturdays where families came and literally helped build the school. They put furniture together, they painted, they cleaned; a lot of those things happened because

they were on a Saturday, and parents were able to make it. So oftentimes you as a school have to extend above and beyond your eight-hour school day to reach out to those parents.”

“You have to make sure that you’re thinking critically about all of the different obstacles and barriers for the families you serve, and make sure that you’re thinking about those proactively so that you can create multiple entry points for families.”

Parent-teacher conferences are an important avenue for family engagement at any school because they provide the opportunity for family members and teachers to discuss student progress, address any concerns, and find solutions to problems. It is a time for families and teachers to communicate their mutual goals and expectations. It is also a challenge in many schools to attract families to attend these conferences and, unfortunately, it is often the family members of children who most need to be supported that do not attend. As such, schools in our study make extra efforts to get families to attend these meetings. For example, one charter school administrator said, “Our conferences were last Thursday and Friday, and today we had a parent who doesn’t have transportation, and she called me this morning and said, ‘I could take the bus this morning and bring my son to school, would it be okay for me to meet with his teacher then?’” Being willing to accommodate families’ schedules helps this school, like many in our study, achieve high rates of participation in parent-teacher conferences.

Another charter leader noted, “We have four parent/teacher conferences a year, and from the very beginning we’ve had the expectation of 100 percent attendance, and we’re pretty relentless at that, and last year for three out of the four parent/teacher conferences we had 100 percent attendance. We have two nights of conferences, and we tell them well in advance, and they know that they’re expected to come, and if they don’t come, we’re pretty persistent in calling them or showing up at their house, or what have you. So that’s taken a little bit of time to develop within our culture; I always had pretty good attendance in the beginning,

I'd say between probably 75 and 85 percent, but we kept driving that whole point home, and as they became more comfortable at the school, and realized that it wasn't a scary experience for them, it was easier."

Another school reported attaining 100 percent participation at parent-teacher meetings by feeding families: "We had potlucks where each family contributed and felt their contribution was valued." In another case, a district in which attendance at parent night was less than 20 percent offered to send school buses to neighborhoods to bring families to the meetings. The buses remained almost empty, but attendance reached 90 percent; once families realized the district was serious about wanting them to attend, they made the effort to do so.

Another strategy to increase turnout at conferences is to give students a more active role in the conference— hearing about their child's progress from the child's perspective, rather than just the teacher's, can motivate a family to attend. At Amy Biehl High School, for example, conferences are called "family meetings" and are student-directed; the student is the facilitator, taking an active role in directing conversation rather than being the topic of conversation. During the meetings, held at the school during the evening, each family meets with the dean and an advisor who has been trained by a social worker. Together they discuss the student's strengths and areas he or she needs to improve. If the student is having difficulty, the discussion is a way for the student, family members, and staff to begin working on a plan to address the issue<sup>4</sup>.

In some cases, meetings are held at community centers, churches, mosques or other places where families feel comfortable, rather than requiring them to come to the school.

## Views Around Town

### How do you get families to attend meetings?

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“We are very flexible about scheduling meetings, and I do think we go the extra mile, even to the point of going to the home rather than having them come here if it really doesn't work for them to come here. And doing visits over the phone if it just isn't gonna work that year for them to have a home visit or to come in. . . . We'll do whatever it takes to be in touch with those parents.”

“I think also realizing that you have to extend your hours; sometimes you do have hold meetings at six o'clock or come in on a Saturday to get that parent engagement.”

“We ask them when is the best time, and then we kind of base it on history too, like we'll see, OK, this wasn't well attended, and we'll do that type of analysis.”

“We'll keep hounding them, we'll say, 'Oh, well, you missed the conference. Now that's no problem, just come on in, make an appointment to look at your child's work, that's one-on-one, since you couldn't come to the big event.' We also define family broadly, so it doesn't have to be the parents, we'll have an auntie who comes to an event because the parents are both working, and that's fine, that's great: one more person in the family that knows about the education of that child.”

“By combining family conferences with meals and community information sessions. This means that families can come to the conferences, share a hot meal, and learn more about community resources. You can do this by inviting a variety of community groups to come into the school on the nights of the conferences and have them pass out material. Sometimes local restaurants will contribute food for these events, in exchange for the school providing information about the restaurant to their families.”

