



Quick Reference Guide: Classroom Level Effective Family Engagement

Culturally Responsive Two-Way Communication

Educators use culturally responsive practices and strategies to engage in two-way communication with families of ELs (e.g., providing interpreters/translators for parent-teacher conferences, promoting participation of EL family organizations such as English Learner Parent Advisory Councils, empowering families of ELs to communicate in the language of their choice and using their preferred method of communication).

Strategies for Effective Family Engagement

- Engage Every Family
- Build Effective Communication
- Empower Families as Partners
- Involve Families in Decision-Making
- Leverage Community Partnerships

Adapted from [Massachusetts Guidance for English Learner Parent Advisory Councils](#)

Educators recognize the integral role families play in English Learners' (EL) success and work to create a mutually beneficial partnership between the school and home. Establishing an open channel for on-going, two-way communication starts from the time ELs are enrolled and placed. To maximize communication, educators use methods that overcome traditional barriers and that are [responsive to](#) families' cultures, schedules, languages, and relevant needs. For example, educators ensure a balance among different types of communications (apps, letters, electronic communications, phone calls, student journals, etc.) and use methods preferred by parents and families. They overcome language barriers by using a family's language of choice whenever possible and working with [interpreters and translators](#) whenever appropriate, such as parent-teacher conferences and parent-teacher association meetings. They inform parents about EL performance in class and also share information about organizations, meetings and leadership opportunities in the community, such as [English Learner](#)

[Parent Advisory Councils](#). In this way, effective two-way communication with ELs' families also includes educators facilitating connections between EL families and other relevant services and programs in the district and community.

Families as Active Participants in the School Community

Educators regularly invite families of ELs to participate in their children's education in an intentional, systematic and sustained manner, while demonstrating respect for different home languages, cultures, and values.

Truly effective family engagement extends beyond communication and promotes [active participation of EL families in the education of their children and in the larger school community](#). Educators promote active participation of EL families by developing relationships and getting to know their ELs and their families, cultures, values, and home languages. This knowledge helps to identify ways educators can encourage family participation [creatively, capitalizing on the assets ELs and their families bring](#) and can contribute to the whole school community. Authentic, systematic ways for EL families to become involved include volunteering in the classroom and school, co-developing language development objectives, promoting EL parent leadership roles, connecting families to district and community organizations, and promoting advocacy opportunities.

"True partnership will require you to believe that your families and the communities in which they live are rich with the human and social capital that you need to be an effective educator. My advice is that we see our families and community members as co-creators and co-producers of the excellent schools and learning opportunities that we want for all of our students."

- Dr. Karen L. Mapp
[Seeing Families as Co-Creators of Our Schools](#)

Home and School Partnership

Educators engage in ongoing conversations with families of ELs about grade-level standards and their children's learning throughout the year and work together to identify strategies for supporting learning in and out of school, including appropriate supports for ELs.

Effective educators of ELs know the importance of forging a partnership with ELs' families and value them as mutually beneficial. They understand these partnerships are [essential to EL success](#). Partnerships with families of English learners provide opportunities for educators to learn more about the strengths and assets of each EL and [provide information for supporting EL success at home by sharing performance data, resources and strategies](#). They also provide opportunities for families to learn about grade-level standards, analytic practices, and language development [benchmarks](#) and expectations. In addition, partnerships allow EL parents to have a voice in the education of their child and to develop a common understanding of the student, his or her progress, and potential future goals with educators.



ELs benefit from a solid home and school partnership and the larger support network that develops as a result. ELs experience school and home not as two distinct entities but as part of their world. Good partnerships provide a unified support network with common understandings, goals, and expectations for success that helps to support key aspects of ELs' worlds. These shared understandings, goals, expectations and supports promote strong identity formation and agency, greater engagement and self-monitoring of learning, increased academic performance, and overall mental well-being and self-confidence.

Actions-at-a-Glance: Family Engagement

Family Engagement: What can educators at the classroom level do?

