

# Quick Reference Guide: School Level Effective Family Engagement



## Collaboratively Develop Culturally Responsive Strategies for Removing Barriers

School administrators partner with families, staff and community partners to develop culturally responsive strategies that remove cultural, linguistic and other barriers to engagement with families of ELs (e.g., provision of translation/ interpretation services, racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic biases).

Barriers to EL family engagement can include differences in language, logistical issues (transportation, childcare, timing of activities), lack of trust and partnerships between educators and families, racial, ethnic cultural and linguistic biases, and different beliefs about the purpose of family engagement and its relationship to student success. Addressing these barriers collaboratively provides an opportunity to build trust, leverage families' contributions, and puts the relationship on equal footing across home and school. Using interpreters and translators facilitates communication and supports meaningful parent participation. Family partnerships necessitate schools sharing power with families, and welcoming and leveraging differences in approaches for addressing concerns. One strategy to support this is to strongly support English Learner Parent Advisory Councils ([ELPACs](#)) to provide input on matters that impact ELs such as programming, educational opportunities, ways to explicitly share school expectations with new EL families, developing EL parent leadership, and improvement planning. ELPACs are [required for some districts](#) and in [each school that is designated as "underperforming" or "chronically underperforming" that operates a program for ELs](#). However, they can be established in any school as a best practice for partnering with EL families.

## Provide Resources to Help Families Feel Welcome, Interact as Equals, and Contribute

School administrators support family-school partnerships by providing resources to educators and families to ensure that families of ELs feel welcome, interact as equal partners and contribute their cultures to the life of the school.

Supporting asset-based family engagement requires resources to ensure partnerships between home and school can be effective. In practice, this requires [building educators' and parents' capacity for working together](#) through professional learning and training, resources for regular two-way communication between home and school, such as family liaisons and interpreters, and structured time and space for collaboration between parents, educators, and community members to ensure that families feel welcome, share their cultures and experiences, and interact as equal partners.



### Training Topics for Effective Partnerships

#### For Educators

- Cultural responsiveness and ambassadorship
- Gathering information about students and their families
- Incorporating student profile information into instruction
- Co-developing learning objectives with EL parents
- Collaboration and cross-cultural

#### For EL Families

- Roles in school governance
- Information about school expectations, EL programs, EL rights
- Leadership and advocacy skills
- Supporting EL language and academic development at home
- Collaboration strategies

### Examples of EL Families' Funds of Knowledge

- Knowledge of different cultures and languages
- Daily routines (budgeting, childcare, maintenance/repairs, etc.)
- Ability to develop social networks to gather and exchange resources
- Career-specific skills and knowledge (engineering, plumbing, accountancy, management, etc.)
- Traditions, moral knowledge, ethics

[Adapted from Moll et al \(1992\)](#)

## Laying a Good Foundation: Asset-based Approaches

School administrators hold themselves and staff accountable for using asset-based approaches to regularly engage with families of ELs about their children's academic and linguistic progress.

Asset-based approaches focus on what partners can contribute, rather than what they lack. Approaching family engagement this way requires celebrating the skills and funds of knowledge EL families have developed to function in their communities, leveraging them to promote student success, and [adding to them rather than trying to change what families do](#). It also

means recognizing that learning happens across the different settings and contexts students navigate seamlessly – rather than seeing home and school as separate worlds. This is especially important for ELs, whose home and school cultures and languages may be very different. Moreover, believing that all families want to see their children succeed, intend to support

their development, and play an important role in their children’s education is foundational for asset-based approaches. The varied roles parents and guardians’ play have been [connected to indicators of student achievement](#) including student grades, test scores, lower drop-out rates, students’ sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning, and students’ beliefs about the importance of education. School leaders who implement these approaches are known for actively welcoming EL families’ contributions, creating opportunities for sharing information about EL performance, and making programming and curricular decisions together with parents. They hold themselves accountable to [asset-based principles for engaging families of ELs](#) by incorporating them into all key school processes such as school improvement plans and goals, educator evaluation, hiring and staffing decisions, curriculum development, scheduling of classes and parent engagement activities, etc. For example, they develop metrics related to asset-based approaches in each key school processes and establish processes for gathering data related to these metrics regularly. They review progress towards metrics periodically in collaboration with parents to ensure the school is implementing asset-based principles and that their implementation supports increasingly effective family engagement. Finally, school leaders use this data and process to make strategic corrections when needed.

### **Actions-at-a-Glance: Family Engagement**

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

- Establish an English Learner Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC)
- Set goals for EL family involvement in district and school governance structures and committees ([school councils](#), [parent advisory councils](#), etc.) to ensure multilingual and multicultural perspectives are represented
- Develop a new EL parent orientation program
- Establish parent-to-parent mentoring and leadership development programs
- Inviting parents to student learning data analysis conversations
- Include EL parents in school improvement planning meetings
- Recruit EL parents to implement their ideas for improvement
- Include welcoming, culturally inclusive visual displays and instructional materials
- Promote school activities and programs that represent the cultural backgrounds of families in the school
- Ensure school practices and procedures (new student registration, parent-teacher conferences, etc.) are well-resourced and support collaboration with EL families
- Review family engagement and school improvement plans reflect asset-based principles
- Use educator evaluation and professional learning efforts to support asset-based practices for EL instruction and family engagement
- Establish opportunities for sharing information about EL performance and making curricular and programming decisions with EL parents
- Develop metrics related to asset-based practices across key school processes and establish processes for gathering and analyzing data related to these metrics regularly within the school and with parents of ELs
- Review progress towards established asset-based metrics periodically and make strategic corrections when needed

## Planning Resources

### DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation: Classroom Teacher Rubric Standard 3](#) (p. 10 – 11) is about family and community engagement and provides indicators to guide communication with families.

[Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals \(Fundamentals\)](#) defines family engagement and provides a tool for self-assessment that includes examples of responsibilities, opportunities, and expectations of families, schools, school districts, and communities for partnering together to support student performance and academic achievement.

[Family Resources](#) provides information for EL parents in multiple languages, including EL Parent Advisory Council information and guidelines, relevant laws, and links to additional resources for immigrant and refugee families.

[Family and Community Resources](#) provides a collection of resources to support families, and engagement between families, schools and the larger community.

[District-Family Communications](#) provides information about essential communication processes between EL families and

schools (such as Home Language Surveys, Parent Notification Regarding English Language Education, English Language Education (ELE) Program Placement, and Parent ELE Program Transfer Request) in multiple languages.

[Fulfilling Our Promise: Snapshots of English Learners and their Families](#) highlights ELs and their families. It includes a discussion of families' hopes for students and suggestions for schools on how to engage them.

## **DESE Guidance**

[Guidance for Defining and Implementing Two-Way Immersion \(TWI\) Programs](#) provides ideas for how educators in TWI programs can engage with parents and community members (p. 14).

[Guidance for Sheltered English Immersion \(SEI\) Programs](#) provides examples of districts implementing Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) programs, including scenarios (link to Scenarios on p.14) showcasing a new student intake process (Scenario 1, p. 2-3) and family engagement at the school level (Scenario 6, p. 19-21) as well as related resources.

[Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners](#) provides information about requirements for parental communication across ELE program procedures and resources to support communication with parents (see Appendix A: Home Language Survey, Appendix B: Parent Notification Form, and Appendix P: Parental Engagement).

[School Councils Questions and Answers](#) provides guidance related to state laws for school councils, including expectations for [racial and ethnic representation](#) within councils and ideas for [member selection](#) and [inclusive decision-making](#).

## **Federal Resources**

[EL Toolkit Chapter 10](#) provides tools and resources for ensuring meaningful communication with limited English proficient parents, including a framework for family engagement activities that help establish partnerships for student success (Tool #1, p. 5), ideas to establish and maintain strong parental engagement in schools (Tool #2, p. 7), and resources for interpretation and translation (Tool #3, p. 8).

[Newcomer Toolkit Chapter 5](#) discusses characteristics among newcomer families, as well as cultural barriers to school-family partnerships and ways to overcome them. It describes essential components of strong parent and family engagement; characteristics of quality programs; and examples of effective collaborative, sustained, and supportive partnerships with newcomer families.

Mapp, Karen L., & Kuttner, Paul J. (2014) [Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) Austin, TX: SEDL. Provides a research-based framework and strategies for supporting effective family-school partnerships, including specific process and organizational conditions that must be met for educators and families to learn how to partner together and to sustain family engagement efforts (see [report summary](#)).

[Supporting Undocumented Youth](#) provides legal guidelines for elementary and secondary education (p. 7-8), tips for secondary school educators and other personnel (p. 9), models from the field and useful resources (p.21-26).

[Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades](#) provides recommendations to early childhood systems and programs on family engagement (p. 9 – 17), acknowledging how integrated family engagement requires schools to engage families as essential partners.

## **Other Featured Resources**

[Attorney General's Advisory Regarding Equal Access to Public Education for All Students Irrespective of Immigration Status](#) explains state expectations for all Massachusetts students to have equal access to quality public education.

[Global Family Research Project](#) provides resources for effective EL family partnerships including [Teaching Teachers on Effective Family Partnerships](#).

Henderson, A.T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). [A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student learning](#). Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Laboratory. Provides evidence of the pivotal role families play on their children's achievement in school and through life and argues for supporting more involvement at school from all parents as an important strategy for addressing the achievement gap (see In Short, p. 7-8).

[Funds of Knowledge](#) presents Luis Moll describing the concept of Funds of Knowledge and how to gather and use them in the classroom (see video and related [handout](#) summarizing Moll's research and connecting it to Head Start frameworks).

[National Parent Teacher Association's Spanish Resources](#) and [Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit](#) provide useful resources for engaging with EL families.

[Promising Practices: An annual collection from the members of the National Network of Partnership Schools](#) provides examples of district and school-level strategies for supporting effective parent engagement.

Regional Education Laboratory for the Pacific. (2016). [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education](#) provides resources for school staff to build relationships with families and community members and to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students' ongoing learning and development. The Toolkit includes Part 1: Building an understanding of family and community engagement, Part 2: Building a cultural bridge, Part 3: Building

trusting relationships with families and community through effective communication, and Part 4: Engaging families and community members in data conversations.

[Guide for Engaging ELL Families: 20 Strategies for School Leaders](#) provides a variety of strategies for removing barriers and increasing effective EL family engagement, along with multiple resources, references and recommended readings related to the topic of EL family engagement.

WIDA's [Language-Focused Family Engagement](#) provides a framework for engaging EL families in language development, as well as ideas for implementation and an example from a district ((see The Four Pillars of Language-Focused Family Engagement: A Reflection Tool for Educators on p. 8-9 and Language-Focused Family Engagement: Potential Pathways to Implementation on p. 10-13).

WIDA's [ABCs of Family Engagement](#) highlights characteristics of effective EL family and school relationships.