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## Provide Training for Family Members

The school leaders we spoke with stressed that schools shouldn't expect that families have the confidence or experience to support their child academically. We found that schools have increased family engagement by training family members to support their child academically, to participate in school decision-making and to use technology.

For example, one charter school leader said, "We have family learning nights that are dedicated to different grade-level teachers, with different sessions to help families know how to help their child with math or with literacy at home. Most of our parents didn't graduate high school themselves, and so getting them to understand what this education system looks like is the first step. . . . It is important for them to understand what our curriculum is and how they can support their children." Similarly, another leader noted, "Every month we have a curriculum night, and so that's an opportunity for parents to come in with their children and be engaged initially in a description of the curriculum and the expectations . . . to spend a night in the seat of your child. For math night, parents actually do the math work that their children do, so there are math games that the children and their parents participate in. For literacy night, it's the same kind of thing; we really walk the parents through a pretty comprehensive experience of what literacy looks like at the school. Same thing for science, same for character education, same for art."

At another school, when they registered their child, families were asked about their access to computers. The school provided refurbished computers for those families without access to technology. The school then offered technology training sessions so that families would be more comfortable using the technology.

## Using a Parent-Student-Teacher Journal to Engage Parents

A high school English teacher at The Equity Project (TEP) Charter School in New York launched a collaborative journaling project.

On Fridays, students write for 10 minutes on a given topic and then bring their writing home to their parents. Over the weekend, the parents add to the journal, responding to their children's writing or writing something new. The teacher responds to each of the journals by the following Friday.

“With a population of nearly 100 students, this was an arduous task for me, but certainly one of the most fruitful and rewarding of my career,” the teacher said. On average, 85 percent of parents completed the assignment weekly, including parents who spoke English as a second language.

The parent journal served to increase communication between parents and their children, and helped create an academic environment in their homes.

For more on this, see: <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=15717>

## Several organizations have information available that can be given to families as part of their training.

The Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, directed by Joyce Epstein, houses the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), a professional development organization that provides tools, training and materials to enable school, district and state leaders to plan, implement, evaluate and improve their programs and practices of school, family and community partnerships. For more on the NNPS, visit: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/index.htm>

The Developmental Studies Center, founded in the San Francisco area, has produced materials in English and Spanish that can be given to families as part of training, in grades K–6, to help children at home. For more on the Developmental Studies Center, visit: <http://devstu.org>

“Every month we have a curriculum night, and so that’s an opportunity for parents . . . to spend a night in the seat of your child.”

In another case, Pacific Collegiate School sponsors approximately 17 family education events each year, using both outside and in-house experts from the school and family population. The programs focus on topics (e.g., child development, school governance, and education reform) that help prepare family members to serve in decision-making roles at the school. This has resulted in almost 15,000 hours of family service.





*Principle Five*  
**Be Flexible**

## Be Flexible

Charter schools that have successful family engagement programs provide a variety of engagement opportunities for families to maximize their participation. Being flexible also means providing a range of ways to meet participation requirements and, if expectations of engagement are not met, working with families to find a mutually agreeable solution. Schools in this study used the following strategies to be flexible:

- Offer a variety of family engagement opportunities;
- Provide a range of ways for families to meet participation requirements; and,
- Incorporate leeway into family engagement requirements.

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### Offer a Variety of Family Engagement Opportunities

A variety of family engagement opportunities were offered at each of the charter schools in this study. According to one principal, “We try to have a variety of opportunities for parents to be involved, whether it’s helping out in the office or coming on a special event and getting to see their kids at school, or having lunch with their children, or coming on a field trip as a chaperone, or participating in tutoring. We also have a pretty active PTA, and they do a lot of activities on the weekends to raise money to plan trips for the kids.” Not only do the charter schools we studied offer a plethora of engagement activities, they also create flexibility by extending these activities to the weekends. Family members who are busy working during the week might attend a community-building event that involves cleaning the school grounds on the weekend.

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## Provide a Range of Ways for Families to Meet Participation Requirements

Some charter schools require a minimum number of volunteer hours from families, as noted in the “Be Specific” section. For some families, this provides a clear expectation and offers ideas of ways to get involved. For others, the requirement may seem restrictive and demanding. Being flexible with how and when families fulfill their required hours and providing a remedy instead of a penalty may yield the best results.

