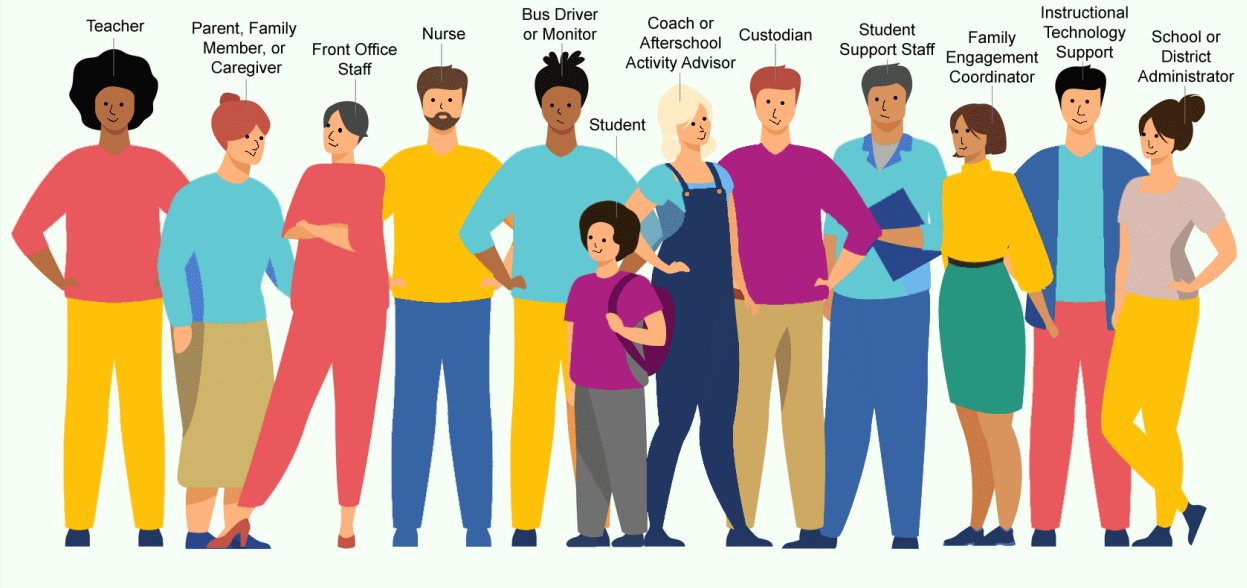
Family partnership is everyone's job!



Family School Partnership and Roles - Examples

Teacher

- Set the tone for two-way communication and collaboration early on. Families will follow your lead.
- Learn as much as you can from each child and family (it's instructional gold!).
- Share good moments and successes regularly, even small ones, for every child.
- Invite family members to come see students in action and talk about their learning.
- Learn about the backgrounds, skills and assets different families have. Be intentional about tapping into them.
- Share information about learning regularly; for example, the focus for the week and ways families can help.
- If a student is struggling, strategize together with family members, colleagues, and other people who know the student (coach, previous teacher, etc.).

Parent, Family Member, or Caregiver

- Let teachers know the best way to communicate with you (text, email, voicemail, etc.).
- Share information that impacts your child's learning (interests, what's worked, what hasn't).
- Let schools know what support you need to be an effective partner in your child's education.
- Share your gifts! Let school staff know about your skills, interests, talents and strengths.
- Play a leadership role at the school. Join a school site council, parent council, PTO, or other group.

Front Office Staff

- Create a welcoming and supportive space for family members to enter.
- Greet everyone warmly even when you are busy. People appreciate being seen.
- Learn about the cultures and language of families. Find ways to show you value them.
- Family members often arrive at schools uncertain or nervous. You can set a supportive tone and defuse potentially difficult situations simply by listening and caring.
- Respect privacy. Front office staff hear lots of "stuff", some of which should not be shared.

Family partnership is everyone's job!

Nurse

- Participate in family activities and home visits to learn about families and build relationships.
- Involve family members as co-designers and facilitators of wellness activities.
- Help your school community learn how to recognize signs a student might be struggling with health or mental health.
- Work with school staff and families as a team to support struggling students, particularly students who may experience an extended absence because of their situation.

Bus Driver or Monitor

- Be an ambassador! You are often the first and last school system adult a child sees each day.
- Greet family members and students and get to know them.
- Let family members know the physical and emotional safety of their child is the most important part of your job. Share the same message with students.
- Look for struggling students (lonely, new, teased). Take action or seek help from school staff, family members, and student allies.
- Ask family members to share concerns and suggestions. Be open to what you hear.
- Share issues and family feedback with school leaders.

Student

- Talk to your family about what you are learning at school and help you might need.
- Get to know your teacher and let them get to know you.
- Let your teacher or trusted adult know when you are struggling.
- Be part of conversations about your education! Attend family-teacher conferences and other meetings so you can share your experiences and ideas.
- Build relationships and learn from other students and families, particularly those who come from different backgrounds and experiences.

