

Engaging Families in Reciprocal Partnerships

The earner utilizes effective partnership strategies to build reciprocal relationships with families.

Key Method

The earner collaborates with families to create a shared vision for their student's success and to establish protocols for two-way communication to support families and students in achieving that vision.

Method Components

Over 40 years of research compiled by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) confirms that family engagement in schools has a remarkable impact on student achievement and school improvement. Research from the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education shares that “no matter their income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.” Based on this research, every Arkansas School Improvement Plan includes an embedded plan for parent and family engagement.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines parent and family engagement as the “participation of parents in **regular, two-way and meaningful communications** with school staff that involves the student, addresses learning, and engages the family in school activities.” In addition, The Danielson Framework for Teaching outlines the teacher's role in Engaging Families and Communities (Domain 4, Component C) as follows:

- Teachers interact with families and communities in ways that respect their values and cultural backgrounds.
- Teachers create learning experiences that uphold the values of the community and partner with families to create a shared vision of student success.
- Teachers establish processes to keep families informed about instructional programs **and** provide opportunities for input and feedback from families and the community.
- Teachers connect students' out-of-school learning and lives to their efforts in school **and** take the lead in forming partnerships and relationships to strengthen those connections.

Establishing partnerships and engaging with families involves an investment of time and commitment, especially when families are from cultures and backgrounds different than your own. All parents love their children and want the best for them; however, the ways parents express their love and interest in their child's education may look very different from family to family. Not all parents have jobs that provide the flexibility to attend traditional school events or to volunteer for school-based activities. In fact, research indicates that parents from lower socio-economic households or with lower levels of formal education will seldom respond to open requests for volunteers, but they will often participate if they are personally *invited* to help.

Funds of Knowledge: A Different Approach to Family Engagement

Researcher Luis Moll and colleagues from the University of Arizona approached family engagement as both educators and anthropologists. This approach identifies the “strategic knowledge and related activities” families demonstrate within their households that contribute to the economic and psychological success of the family. Educators who participated in the research began to view families’ work experiences and social practices as **funds of knowledge**, breaking away from the deficit thinking that focuses on the academic skills parents and students may lack. Using a funds of knowledge approach allows educators to establish strategic alliances with families to support their students’ learning in ways that respect their social history and intelligence and make them feel valued. Once educators become aware of a family’s funds of knowledge, they can incorporate unique skills and experiences from a student’s funds of knowledge into classroom pedagogy.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The text *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* by Dr. Joyce Epstein and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University has become the gold standard for educators seeking practical ways to engage families and communities in systematic, sustained, and integrated partnerships. Epstein bases her framework on the theory of “overlapping spheres of influence.” When all parties of influence—school, family, community—agree to mutually reinforce common goals and collaboratively design two-way partnerships that acknowledge and leverage their unique relationships with students, everyone involved benefits.

Table 1.1 includes Epstein’s six types of involvement and strategies for implementation adapted from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Third Edition)*.

Table 1.1 Six Types of Involvement and Strategies for Implementation

Parenting	Communicating	Volunteering
Provide information to all families, not just those who attend meetings at school.	Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all print and nonprint communications.	Make schedules flexible to accommodate parents employment.
Enable families to share about their culture, background, their children's talents and needs.	Establish two-way channels for communications—home to school and school to home.	Recruit volunteers widely so all families know their time and talents are welcome.
Learning at Home	Decision Making	Collaborating with the Community
Design interactive homework so the student leads the family in discussion of a school related topic.	Develop parent leaders who will represent other families by facilitating 2-way communication between families and the school.	Provide locations, staffing, funding, and support for school sanctioned activities.
Involve families in important curriculum related decisions and student learning preferences.	Include parent leaders who offer various perspectives on decision making committees.	Inform families of community programs for students: mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships.

Family and community engagement is more than asking parents and guardians to help with fundraising activities or to bring treats for the class party. This type of *school-based* involvement, linked to activities within a brick-and-mortar building at set times, is often unrealistic for many families and declines as students get older. Therefore, all educators, especially those in secondary schools, should place high priority on engaging families in *home-based* involvement where parents provide homework support, initiate conversations that pique their child's interest in learning, and encourage positive behavior that aligns with classroom expectations.

According to Dr. Karen Mapp of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, both families and educators must be taught ways to build trust and establish engaging partnerships. Mapp believes all efforts at engaging families should be interactive, collaborative, and linked to learning. In other words, if parents attend a school event, they should leave better equipped to support their child's educational journey. Too often schools conduct an Open House or Back-to-School Night that consists of reading school policies or the student handbook to parents and guardians which is neither interactive nor collaborative.

Most educators and parents have a vision of being equal partners in their child's education, but a lack of training often prevents the dream from being realized. To move from vision to execution, schools must make family engagement an integral part of all school initiatives rather than “random acts of family engagement” in an effort to check the family engagement box.