Manzanita Charter School encourages parents to bring extended family members to a volunteering event; each family member’s participation counts toward the total hours required. Not only do families meet their participation requirements this way, they also build a stronger community by working together. “This last work party, we had a need to move a great big copier, and to do some work to set up the office I’m sitting in,” Manzanita’s principal said. “Two older brothers of an incoming student came in and it was just amazing to watch them, they’re moving this gigantic copier, and getting it set up and they were moving like the wind, getting amazing things done, and just whipping around with tools. . . . It’s so gratifying to see the whole family working at it.”

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## Incorporate Leeway into Family Engagement Requirements

Even with flexibility in how families can meet their engagement requirements, some families may struggle to do so. At Dolores Huerta Learning Academy, for example, families are allowed to make a donation in place of their required volunteer hours. The donation can include supplies for the classroom or a snack for the students. This policy allows families who are unable to provide the hours required to contribute in a different way.

At Partnership Academy, the contract is not the rule of law. When asked about what happens if families do not fulfill their contract, the school leader said, “We would

probably sit down and have some further discussion with them, but the contract's really not that enforceable and if they don't show up for one conference, I don't pull out the contract and say, 'Hey look, you signed this and now you're not here.' I will let them know if they're the only parent that hasn't shown up for conferences. I'll tell them that. I'll say, 'Hey, every other family in this school has shown up, and you're the last ones, I need you to come.' So we will use those tactics if necessary."

Another charter school provides a waiver policy for unforeseen circumstances where families are unable to fulfill their expected engagement. The principal gives an example of a family that faced both immigration issues and the mother's cancer diagnosis: "That sounds to me like waiver material, so they fill out the form and they tell about what's going on in their lives that make the hours difficult or impossible. . . We tend to be pretty compassionate."



*Principle Six*  
**Be Creative**

## Be Creative

Schools are often forced to operate under tight budget restrictions. In many schools, family engagement becomes a secondary priority since it is often perceived as an “extra” that can be sacrificed for core aspects of the school’s operation. The schools in our study have developed creative strategies to engage families by using minimal resources and physical space. Some have gone further by utilizing family members as resources to fulfill major needs in the school’s operations and academic programs. In addition, the schools have found that providing an incentive promotes greater participation. The schools in this study showed creativity by adopting the following strategies:

- Dedicate a space in the school to families;
- Offer incentives for participation;
- Assign responsibilities to families; and,
- Use technology.

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### Dedicate a Space in the School to Families

Some schools have designated family centers where family members can gather for meetings, find out information about events and activities, utilize school resources such as computers or curriculum guides, and where available, speak to a family coordinator. At these centers, families can plan and run events, and forge relationships with each other, school personnel and students. The principal at Donoghue Elementary noted that designating a space for families has “shaped the culture of the school,” where family engagement, like curriculum and instruction, is central to the success of the school community.

Without the luxury of extra classroom or office space to dedicate to a family center, some of the schools in our study have found other ways to utilize existing spaces for family engagement. At one school, school personnel have dedicated a bulletin board to the

## Views Around Town: Let's Talk Family Centers

### Q: Do you have a family center? How is it used?

**A:** “We’re in the middle of creating a parent resource room, where parents can come and use a computer, can come and get some information or do some research if they need to. Right now our library is open to parents also to come and pick books out with their kids. So we definitely encourage parents to come and spend time here, but we don’t have a centralized place where they specifically go yet.”

**A:** “When we first opened the school in 2005, we identified a designated room that became our parent center, and so that helped shape the culture of our school. Parents have this designated room that is for them. There’s a parent actually that we hired to help coordinate activities inside that room, and that made a big difference. It’s a place where parents can come in, they can access technology, they can access curriculum resources, and it’s a place where they can meet one-on-one with teachers. We hold meetings in the parent center related to curriculum or social supports that parents may need.”

**A:** “Our on-site Family Center is a one-stop shop of health and social services. It provides families with basic needs (clothing, food), drop-in counseling, prenatal care, family literacy, family activities, inter-group bridging, adult education classes, job referrals and a host of social service programs provided in collaboration with agencies. Families accessing services from the Center must give back via our Parent Exchange Service Bank. Reciprocal services include classroom tutoring and volunteering at the Center. The focus is on hands-up, not handouts.”

