

BEST PRACTICES IN ENGAGING DIVERSE FAMILIES

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines literature and case studies on engaging diverse families in public, K12 settings. It focuses in particular on the experiences and needs of large, urban public school districts, and on the experiences and needs of African-American and Hispanic families.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Family engagement, long a concern of public K12 school districts, has gained higher priority in recent years due to both research and policy efforts. Education reporter Karla Scoon Reid (2015) notes several ways school districts have evolved this practice, including developing “positions and departments specifically geared toward parent involvement, with a concurrent growth in related organizations, increased attendance at conferences, and a heightened interest from some philanthropic groups to fund parent-engagement efforts.”¹

This report examines literature and case studies on engaging diverse families in public, K12 settings. It focuses in particular on the experiences and needs of large, urban public school districts, and on the experiences and needs of African-American and Hispanic families. The report is organized as follows:

- **Section I: Engaging Diverse Families** addresses practices for engaging diverse families. It outlines general best practices, then explores specific strategies for African-American and Hispanic families, respectively.
- **Section II: Case Studies** presents two case studies of districts recognized for their service to diverse populations.

Below we present key findings from this research. Please note that throughout the report, we navigate disparate terminology for selected subgroups. The terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably to accommodate variations across the literature. Similarly, the terms “Latina/o” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably, although we recognize that there are important distinctions that can be made among each of these four racial and ethnic categorizations.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Effective engagement of diverse families begins with understanding the local structural, attitudinal, and cultural barriers to their participation.** Districts can use research generalizing the experiences of particular groups to help initial decision-making, but should not operate without input from the local community. Families may be unable to engage due to work expectations, transportation or childcare considerations, or other logistical factors. However, they may also feel disconnected from or distrustful of the educational system. Additionally, local groups may represent unique combinations of cultures and backgrounds that broad categories like “Black” or “Hispanic” mask. Understanding local needs helps districts choose appropriate engagement strategies.

¹ Reid, K.S. “Parent Engagement on Rise as Priority for Schools, Districts.” *Education Week*. June 2, 2015. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/06/03/parent-engagement-on-rise-as-priority-for.html>

- **Educators must build cultural competency at both systemic and individual levels**, so that all families feel welcome in all events and engagement opportunities. Staff training in parent engagement as well as in topics of diversity is essential to support these activities. All staff must be welcoming, accessible, and available to minimize barriers to family participation.
- **Effective districts seek to encourage diverse families' participation in general as well as in targeted involvement opportunities.** This might require the use of translators or community facilitators at common meetings, social gatherings, or conference nights. Districts can also offer community-specific opportunities such as diversity task forces, racial/ethnic group or disability advocacy or representational units, or targeted programming that supplements general opportunities.
- **Home visits and other programs that take place outside the school build trust and cultural competency.** Trained teachers visit families at their homes or in community settings to construct shared meaning and a vision for their child's education. Through this exchange, teachers gain insight into the educational and emotional values of that family and thus how best to support their child. Research suggests other options for this type of outreach, such as networking with churches, trusted community organizations, or neighborhood libraries and sites. However, families may struggle with the logistical demands of programming outside of their home, or lack trust in a group setting.
- **Families often need basic information about the education system.** Certain populations, in particular immigrant populations and those facing linguistic barriers as well as families of students with disabilities, may need more information about how the education system works in order to advocate effectively for their children. Districts can begin the school year with information nights and related communications that provide this background knowledge before expecting parents to use services or network with staff. Parent universities, workshops, and related programming throughout the year can further help families navigate the complexities of school partnerships, career and college planning, and disability or supplemental services.
- **Districts should choose, build, or adapt programs to fit the cultural context of their communities.** Initial program selection should consider the cultural values and needs of the school community, and promotions should frame participation in culturally- and linguistically-relevant terms. These programs can be further adapted in small and large ways to further tailor the offering. This might include modification of program modules, creating or dropping modules, or adjusting the language to better reflect the diversity of the school.

