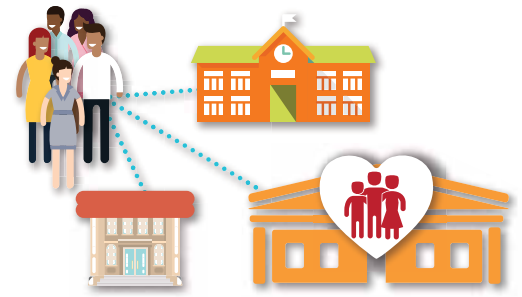


BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN SUPPORT OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



10 TIPS from the

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IMPACT PROJECT (FEIP)



This resource was produced by:



In partnership with:

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research



How can communities join to ensure young children from low-income, immigrant households are prepared to succeed in school?

According to the Heising-Simons Foundation, one way to address this question is to purposefully align early childhood programs, school districts, and community organizations in a coordinated effort to engage families and teachers in support of children's learning. To bring this vision to practice, the Foundation initiated the Family Engagement Impact Project (FEIP).

The FEIP sought to enhance the capacity of communities, professionals, and parents to engage in children's learning and improve educational outcomes for low-income, immigrant children from birth through age eight. The FEIP took place in the California counties of San Mateo and Santa Clara and consisted of three phases: (1) a planning phase (2013), (2) an implementation phase (2014-2016), and (3) a sustainability phase (2016-2017). Funds were awarded to grantee partnerships to strengthen public-private partnerships, coordinate and integrate family engagement efforts across organizations, and leverage existing community resources.¹ Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. evaluated the implementation phase of the project. Drawing from the study, this tip-sheet highlights 10 strategies for community partnerships seeking to coordinate a family engagement initiative in support of children's learning.

1 Engage the Right Partners Partners may include schools, school districts, family resource centers, preschools, childcare providers, libraries, human services agencies, educational agencies, and community foundations. Each partner brings a different strength to the initiative. Important characteristics of successful grantee partnerships include the following:

- **A history of working together**
- **Shared mission and goals**
- **A history of working and building trust with immigrant families**
- **Experience delivering family engagement programs**
- **Pre-existing family engagement policies**
- **Bilingual and bicultural staff**
- **Adequate time to dedicate to the initiative**
- **Family engagement as an organizational priority**

Complete suite of FEIP resources:

1. FEIP Infographic
2. Capacity Building Brief
3. Evaluation Brief
4. Raising A Reader
5. Supporting Teachers
6. 10 Tips from FEIP ✓

- 2 Clearly Delineate Roles and Responsibilities** Clearly defining roles and responsibilities is time intensive, but can foster stronger working relationships in the long term. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is a good tool to clearly define roles and responsibilities across the partnership. MOUs can be revised if roles and responsibilities change.
- 3 Understand the Needs of the Community** Conducting a community needs assessment to understand the needs of both families and service providers supports successful planning and implementation. For example, the FEIP grantee partnerships learned that, what parents wanted to help support their children did not always match what service providers were offering. Data from needs assessments were particularly helpful as grantee partnerships selected their family engagement activities.
- 4 Create and Regularly Convene an Oversight Committee** An oversight committee strengthens the communication among partners and enhances the quality of a community family engagement initiative. The committee can discuss and collaborate on goals, progress, training opportunities, and strategies.
- 5 Be Family-Oriented** Families should be included on the oversight committee(s) and given a voice throughout the planning and implementation process. Meetings and the events could be scheduled at convenient times for families, such as immediately after drop-off or later in the evening. Parents can be reached by engaging in active, direct, and repeated recruitment, such as extending personal invitations to attend an event instead of just sending fliers home with children. Offering food and reliable childcare further encourages family involvement.
- 6 Have A Planning Period** Time should be set aside to establish a common vision, formalize administrative structures, identify goals, hire or designate a family engagement coordinator, select family engagement programs and activities, and develop a service delivery plan. The FEIP allotted eight months for planning; the duration of the planning activities varied by grantee partnership and were based on local needs. The school calendar also influenced the timing of the planning period for some grantee partnerships.
- 7 Hire or Designate A Family Engagement Coordinator and Start the Search Early** The coordinator manages a diverse set of family engagement activities, shares information across partners, develops outreach materials, trains staff, and maintains momentum for the initiative. Finding someone with the right combination of management, coordination, and early literacy or early childhood education experience and skills could be a lengthy process.
- 8 Gain Buy-In from School Leadership** Principals and school district leadership are crucial to implementing family engagement programs because schools are one of the main settings where they take place. In the FEIP, support from school leadership facilitated access to school space and participation among teachers and school staff.
- 9 Consider the Needs of Teachers** Preschool and K-3rd grade teachers and other school staff have many demands on their time. Encouraging teacher participation in trainings and supporting their implementation of family engagement is optimized when training is incorporated into existing meetings and professional development activities. Also, offering additional training and technical assistance can improve the quality of the family engagement programs.
- 10 Have A Long-Term View** A multi-year investment in training and capacity building is necessary to influence children's educational outcomes. Over two years, the FEIP demonstrated improvements in strengthening the ability of the community to improve parent knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to helping their young children learn. Building capacity across communities, teachers, and parents to support the learning of young children is beneficial and helps as further generations of children enter the K-12 school system ready to learn.

Authors:

Courtney L. Harrison, President, CLH Strategies & Solutions
Melina Salvador, Research Associate, James Bell Associates
Dana Petersen, Senior Health Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research
Margaret Caspe, Family Engagement Consultant

1. The FEIP supported Grantee partnerships (e.g., schools, early childhood groups, and non-profits) in replicating at least one evidence-based family engagement model and developing opportunities that build the skills of parents and professionals, with a focus on enhancing family engagement at home. In Phase 1 there were 6 Grantee partnerships, in Phase 2 there were 5 Grantee partnerships, and in Phase 3 there were 4 grantee partnerships. Each Grantee partnership identified a "lead partner" who was responsible for managing the grant.