**A:** “In a way, I think that our parents feel comfortable everywhere. If I were to walk outside during lunch and snap a few pictures, you’d see probably 10 to 15 parents in every shot. So there’s not a special place for them to go, but it’s kind of like it’s all theirs.”

**A:** “We used to have a parent center, but since we needed the classroom space it is no longer there. But I like that parents just walk around the school and not just spend time in that one room.”

successes of families, spotlighting family-run events and celebrating students whose family members drop them off at school on time. Other schools see their classrooms as shared spaces. During after school instructional hours at one school, families routinely use classrooms for meetings, workshops, and other family-oriented events.

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## Offer Incentives for Participation

Ideally, families see engagement as a fun and rewarding experience, not as a burden. Nevertheless, many of the schools in our study have found that creating incentives for reluctant or hard-to-reach families is an effective strategy to maximize participation.

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## Assign Responsibilities to Families

The schools we studied view families as valuable resources that support the inner workings of the school community. Principals and teachers in our study have given families responsibilities in operations and academic support: services that many school budgets struggle to cover. When taking on responsibilities in classrooms and operations, families play a more integral role in the success of the school community. At a meeting with the principal of one school, for example, family members expressed concern that students were crossing the street without adult supervision. The families offered to serve as crossing guards at the end of the school day. Families also lead beautification efforts and routinely clean the school buildings, since the school can not afford a janitorial staff. The principal noted, “They keep an eye on the community. They notice things in the community that the teachers and I fail to notice. Their input and their concerns are all incredibly helpful.”



## Let's Talk Incentives

**What types of incentives do you use to increase family engagement?**

“At the parent meetings, we give free dress passes to the students whose parents show up to meetings. This has worked for years, and the great part is that students play a role in parent engagement.”

“We often need parents to fill out surveys so that we can assess their specific needs, so we pick a time of day when parents are here and not in a rush. They can take their time and they enjoy the incentives that come along with the survey like a raffle. Incentives are always a good way to make parent participation fun.”

“We put up pictures of families in our front hall, showing them helping out the school in various ways. We call this the Family Hall of Fame.”

“We make sure that we distribute important student documents to parents in person. This gives them a motivation to come to parent conferences and talk one-on-one with teachers in detail about their child's academic progress. We distribute report cards at conferences, and parents come because they want to review the report cards; they have the added bonus of talking to teachers in person about how to ensure academic success in the short- and long-term.”

“We don't punish students if their parents fail to make their commitments. We try to create incentives to encourage parents to follow school policies. For example, we try to come up with ways to incentivize being on time, so right now we have a competition. We made a big poster board that's in the front office. Each class is competing to see which class gets to 10 days of perfect on-time first, and that class gets a party. So, when the parents walk in with their children after school starts and one class had everyone present on time except for one child, it not only makes parents think that they should bring their child to school on time, but also that they need to actively support school policies. These types of attitudes trickle into other school events when parent engagement is needed.”

## 50 Ways Families Can Help Schools

1. Share information with a student or class about a hobby.
2. Share information with a student or a class about a career.
3. Share information with students about a country where you visited or lived.
4. Tutor one or a small group of students in reading, math or other area.
5. Help coach an athletic team.
6. Help check a student's written work.
7. Help put out a school or classroom newsletter.
8. Help sew or paint a display.
9. Help build something for the school.
10. Help students work on a final exhibition or project.
11. Help answer the school's phone.
12. Help plan a new playground for the school.
13. Help plan a theme-based presentation for students.
14. Help present a theme-based program for students.
15. Demonstrate cooking from a particular country or culture to students.
16. Share a particular expertise with faculty.
17. Help students plan and build an outdoor garden or other project to beautify the outside of the school.
18. Help coach students competing in an academic competition.
19. Help bring senior citizens to school to watch a student production.
20. Extend learning by helping arrange learning opportunities in the community.
21. Help set up an internship or apprenticeship for a student at your business, organization or agency.
22. Host a one-day "shadow study" for students about your job.
23. Go on a local field trip.
24. Go on an extended field trip.
25. Contact a local business or organization regarding possible cooperation with the school.

