



## Ensuring Effective Principal Engagement with Families

### *School Visit Protocol Supporting Standard III*

School visits are to principal evaluation what classroom visits are to teacher evaluation: the foundation for fair and comprehensive supervision and evaluation. They are also a critical way for superintendents to see firsthand how district and school improvement efforts are playing out in schools and classrooms.

This is a school visit protocol that a superintendent can use to:

- ✓ **Gather evidence of the principal's work** engaging, supporting and communicating with families;
- ✓ **Guide and support the principal's development** as they explore a range of issues related to family engagement; and
- ✓ **Monitor implementation of district and school priorities** for family engagement.

During this visit, the superintendent observes the principal "in action" with parents/caregivers and/or in meetings with staff and, together with the principal, examines data reports, communications and other artifacts, debriefs observations, and plans next steps.

As with classroom visits, what superintendents do before, during and after a school visit should be deliberate and intentional. This protocol describes the preparation, visit activities, and follow-up that promote a meaningful and effective school visit focused on family engagement.

The focus of this school visit is on the following elements from Standard III of the [Model Principal Rubric](#):

- **III-A-1: Family Engagement**
- **III-B-2: Family Support**
- **III-C-1: Culturally Proficient Communication**
- **III-D-1: Family Concerns**

### Ten Steps for an Effective School Visit

#### Before the Visit

1. Establish expectations.
2. Review artifacts and develop visit focus.
3. Establish time, agenda, and preparation required.

#### During the Visit

4. Observe with a specific focus.
5. Debrief what you observed and read
6. Share feedback.
7. Agree on next steps and plan for accountability.

#### After the Visit

8. Hold each other accountable for next steps.
9. Review artifacts.
10. Reflect, prepare feedback, and address implications.



## Before the Visit

### 1. Establish Expectations

- Make sure that the principal has communicated to staff that the superintendent and principal may be observing one or more meetings related to families and family engagement - and that the superintendent is not evaluating the practice of any staff member except for the principal.
- Consider making time at Leadership Team meetings to develop a shared understanding among district administrators of how to approach family engagement to build and sustain strong partnerships. Consider using [DESE's MA Family, School and Community Partnerships Fundamentals](#) as a reference.

### 2. Review Artifacts and Develop the Focus for this Visit

- Review notes and next steps agreed upon at the last one-to-one conference with the principal, leadership team meeting, and/or school visit dealing with family engagement. What questions do they raise for you that you will want to raise with the principal?
- If the principal has a goal related to family engagement or one that depends on family engagement for its achievement, this visit is a good time to examine together progress being made, obstacles hindering progress, and steps to overcome them.
- If the principal has recently encountered a challenging situation with a family (or a successful one), this visit is an opportunity to examine it closely and learn from it.
- If the principal has a scheduled event such as a back-to-school night or a meeting of the School Council, this can be the “principal-in-action” component of the visit. The superintendent and principal can schedule the discussion and review of artifacts afterwards, or at another time.

### 3. Establish Time, Preparation Required, and Agenda

- Schedule the visit in advance with the principal to ensure the opportunity to observe the most relevant meetings and/or events.
- Make an agenda for the visit, allowing for a balance of time spent analyzing artifacts, observing the principal “in action”, debriefing, troubleshooting challenges, and planning next steps.
- Be clear about what artifacts you want to review in advance and what you want the principal to have accessible.
- Consider using a [School Visit template](#) to capture plans and keep you both focused.



## Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit on Family Engagement

Intentionally planning a school visit around a focus area related to a principal's goals or priorities for the school will help ensure that time allocated for the visit is used to effectively gather evidence and provide meaningful feedback.

- **Observe the principal “in action.”** Choose one or more of these opportunities to see how the principal communicates and interacts with families, approaches planning for effective partnerships with families, and guides and supports staff to engage with families in collaborative, culturally responsive ways:
  - Hosting a family engagement event such as a Back-to-School Night, Literacy Night or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Meeting.
  - Meeting with staff members as they plan or debrief a family engagement event.
  - Meeting with members of a department or grade-level team as they plan or debrief parent-teacher conferences when a new approach was taken such as including students or an innovation introduced such as standards-based report cards.
  - Facilitating a meeting of the School Advisory Council as they review the draft School Improvement Plan.

- **Develop an agenda.** Sample agenda for a two-hour visit focused on family engagement:

Review pressing concerns	15 min
Review insights and raise questions based on artifacts	10 min
Observations of principal “in action”	45 min
Debrief together	30 min
Debrief related topics and issues, time permitting	10 min
Share feedback and next steps	10 min

- **Consider including other administrators in the observation and part or all of the debrief.**
  - Consider asking the principal to invite another school administrator with major responsibilities for family engagement for the visit. This provides an opportunity to observe a principal “in action” observing, debriefing, and discussing next steps with other members of their leadership team.
  - Consider inviting the district's Director of Student Support Services or English Learner Director to participate in the visit to add expertise and insight.