Supporting Rationale and Research

The Supporting Rationale and Research includes important resources for learning. More about engaging families in reciprocal partnerships. As you interact with these learning materials, take time to reflect on your professional practice.

Research

Johnson, E., & Johnson, A. (2016). “Enhancing Academic Investment through Home-School Connections. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*.” 12(1), 104-121. [Enhancing Academic Investment through Home-School Connections](#)

Lima, Cristiana Levinthal de Oliveira and Elina Kuusisto. “Parental Engagement in Children’s Learning: A Holistic Approach to Teacher-Parents’ Partnerships.” *IntechOpen*, 28 Oct 2019. [Parental Engagement in Children's Learning](#)

Turnbull, A., Turnbull, H. R., Erwin, E. J., Soodak, L. C., & Shogren, K. A. (2015). “Seven principles of partnership. In *Families, professionals and exceptionality: Positive outcomes through partnership and trust.* (7th ed., pp. 142–157). Pearson. [Seven Principles of Partnership](#) (This resource outlines the Seven Principles of Partnership and provides action steps for educators.)

Resources

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships. This [framework](#) is designed to support the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs.

Dual Capacity Building Framework. In this [video](#), Karen Mapp discusses the Dual-Capacity Framework for building family/school partnerships. Additionally, in this [video](#), Karen Mapp provides insight on the importance of linking family engagement to learning.

Framework of Six Types of Involvement. This [article](#) recognizes six forms of family engagement from the work of Joyce Epstein, professor at Johns Hopkins University.

HLP 3 Leadership and Faculty Guides. The [Leadership](#) and [Faculty](#) Guides provide schools with strategies to support positive interactions and communication with families.

One Size Does not Fit All: Analyzing Different Approaches to Family-School Communication. In this [resource](#), The Center for American Progress emphasizes the importance of communicating through a variety of ways to establish family partnerships.

Mastering the Parent-Teacher Meeting: Eight Powerful Tips. A veteran educator shares [eight powerful tips](#) for having a less stressful parent-teacher meeting.

Five Mistakes That Schools Make with English Learner Family Engagement. This [article](#) provides practical tips for planning school events to engage with families of English learners.

Funds of Knowledge. This [resource](#), excerpted from a Funds of Knowledge Toolkit, provides practical examples of one family's Funds of Knowledge.

Writing Survey Questions. This [article](#) from the Pew Institute provides important considerations to guide the development of survey questions.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

This micro-credential is divided into three areas: Overview, Artifacts and Evidence, and Reflection. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive “Passing” on Parts One and Three, and “Yes” on all criteria in Part Two.

Part One. Overview

Read the Overview criteria carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "passing" submission.

Prompt: Locate your school’s Family Engagement Plan and in a written response discuss/include:

- the location of the Family Engagement Plan on the school website, a link to your school’s Family Engagement Plan, and the ease or effort required by parents to find it.
- the makeup of the family engagement committee for your school (e.g., total members, number of parents, community members, and faculty and their roles within the school or community, including the Family Engagement Facilitator. Do you feel the committee adequately represents the voices of the families and students in your school?
- the criteria for selecting the family engagement committee, number of meetings, and frequency of communication.
- the ways in which your school’s plan for building staff capacity and parent capacity will improve school-family partnerships.
- your reason(s) for selecting this particular micro-credential.

This submission is scored either “passing” or “not passing.”

Passing: The earner includes a response to each part of the prompt; the total response should be at least 300 words and provide adequate detail to help the scorer understand the context of your submission.

Part Two. Artifacts and Evidence

Read the Artifacts and Evidence Submission requirements carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a “Yes” on each task.

Task 1: Establishing Two-way Communication

In order to establish channels for meaningful, two-way communication with families, create a questionnaire that will allow families to share their vision for their child’s

academic success. Before compiling your questions, please obtain copies of any surveys sent to parents from the school and district to avoid asking duplicate questions. Your survey should be 10 questions or less and make you more knowledgeable concerning the following:

- their child's learning preferences.
- Their child's interests outside of school.
- Typical behaviors (both challenging and rewarding) at home
- Specific learning goals families have for their child and the family's measure of success
- Ways the school can support families in overcoming challenges or barriers that prevent an authentic partnership between parent and school
- The parent's preferred mode of communication with you
- Any additional information germane to your teaching context

As evidence of this task, upload a copy of at least 3 completed questionnaires and a copy of your school and district survey(s). Be sure to mark out any Personally Identifiable Information (PII) from the questionnaire.

In addition, include a written response that explains the following:

- how you distributed and collected the questionnaire and the percentage of questionnaires returned.
- how you encourage parent participation in the survey, specifically among parents that might feel marginalized by school policies or procedures.
- new insights you gained as a result of the questionnaire.
- changes or additions you will make to future questionnaires or recommended changes to your school or district's survey.