26. Help create a natural area outside the building where students can learn.
27. Serve on an advisory or decision-making committee.
28. Serve on the school-wide site council.
29. Serve on a school committee.
30. Serve as an officer in the school's PTA.
31. Help organize a parent organization.
32. Help design a parent and/or student survey for the school.
33. Help conduct and/or tabulate results of a parent survey regarding the school.
34. Advocate for the school.
35. Serve as a member of a "telephone tree" to distribute information quickly.
36. Write a letter to a legislator about the school.
37. Go to another school to provide information about this school.
38. Help design a brochure or booklet about the school.
39. Help translate information from the school into a language other than English.
40. Help translate at a parent-teacher conference.
41. Provide transportation to a parent-teacher conference for a parent who needs a ride.
42. Write an article for publication in a magazine about the school's activities.
43. Help arrange for a political leader to visit the school.
44. Fundraise for the school.
45. Help write a grant proposal that would bring new resources to the school.
46. Donate materials to the school.
47. Arrange for a business or other organization to donate materials to the school.
48. Help other parents develop their parenting skills.
49. Help teach a class for parents on ways they can be stronger parents.
50. Help write, publish or distribute a list of parenting tips.

—From Joe Nathan, *Center for School Change, Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota.*  
For more information and ideas, contact [jnathan@umn.edu](mailto:jnathan@umn.edu)

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## Use Technology

To save on the cost of distributing newsletters or flyers, many schools send e-mail updates to families. As one school leader described, “We have a large number of parents that communicate through e-mail because many of our working families can’t always break away to call the school during school hours. Plus, teachers are teaching so parents talk a lot about being able to e-mail a teacher and getting information that way.” In addition to communicating via e-mail, some schools advertise family engagement opportunities on the school’s website and track family participation online. At Pacific Collegiate, for example, the school created a website that lists volunteer opportunities. Family members choose the activities they would like to be involved in. The website includes a description of each activity, the contact person, and the hours required. The online system enables family members to report their hours as they complete them.



*Principle Seven*  
**Be Collaborative**

## Be Collaborative

**B**eing collaborative in your family engagement efforts can mean integrating outside organizations such as local nonprofits or community centers in family engagement activities. Another way to be collaborative is to offer family members a voice in school policy by forming advisory councils, focus groups or family member positions on the school's governing board. The schools in our study worked to create the structures for engagement to help create a deeper level of participation.

Strategies for collaboration included:

- Bring in outside organizations; and,
- Provide families a voice in school decision-making.

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### Bring in Outside Organizations

Many charter schools have looked to outside organizations—nonprofit, for-profit and public—to enrich their programs, to provide such vital resources as facilities or budget expertise, and to enhance family participation. One principal praised a community partners program that helps coordinate volunteers. Elsewhere, school leaders used community groups to hold parent classes or trainings. This engagement can be mutually beneficial. One principal reported that parents participate with their children in community service days organized by the school: “Some of them cleaned up the park across the street for the city, some made baby blankets for the children’s hospital.”

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### Provide Families a Voice in School Decision-Making

Parent advisory councils are a common strategy for involving families in school decision-making. Similar to PTAs, parent councils are sometimes called parent advisory boards, leadership councils or parent-teacher organizations. Of course, just creating a parent council doesn't mean families will attend the meetings. At one school with high levels of participation, the council's

## Views Around Town: Inside Advisory Councils

### How does your Advisory Council work?

“We have a parent leadership council that is an opportunity for parents to come together on a monthly basis. The whole organization is led by parents and a lot of their focus is on students and school fundraising, and also they do meetings around different concerns or topics. Part of what we want to do is really educate the parents on topics that have to do with charter schools. So for example, last month our meeting was basically a Charter Schools 101 workshop, and so we were able to answer questions that parents had about what a charter school is, what are the distinguishing factors from a traditional district school, that sort of thing.”

—*Erie Charter School*

“They do some fundraising things, but it’s also around parent education. So if there are particular issues that the majority of the parents are struggling with—let’s say, helping their kids with their homework—then they may bring in a resource related to that. Or if immigration was a big issue, we’d bring in an expert for that as well.”

