

## What might culturally responsive family engagement look like?

Below are five key practices to consider.

### **Build Relationships and be present.**

All successful family engagement programs are built on solid relationships. A great way to start is with a conversation — be sure to always keep the child’s learning at the center when asking questions, listening, and sharing. These conversations can happen at school or in the community. By going into and being present in students’ communities, teachers and school administrators have an opportunity to not only build relationships, but also to establish mutual understanding and respect.

***Ideas:** Enjoy neighborhood walks and porch visits. Attend street fairs and other local events in your families’ neighborhoods.*

### **Recognize, Honor, and Promote Existing Knowledge.**

All families have knowledge and many are willing to share that knowledge. First, by recognizing that knowledge (i.e., coming to understand what families know), then by honoring it (i.e., inviting families to share with the class/school), and finally, by promoting it (i.e., engaging students, other families, and additional school personnel), family engagement programs send a clear message to all families: they matter and they are a vital component of their child’s education.



***Ideas:** Invite linguistically diverse families to teach or share their primary language. Have families assist you when purchasing books for the school, decorating the school building or sharing student work in the classroom or halls.*

### **Identify and Use What Works for Your Families.**

When working with families, the “one-size-fits-all” approach does not work. Not being present for school-based family events doesn’t mean that a child’s family isn’t engaged in student learning. For some families, attending school events is a cultural mismatch, which is to say that the school’s culture and a family’s culture don’t align. Instead of fighting against cultural mismatches, why not seek to reimagine what family engagement looks like? The better a school knows its families and their cultural beliefs around education, the easier it will be to engage those families in nontraditional, yet culturally responsive ways.

***Ideas:** Partner with families to co-plan a school-based family event or to codesign a home-based family activity.*

### **Promote a Culture of Awareness, Learning, and Sharing.**

When bridging divergent cultures, it's important to listen and observe before talking and acting. It is through the acts of listening and observing that we build a new understanding of others. When we begin by talking and acting, we rob ourselves of the opportunity to examine and challenge our preconceived notions of others. By ignoring these notions, we're likely to make the mistake of using them as a foundation for engaging students' families, which will result in a faulty, and potentially offensive, structure. By taking the time, energy, and effort to promote a culture of awareness, learning, and sharing by listening and observing, the school environment is bound to become more inclusive and welcoming to all.



**Ideas:** Host storytelling and listening groups in which teachers and families gather to share personal experiences. Host reading groups in which teachers and families read books and articles that examine unconscious bias, culture, and other relevant topics that help break down barriers.

### **Foster Community by Building Social Capital.**

Vibrant and resilient communities are founded on the idea that “we’re all in this together.” This belief is a fundamental component to developing, supporting, and sustaining community. However, when seeking to connect dissimilar groups, how can we establish an authentic sense of oneness? It is through the purposeful act of sharing funds of knowledge (also known as building social capital) that dissimilar groups can build unity. The growth of social capital allows for individuals to know that they are part of a network, which often brings about the sense of belonging. According to Warren (2011), “Building social capital among parents is particularly important to education...because studies have shown that working-class parents, unlike their middle-class counterparts, are not typically connected to each other around schools.”

**Ideas:** Host mingling events that are centered on relationship-building and resource-sharing on and off school property to connect everyone to the surrounding community. Create a “knowledge-sharing” board in the school where parents and teachers share local and personal knowledge.

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