Coach or Afterschool Activity Advisor

- Establish a clear communication strategy from the start (email list, online group, etc.). Send a family message or letter to open lines of communication.
- Host a family meeting. Go over expectations and ways families can help (getting to practice on time, providing equipment, praising hard work, volunteer roles).
- Emphasize what being a team or group member means. Talk about ways members can support each other (acceptable and unacceptable behavior).
- While you have them for 1, 2 or 3 years, families are with their children forever. Build a partnership with families that supports student, family and team dreams and goals.

Custodian

- Get to know students and families and let them get to know you. You are part of their school community.
- Be part of the support system for students. There are many great examples of students helping a custodian (quality time with an adult they trust) or a custodian helping the student support team and family with a restorative approach to something a student may have done (broken something, written on a wall, etc.).

Family partnership is everyone's job!

Student Support Staff

- Promote and prioritize family voice and partnership in all aspects of student support work.
- Develop support strategies collaboratively with teachers, the student and family members, school staff, and other trusted adults who know the student (coach, previous teacher, etc.)
- Demystify "school talk" and school protocols for family members. Empower them to advocate for their child.
- Look for student support trends across a class, grade or school. Involve families in identifying strategies to respond; for example, stronger communication or educator and family training.

Family Engagement Coordinator

- Solicit partners and create a team to assist you. No one can get the job of family partnership done alone.
- Connect families with school and community resources.
- Help teachers identify ways to build meaningful relationships with families.
- Find ways to align family partnership work with school and district priorities. What role can families play to help you succeed with that priority?
- Learn about the experiences of different families and staff. Talk to them to better understand how they think and feel. Use their experiences (anonymously) as examples, stories, or case studies to build awareness and strengthen family partnership strategies.
- Help build a shared understanding among staff and families about what strong school-family partnership can look like at particular different developmental ages - elementary, middle and high.
- Advocate for what staff need to practice strong family partnership (time, training, coaching, clear information or expectations, access to additional support).

Instructional Technology Support

- Help the school organize workshops to help families learn important school technology tools. Engage students and parents to help you!
- Help identify families with technology access issues. Work with the district and community partners to address barriers.
- Monitor teacher communication methods and family preferences. Identify technology tools/apps that should be used consistently.
- Help identify and support communication best practices; for example, warm and concise messaging, positive/constructive communication, parent feedback polls, effective school social media use, etc.)

School or District Administrator

- Articulate a clear vision for family-school partnership in your district.
- Deliver a clear message about the mindset you want staff to bring to family partnership (two-way communication, essential element of teaching and learning, family partnership is organizational strategy work just an interpersonal work)
- Promote family partnership work as the responsibility of every staff member and an aspect of every domain of school life.
- Lead by example. Take every opportunity to model deep family partnership in your own actions and work.
- Allocate the resources and time needed to support your district's vision.

Family partnership is everyone's job!

- Establish routine ways to listen to families, students and staff and collect feedback on what's working and what needs improvement. Let them know how you have used their feedback.
- Establish the systems, structures and support that enable educators to practice strong family partnership.

The Family Liaison or Coordinator Role

Many districts have family liaisons, coordinators, engagement managers - perhaps even a family and community engagement office or family resource center. That's great! It shows commitment to family partnership work. However, there's a pattern that repeats over and over in schools and districts.

As family partnership staff step forward, other staff step back.They perceive family partnership as someone else's job and are relieved to have someone else who can do the job.
So what's the problem?

- Family partnership staff are expected to do everything related to family partnership.
- Family partnership work remains siloed. It's not seen as everyone's job
- Family partnership staff hit roadblocks as their efforts compete with other priorities and resource demands.
- Strategies and practices are scattershot and vary widely. It's hard to establish shared values and deeply rooted approaches.
- Family partnership staff feel marginalized, unsupported, and frustrated.

Instead, family partnership staff should help everyone else step forward and be a full partner in the work. It's a facilitative and capacity-building role.

Staff Facilitate. Partners Do.	
When Family Staff Roles Do and Everyone Else "Advises"	**When Everyone is a Partner and Family Staff Role "Facilitates"**
• Not enough ownership of the vision, results, successes and failures • Can silo effort and limit the amount of impact or change • Decreases the resource base; partners aren't contributing their assets and talents • Relies on adding family staff to have more impact - hard to sustain when funding shifts • Staff are seen as the owners of the effort; if staff leadership goes…so does the work.	• Increases the number of leaders owning the work and ensures it is integrated across the organization • Creates an atmosphere where people plan, implement, assess and problem-solve as partners • Increases the size of results/impact partners achieve together • Integrates resources (time, human, material, financial) into a collaborative base; extends the reach of those resources • Decreases the size of staff and actual hard dollars needed to operate but has more impact on more students and families

© School & Main Institute