—*Partnership Academy*

“We have a parent-teacher-community organization in which a group of parents do things that some of the suburban or parochial schools do, the fundraising function.”

—*Donoghue Elementary*

## Using Satisfaction Surveys to Elicit Family Input

View Park Preparatory, an elementary, middle and high school charter school cluster in inner-city Los Angeles, elicits parent input through annual satisfaction surveys. School leaders use survey responses to inform school improvement efforts. For example, survey responses from families at the elementary school indicated a lack of access to technology, so the school focused fundraising efforts on creating a computer lab. Survey results also showed a lack of understanding among families new to the school about the school’s governance model and school culture, and so the school held a training class to increase their knowledge.

president (a parent) reminds families the day before each meeting by passing out fliers when family members pick up their children after school. The principal feels that having a parent hand out the flier right before the meeting, face-to-face, has increased participation; so many families show up that they have had “to find a bigger space to hold the meetings.”

In addition to advisory councils, some schools involve families in decision-making through satisfaction surveys or needs assessment surveys. Sometimes, these can be used to gather information about which engagement activities families support; other times, it helps the school set policy.

Another way charter schools have given families a voice in shaping the school is through membership on the school’s governing board. In six of the 40 states with charter schools, this is required by law. For example, Delaware law stipulates that “the board of directors must include a teacher at the school and a parent of a student enrolled at the school as members.” In other states, where laws are not prescriptive as to board membership, many charter schools find family members willing to commit the time required to be a board member. Both benefits and challenges to having family members serve on a school’s governing board exist, however, as seen in the quotations from state-level charter school leaders below.

In other cases, families shape the school’s governing board by electing its members. Timpanogos Academy in Utah, for example, has parents elect the seven-member governing board, making the board directly accountable to them. The Timpanogos Academy charter provides for representative governance, which mandates responsiveness to constituent concerns. The charter bylaws include a recall provision in case parents believe any board member is not performing in the school’s best interest.



## Let's Talk Decision-Making

**Q: How do you give families a voice in shaping school policy?**

**A:** “We have EESAC, Excellence in Education School Advisory Council that has two parent representatives and one student representative.”

**A:** “We have what we call a parent advisory committee, or a PAC, that is run by parents. Some of our staff helps facilitate it; we have a family and student support coordinator who helps facilitate a monthly meeting.”

**A:** “The parent leadership council was started at the school's inception; we looked to parents about things like our uniform policy. We wanted parents to have a place where they could come together with their concerns. . . . It began with the founding principal, who sought parents out.”

**A:** “We have five parents and six teachers on the board.”

**A:** “We do focus groups with parents to see if there are things that they'd like to see happen in the school. We use that as an avenue to get parent feedback.”

## Point-Counterpoint: The Pros and Cons of Involving Parents on the School's Governing Board

**Pro:** “It has really worked well for us because we stress ethics and human relationships so highly in our building. We have a very high level of trust, and we tend to do everything ‘out in the sunlight,’ so parent input at the board level is very important.”

**Con:** “Some governing boards have nine members, eight of whom are parents, and the parents aren’t fully equipped to deal with thorny issues of policy and finance, grievances of teachers, and due process hearings and all of that.”

**Pro:** “When charter schools are founded by a group of parents who are dissatisfied with the other options their children have, they’ve got the energy and the passion and a lot of good insight about what’s best for the kids.”

**Con:** “One challenge in having parents on the board occurs when they may appear to be focused more on their individual child’s needs and issues, versus a parent collectively representing all parents at the school.”

**Pro:** “I think it is incredibly important for the parents of the school not only to have a voice, but to be actively involved on the governance board.”

**Con:** “Our law requires that two parents be on the board. One issue with this requirement is how those parents are identified to serve. We have to make clear to folks that it’s not necessarily the president of your PTA who should be on the board, because [parents’] role on the board is to make decisions. They’re able to give insight as a parent, but [they’re] not necessarily there as the parent advocate.”

## Conclusions

The findings from this study, accumulated here into seven principles for successfully engaging families, suggest that families can be important partners in the operation and success of a school. However, you shouldn't feel that you have to adopt every strategy at one time. As one school leader stressed, "I think you really have to start small, and set some really short-term, realistic goals. Start with connecting parent engagement to the academic program. . . . I also think you have to set an expectation for all of your staff on how you're going to engage parents, and then work to maintain some consistency and to support teachers, because many teachers don't understand how to work with parents in a way that can be supportive and constructive." Other school leaders shared their "recipes for success" (see the following page).