- Respond to communications from EL families in a reasonably timely manner and using preferred methods and language of communication to promote an equal partnership
- [Mitigate barriers to communication](#) through [interpretation/translation](#) services, accessibility, and ease of use
- Develop ways to maintain frequent communication so families stay connected to EL performance
- Spend time researching and learning about [the strengths](#) families of ELs bring and how they can be used to benefit EL success and the larger school community
- Seek ways to actively engage families in the education of their child beyond just providing updates on student learning
- Ensure classroom spaces are welcoming, display instructional materials representative of the cultural backgrounds of EL families, and regularly invite families to participate in classroom activities
- Regularly communicate the belief that every family wants to see their EL succeed along with practical ways you see evidence of this belief in your interactions with EL families
- Share opportunities for families to [learn how to advocate for their child](#)
- Co-develop classroom objectives and goals with ELs and their families
- Create opportunities for families to volunteer in the classroom and ensure these opportunities are aligned with families' schedules so they can participate meaningfully
- Develop ways EL families can engage in leadership roles in the classroom and school (family communication networks and phone trees, parent-teacher association roles, participation in team planning sessions, etc.)
- Encouraging involvement in [English Learner Parent Advisory Councils](#) (ELPACs) and sharing information about how to join and participate
- Facilitate connections between EL families and relevant community organizations that could serve as supports to EL success

Planning Resources

DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals](#) provides a self-assessment rubric for evaluating and reflecting on educators' proficiency level related to family engagement (See p. 3-8).

[Fulfilling Our Promise: Snapshots of English Learners and their Families](#) highlights ELs and their families, including a discussion of EL families' hopes for students and suggestions for ways to develop home-school partnerships.

[Family and Community Resources](#) provides resources for family and community engagement for both educators and families.

DESE Guidance

[Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation: Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) provides guidance regarding expectations for all educators. Standard 3 clarifies expectations about family and community engagement and can be used to help guide communication with families and educator improvement efforts (see p. 10 - 11).

[English Language Proficiency Benchmarks](#) provides guidelines for EL language proficiency targets in Massachusetts, how these are set, and how they are related to expectations for EL success.

[Guidance for English Learner Parent Advisory Councils](#) provides suggestions and strategies for effective EL family engagement (see Appendix C, p. 13-16).

[Guidance for Sheltered English Immersion \(SEI\) Programs](#) provides scenarios that highlight effective family engagement and strategies for structuring and supporting family involvement and communication (see Appendix F: Scenarios).

Federal Resources

[Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships](#) presents outcomes of effective home-school partnerships and provides examples of successful ones. This guide can be used to help structure family engagement and partnerships (see Staff and Family Partnership Outcomes on p. 11 and Case Studies on p. 13-23).

[Family](#) and [Community](#) Engagement provides resources for developing relationships with families.

[Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#) provides resources for building effective school-family partnerships (for EL family strategies, see Part 2: Building a Cultural Bridge).

[English Learner Tool Kit Chapter 10: Tools and resources for ensuring meaningful communication with Limited English Proficient parents](#) provides suggestions for bridging families’ cultures with school, information around translation, and resources (see p. 7-13).

[Newcomer Toolkit Chapter 5: Establishing Partnerships With Families](#) describes characteristics of effective partnerships with families of newcomer ELs and effective strategies for developing and maintaining them.

Other Featured Resources

[Schools and Families: An Important Partnership](#) provides resources for developing effective partnerships for both educators and families of ELs.

[Communicating Important Information with ELL Families: Strategies for Success](#) describes strategies for communicating with families of ELs.

[Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners and Their Families](#) presents key practices staff and educators can use to move their school towards a comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to serving ELs and their families, including ways teachers can take action outside the classroom to promote welcoming, equitable experiences for ELs (see Section II: Classroom Culture and Section III: Family Engagement).

[Partnering with Newcomer Families](#) provides ideas and strategies to promote partnership with families of newcomers.

[WIDA: Family Engagement page](#) provides resources for promoting and strengthening engagement with EL families.

[Global Research Family Project](#) provides resources and tools to support the development of EL family partnerships (see [Joining Together to Create a Bold Vision for Next Generation Family Engagement](#) and [Family Engagement Playbook](#)).

[Parent–Teacher Conference Tip Sheets for Principals, Teachers, and Parents](#) provides approaches for maximizing parent-teacher conferences to ensure families receive the information they need to help their children and for educators to understand their students’ strengths and needs.

[A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student learning](#) explains the pivotal role families play on their children’s success in school and explores the importance of family involvement in a student’s education.