## During the Visit

### 4. Observe and Review Artifacts with a Specific Focus

In this protocol, the superintendent is observing the principal “in action”. To focus attention on **Culturally Proficiency Communication (III-C-1)**, look and listen for how the principal and staff members frame a challenge and talk about families, e.g.,

- Are they taking an asset-based approach, or one based on deficits?
- How curious and knowledgeable are they about the family’s background and culture?
- How much do they seek to discover root causes, rather than remain at the symptom level in their discussion?
- How much resilience and resourcefulness do they exhibit?

### 5. Debrief What you Observed and Read

Find a private place for the debrief where you will neither be interrupted or overheard. Ask a sequence of clarifying and probing questions about what you observed that are designed to support the principal to be reflective and analytical, offering specific examples and evidence as needed to prompt and deepen reflection, e.g.,

- *How typical was the meeting you observed?*
- *What surprised you? Why?*
- *What pleased you? Why?*
- *What concerned you? Why?*
- *What could you have done differently to support a better outcome?*
- *What are the implications, if any, for your leadership beyond this specific context?*

### 6. Share Feedback

Share and discuss your respective assessments of progress being made to engage families in a meaningful partnership, offering evidence and examples. Offer feedback that is specific and actionable, identifying both strengths to build on and ways to shore up performance.

- If warranted, offer precise praise for something you saw the principal say or do.
- Share any concerns raised by what you saw and heard.
- Be explicit about whether the progress being made related to family engagement is sufficient in your judgment.

### 7. Agree on Next Steps and Plan for Accountability

Conclude with clarity about the specific next step(s) for both the principal and the superintendent. Be specific about the timeline.

- Decide how and when the principal will communicate evidence of their progress in strengthening family engagement.
- Decide how and when the superintendent will provide promised support, if any is to be provided.



## Deep Dive: Collecting Evidence on Family Engagement

School visits offer a rich source of evidence about principal practice. Approaching visits with clarity and specificity about questions to ask, situations to observe and artifacts to examine will set the stage for deep, growth-enhancing conversations with principals about their practice.

➤ **Reviewing artifacts.** Reviewing some or all of these artifacts can make for rich conversation and learning about family outreach, engagement and support:

- Agendas/plans/materials from recent family outreach events and data about attendance broken out by subgroup.
- Samples of communications with families.
- Agendas and notes from Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and/or School Advisory Council Meetings.
- Agendas and/or notes from meetings of the school's student support or other comparable team tasked with building home-school connections.
- Analysis of the results of staff survey questions related to family engagement from [DESE's Model Staff Feedback Survey](#).
- Analysis of results of a parent survey.
- Analysis of feedback sought more informally at the conclusion of recent parent events through "exit slips" or similar feedback devices.

➤ **Asking probing questions.** Some questions to consider posing about the state of family engagement in the school:

About Current Conditions and Plans	About Outreach	About Expectations and Support for Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways is the relationship with students' families and this school strong? How do you know?</li> <li>• What families are "under-engaged"? Why? What have you/can you do about it?</li> <li>• What efforts to improve family engagement have been successful? How do you know?</li> <li>• Do the majority of parents know who the leadership team is at your school?</li> <li>• What are the regular opportunities for parents to meet with school leaders to raise concerns and share information? Who takes advantage of those opportunities? Who typically doesn't? What obstacles get in the way? What are ways you are trying to overcome them? What's working?</li> <li>• What support can other district staff or I provide to you and your staff?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you regularly provide school-specific information to all families in a way that they are sure to receive it – text, social media, handing out newsletters? How do you reach out to families whose home language is not English? What's been successful? How do you know?</li> <li>• Would you and your staff be able to identify at least 10-20 parent leaders to show up at an important meeting at your school or somewhere else in the town/city?</li> <li>• Is there a regular meeting (monthly) between you and the identified parent leaders? How do these meetings support two-way communication?</li> <li>• Are there any communications or outreach systems currently in use at the school that aren't yielding any benefit? What might you stop doing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your expectations for staff reaching out to families to communicate information about their children's progress and needs? Are the expectations for family engagement consistent throughout the school, or do they vary?</li> <li>• How are staff supported to understand their own cultural identities? To become aware of their own implicit bias and its potential impact? To recognize a deficit-based approach and replace it with an assets-based approach to working with students and their families?</li> <li>• How often are school leaders or staff greeting families at arrival and dismissal as they drop off/pick up their children by car or foot? Does this/would this make a difference? How do you know?</li> </ul>

## After the Visit

### 8. Hold Each Other Accountable for Next Steps

Make sure there is timely follow through on any district support committed, such as exploring an aspect of “cultural proficiency” or discussing the district’s attendance policy at a Leadership Team meeting, or providing time for principals to share with one another practices used to engage families of English learners.

### 9. Review Artifacts

The visit may prompt the need to review more data related to indicators of family engagement. Make time to review these before finalizing plans for the next one-to-one conference or visit.