We hope that you find the experiences from these charter schools useful and are able to adapt their advice to your own school context in order to create and sustain a meaningful partnership with your students' families.

## What's your recipe for success?

“The fact that when we plan our calendar year, we plan the parent activities. When we moved into the school and we planned classrooms, we planned to have a parent center. And so every conversation that we have, it always includes parents. And when we talk about interventions for students, we talk about parents as one of those interventions. When we talk about students that are struggling, it's never just a conversation where we talk about, well, the teacher can do this, the social worker can do this; the parent is always part of the equation. It's about the strategies, and the strategies never end with just what the school's gonna do.”

—Donoghue Charter School

“We don't have busing, so we see a lot of parents because they're walking here or they're driving here, and they come in to get their kids. We make sure to be out there in the mornings when parents are out there, at dismissal when parents are out there, so that they see us.”

—Erie Charter School

“We try to have a variety of opportunities for parents to be involved, whether it's helping out in the office or coming on a special event and getting to see their kids at school, or having lunch with their children, or coming on a field trip as a chaperone, or participating in tutoring. We also have a pretty active PTA, and they do a lot of activities on the weekends to raise money to plan trips for the kids. . . . We really want our families to not feel pressured to be involved, [but] to want to be involved.”

—Rise Academy

“Especially here in east Oakland [Calif.], the schools that are around here are huge. We only have 200 students for K–8, so it's a small school, it's safe, and the parents really feel comfortable here.”

—Dolores Huerta Learning Academy

## Useful Resources

The **Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships**, at Johns Hopkins University and directed by Joyce Epstein, has links and information about publications, research and professional development as well as information about the center's National Network of Partnership Schools.

Visit <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm>

The **Coalition for Community Schools** is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in K–16 education, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government and philanthropy as well as national, state and local community school networks. Their website includes links to resources, tool kits and technical assistance. Visit <http://communityschools.org>

The **National Parent Teacher Association** website provides information on PTA programs, conferences and events as well as a social networking site called the “Great Idea Bank” to enable parents to interact and learn from each other by sharing ideas on how to be a more involved parent, activities to share with their children, and ways to communicate with their child's school. Visit <http://www.ptagreatideabank.org/>

The **U.S. Department of Education's Parental Information and Resource Centers** website includes resources for parents and research links.

Visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/pirc/index.html>

## Appendix: Charter School Profiles

While many people contributed examples of successful family engagement practices at schools around the country to the creation of this guidebook, the schools listed below participated in the interviews conducted for our study.

### **Amy Biehl High School, Albuquerque, N.M.**

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* 9–12

*School mission:* To teach students to apply and demonstrate skills and knowledge to analyze and address community needs. Through service, to challenge students to play meaningful roles in their communities while developing leadership skills and to assist a diverse student body to acquire intellectual, social and ethical habits to prepare them for post-secondary education and life.

### **Community of Peace Academy, St. Paul, Minn.**

*Year opened:* 1995

*Grades served:* K–12

*School mission:* To be a racially and culturally diverse community of students, parents, and staff, dedicated to creating a peaceful environment in which each person is treated with unconditional positive regard and acceptance.

### **Community Montessori, New Albany, Ind.**

*Year opened:* 1997

*Grades served:* K–12

*School mission:* To give children an environment that respects all people and ideas and that gives families a vehicle to learn cooperatively, have fun, and promote peace with their children.

### **Dolores Huerta Learning Academy, Oakland, Calif.**

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* K–8

*School mission:* To provide a dynamic, supportive learning environment that recognizes the individual abilities and ambitions of all students and offers both the opportunity and skills to become lifetime learners, responsible citizens, and leaders of tomorrow in a culturally and linguistically diverse society.

**East Mountain High, Sandia Park, N.M.**

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* 9–12

*School mission:* As a small learning community, East Mountain High School provides exceptional curricular and extracurricular programs, supportive interpersonal relationships, and excellent teaching, all of which encourage self-awareness, community involvement and academic excellence.