Please submit at least 3 completed questionnaires with the title "Task 1 Completed Surveys," a copy of your school and district survey(s) with the tile "Task 1 School/District Survey(s)," and a written response (at least 300-words) with the title "Task 1 Written Response" as evidence for Task 1.

Task 2: Developing a Family Engagement Plan

Based on the survey results in Task 1, develop a plan of action to increase engagement with all families throughout the school year. Select one type of involvement from Epstein's

Six Types of Involvement Framework as the focus for your plan of action. Your action plan should identify the type of involvement you will address and include clearly defined steps that outline your vision for engaging families based on your survey results. Submit your written action plan and at least 2 artifacts (e.g., audio/video recording, slide deck with speaker notes, email correspondence with parents, collaborative homework assignments, etc.) that indicate you have begun initial phases of implementation. As evidence of this task, upload your written action plan and at least 2 artifacts (e.g., audio/video recording, slide deck with speaker notes, email correspondence with parents, collaborative homework assignments, etc.) that indicate you have begun initial phases of implementation.

In addition, provide a written explanation of how your individual family engagement plan supports your school's Family Engagement Plan **and** is linked to an academic initiative or goal.

Please submit the artifacts with the titles “Task 2 Plan of Action,” “Task 2 Artifacts,” and “Task 2 Written Explanation” as evidence for Task 2. The written explanation should be at least 300-words.

Task 3: Creating a Shared Vision for Success

Based on responses to your questionnaire, select one family that you believe needs, and would be receptive to, additional support to help their student meet academic or behavioral goals. Schedule a time and place where both you and the parents will be relaxed and can engage in authentic discussions that provide insight into the family's funds of knowledge. The goal of the meeting is to learn about the family's funds of knowledge and create a shared vision for the student's success. Rather than an interview session of questions and answers, try your best to engage in authentic two-way conversation with the family member(s) by using open-ended question stems.

As evidence of this task, upload a written response that explains the following:

- why you selected this family to receive additional support
- the location and dynamics of the meeting
- the projected outcomes as a result of the meeting
- the insight you gained into the family's funds of knowledge
- the shared vision for success you and the family have created

Note: Additional artifacts may be included as appropriate.

Please submit a written response (at least 300 words) with the title “Task 3 Shared Vision” as evidence for Task 3. If submitting additional artifacts, please use the title “Task 3 Additional Artifacts.”

Artifacts and Evidence Scoring Guide

Tasks	Not Yet	Almost	Yes
Task 1: Establishing Two-Way Communication	Earner does not submit the required documents/evidence as outlined in Task 1.	Earner submits two of the three required documents/evidence as outlined in Task 1. OR Earner submits a written response that partially explains the bulleted prompts as outlined in Task 1.	Earner provides a minimum of three completed surveys (10 questions or less) that capture the bulleted information as outlined in Task 1. AND Earner submits a copy of school and district surveys. AND Earner submits a written response (at least 300-words) that thoroughly explains the bulleted prompts as outlined in Task 1.

Task 2: Developing a Family Engagement Plan	Earner does not submit the required artifacts as outlined in Task 2.	Earner submits a plan of action to increase engagement with all families throughout the school year. The plan partially: • connects to the survey results from Task 1. • identifies one type of involvement from Epstein’s framework as the focus. • includes steps that outline the vision for engaging families. OR Earner submits 1 artifact to indicate implementation. OR Earner submits a written response that partially explains how your individual family engagement plan supports the school’s Family Engagement Plan and is linked to an academic initiative or goal.	Earner submits a plan of action to increase engagement with all families throughout the school year. The plan thoroughly: • connects to the survey results from Task 1. • identifies one type of involvement from Epstein’s framework as the focus. • includes clearly defined steps that outline the vision for engaging families. AND Earner submits at least 2 artifacts to indicate implementation. AND Earner submits a written response (at least 300-words) that thoroughly explains how your individual family engagement plan supports the school’s Family Engagement Plan and is linked to an academic initiative or goal.
Task 3: Creating a Shared Vision for Success	Earner does not submit the required written response as outlined in Task 3.	Earner submits a written response (at least 300-words) that partially explains the bulleted prompts as outlined in Task 3.	Earner submits a written response (at least 300-words) that thoroughly explains the bulleted prompts as outlined in Task 3.

Part Three. Reflection

Read the Reflection criteria carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "passing" submission.

Prompt: Based on the learning in this micro-credential, submit a written response that explains the following:

- What proactive strategies will you put in place to create a classroom environment that removes common engagement barriers for families?
- What actions will you take to ensure that family engagement efforts are reciprocal and fully involve families as partners in their students' learning?
- What strategies can you put in place to ensure that family engagement efforts are responsive to the cultures and contexts of the families you serve?

This submission is scored either “passing” or “not passing.”

Passing: Earner includes a response for each part of the prompt (300-word minimum). Responses should clarify and further explain how earning this micro-credential has impacted your professional practice and student outcomes.