### 10. Reflect, Prepare Feedback, and Address Implications

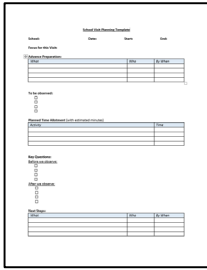
- Take time to reflect on the visit and make notes:
  - Are there patterns emerging about this principal’s leadership related to family engagement?
  - What is an emerging [C-E-I-J \(Claims-Evidence-Impact-Judgment statement\)](#) that captures an essential aspect of their performance?
  - What supports might help them:
    - Sharpen their performance in one or more of the Indicators and elements related to family engagement?
    - Deepen their knowledge of “best practice”?
    - Make more authentic, culturally sustaining connections with families?
  - Are there other principals who could benefit from those same supports? How might Leadership Team meeting time be used to provide them?
- Draft written feedback for the principal that is specific and actionable, identifying both strengths to build on and ways to shore up less-than-proficient performance.

The **Model Principal Rubric** defines proficient practice in these focus elements as follows:

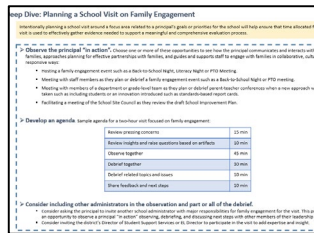
- **III-A-1: Family Engagement:** *Engages with families in a way that is culturally responsive and collaborative to ensure that all families are welcome and can contribute to the classroom, school, and community’s effectiveness. Works with staff to identify and remove barriers to families’ involvement, including but not limited to families with limited access to technology, and families whose home language is not English.*
- **III-B-2: Family Support:** *Supports families in understanding district and school-based policies and resources that ensure student learning and achievement. This includes but is not limited to parent teacher organizations, child study/intervention teams, IEP referral processes, and student attendance policies. Sets clear expectations regarding how specialized support staff should partner with families in accessing support services within and outside of school, and monitors adherence to these policies.*
- **III-C-1: Culturally Proficient Communication:** *Sets clear expectations for and provides appropriate supports to educators regarding regular, two-way, culturally proficient communication with families. Ensures that all communication with families demonstrates understanding of and respect for different home languages, culture, and values.*
- **III-D-1: Family Concerns:** *Responds to families as concerns arise in a timely and effective manner, and supports educators to do the same; works to reach equitable solutions in the best interest of students. Is able to articulate rationale for decisions made.*



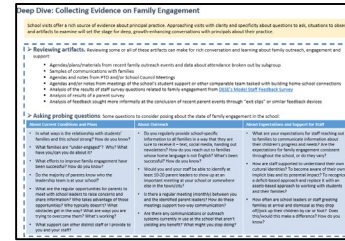
# Resources



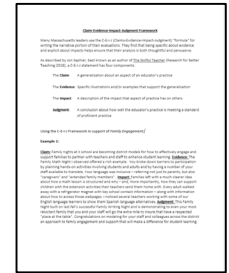
School Visit Template



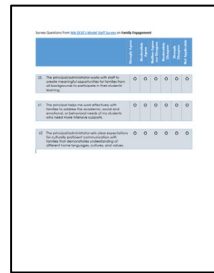
Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit on Family Engagement



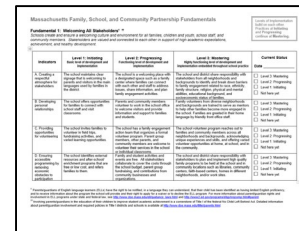
Deep Dive: Collecting Evidence on Family Engagement



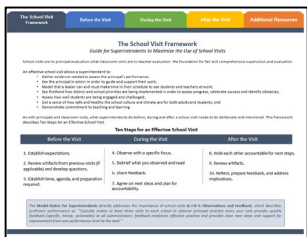
Sample C-E-I-J for Family Engagement



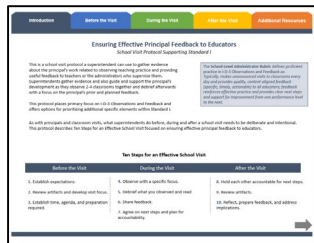
Model Staff Survey



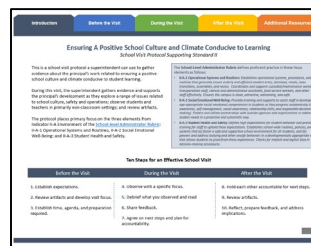
MA Family, School, and Community Partnerships Fundamentals



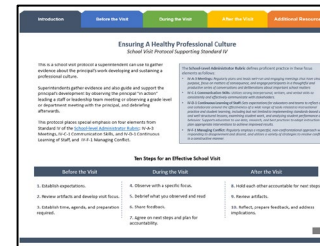
School Visit Framework



School Visit Protocol #1: Observations and Feedback



School Visit Protocol #2: School Culture



School Visit Protocol #4A: Professional Culture



School Visit Protocol #4B: Cultural Responsiveness

Coming soon!