**EC Reems, Oakland, Calif.**

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* K–8

*School mission:* To provide a student-centered curriculum that enhances intellectual development, leadership ability and technological fluency, to prepare and endow East Oakland youth with strategic advantages needed to participate in the 21st century.

**Erie Charter School, Chicago, Ill.**

*Year opened:* 2005

*Grades served:* K–3

*School mission:* To foster a community where students, parents and educators work together to develop children who are confident in their culture and ethnic origin, bi-literate in Spanish and English, who achieve academic excellence and are firmly placed on a path to higher education.

**International Community School, Decatur, Ga.**

*Year opened:* 2002

*Grades served:* K–6

*School mission:* To provide refugee, immigrant and local children with an international education at the elementary level; and to explore and celebrate cultural differences in a challenging, nurturing and internationally multi-ethnic environment.

**Lighthouse Community Charter School, Oakland, Calif.**

*Year opened:* 2001

*Grades served:* K–12

*School mission:* To prepare a diverse K–12 student population for college or a career of their choice by equipping each child with the knowledge, skills and principles to be a self-motivated lifelong learner.

**Ivy Preparatory Academy, Norcross, Ga.**

*Year opened:* 2008

*Grades served:* 6–7 currently, growing one grade at a time through 12th grade

*School mission:* To develop middle and high school girls into thoroughly equipped scholars who are prepared to enter and succeed in the colleges and universities of their choice.

**Manzanita Charter School, Richmond, Calif.**

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* 6–8

*School mission:* Through active family involvement in self-governed public education, this cooperative charter seeks to create a safe, nurturing, and diverse educational community for its children.

**Neighborhood House, Boston, Mass.**

*Year opened:* 1995

*Grades served:* Pre K–8

*School mission:* To offer a quality education to a diverse community of Boston children through a neighborhood-based school that integrates education with social services and health care programs for the benefit of students and their families that otherwise have limited public educational opportunities.

**Pacific Collegiate School, Santa Cruz, Calif.**

*Year opened:* 1999

*Grades served:* 7–12

*School mission:* To provide exemplary, standards-based college preparatory and fine arts education for public middle and high school students of Santa Cruz County and bordering areas, and to offer any student the same quality of education offered by the most academically distinguished schools in California.

**Partnership Academy, Richfield, Minn.**

*Year opened:* 2002

*Grades served:* K–6

*School mission:* To empower teachers, students, families and the broader community as partners in creating an exceptional school.



**Rise Academy—South Dade Charter School, Florida City, Fla.**

*Year opened:* 2008

*Grades served:* K–8

*School mission:* To prepare students from underserved communities for success in college and in life, and to prepare every Rise scholar to apply, matriculate and succeed at four-year colleges and universities.

**Taos Charter School, Ranchos De Taos, N.M.**

*Year opened:* 2000

*Grades served:* K–8

*School mission:* To provide our community’s children an educational alternative within the public school system, to provide our teachers with the best possible educational environment in which to teach, to involve the parents and families of our students in the education of their children, and to enhance the character education of all students.

**Timpanogos Academy, Lindon, Utah**

*Year opened:* 2002

*Grades served:* K–8

*School mission:* To be a model of excellence in education.

**University of Chicago Charter School—  
Donoghue Elementary Campus, Chicago, Ill.**

*Year opened:* 2005

*Grades served:* Pre K–5

*School mission:* To prepare all students for success in college, beginning in prekindergarten; to provide academic and social support by offering community programming for student and families beyond the school day, and to serve as a center of professional development that strengthens the ability of educators to teach all students well.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See the appendix for more information on each school included in the study.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for example: Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(1), 39–62; Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual Synthesis, 2002*. Austin: Southwest Educational Development Lab; Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1–22; Jaynes, W. H. (2003). A meta-analysis: The effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(2), 202–218; Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). *Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children* (Vol. 43, pp. 193–218).
- <sup>3</sup> See Gross, B., & Pochop, K. M. (2007). *Leadership to date, leadership tomorrow: A review of data on charter school directors*. NCSR working paper #2007-2. Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- <sup>4</sup> Student-led IEP meetings also have been shown to be very effective. See <http://hawbaker.pls.iowapages.org/id2.html> and <http://stetsonassociates.com/Resources/S-Led%20Basic-Agenda.pdf>

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