SECTION I: ENGAGING DIVERSE FAMILIES

This section addresses practices for engaging diverse families. It outlines general best practices, then explores specific strategies for African-American and Hispanic families, respectively.

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING DIVERSE FAMILIES

Engaging diverse families begins with acknowledging the need to engage *all* families. “The active support of community and family” is essential to school reform, and such collaboration “can ease the cultural dissonance that arises between a student population that is becoming increasingly diverse and teachers who remain predominantly White and middle class.”² The broad effects of family engagement on student outcomes is clear and well-studied. Matthew Kraft and Shaun Dougherty, for example, demonstrate that teacher-family communication helps increase the likelihood of students completing homework, paying attention in class, and participating in class. Communication with parents contributes to stronger teacher-student relationships and student motivation.³ It can be essential to school turnaround.⁴

However, diverse families face significant barriers to participation.⁵ Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), Kristin Turney and Grace Kao explored the “correlates” of family engagement with attention to race and immigrant status.⁶ They found that “black and Latino immigrant parents perceived a greater number of barriers (e.g., inconvenient meeting times, lack of transportation, not feeling welcome at their child’s school, problems with safety in getting to school) compared to white and native-born parents, even after controlling for other demographic and socioeconomic variables.”⁷ The Multicultural Affairs Committee of the National Association of School Psychologists also emphasizes that there are numerous cultural factors that may mediate how minority families and students interact with school personnel. Some of these considerations are presented below:

² LaRocque, M. “Addressing Cultural and Linguistic Dissonance Between Parents and Schools.” *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 57, 2 (2013): p.112. EBSCO.

³ Kraft, M.A., and Dougherty, S.M. “The Effect of Teacher-Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment.” *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 6 (2013): pp. 199-222. EBSCO.

⁴ Domingo, J. “What It Takes To Engage Diverse Families.” Washington State Family and Community Education Trust. July 22, 2014. <http://www.wafamilyengagement.org/articles/what-does-it-take-to-engage-diverse-families-219.html>

⁵ De Luigi, N., and Martelli, A. “Attitudes and Practices of Parents: Disadvantage and Access to Education.” *European Education* 47 (2015): pp. 46-60. EBSCO.

⁶ Turney, K., and Kao, G. “Barriers to School Involvement: Are Immigrant Parents Disadvantaged?” *Journal of Educational Research* 102, 4 (March/April 2009): pp. 257-271. EBSCO.

⁷ Summarized in: Moodie, S., and Ramos, M. “Culture Counts: Engaging Black and Latino Parents of Young Children in Family Support Programs.” *Child Trends*. October 2014. p. 5. <http://childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2014-44BCultureCountsFullReport1.pdf>

- Research shows that low-income parents hold the same attitudes about education that wealthy parents do. Parents from low-income levels are less likely, however, to attend school functions or volunteer in their children’s classrooms because they have less access and face greater barriers to involvement.
- Lack of trust, fear, and suspicion of government entities and school personnel can negatively influence how school psychologists and their provision of services are viewed.
- Culturally originated pressures to succeed place different burdens on students.
- Degree of acculturation with “mainstream values” will change behaviors of families from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Not all families from the same cultural or linguistic background look or act the same.⁸

Shannon Moodie and Manica Ramos broadly categorize barriers to engagement of diverse families as “structural,” “attitudinal,” or “cultural” (Figure 1.1).⁹ Of these, the authors argue that cultural barriers are the most important – and most difficult – to resolve. In particular **schools and districts must respond to the expressed and observed needs of their unique communities, “rather than on cultural generalizations or preconceptions.”**¹⁰

Figure 1.1: Types of Barriers to Family Engagement

Structural	Attitudinal	Cultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex: scheduling conflicts, child care, time constraints • Solutions are easily identified, but may require resources that are not available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex: parents not included in planning or review process • Solutions require an understanding of families' values, beliefs, and culture, and may require larger-scale changes to programming and/or staff approaches and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex: families do not understand the school structure or system; teachers do not speak the parents' language • Solutions require building authentic sensitivity into the culture of the school system at all levels and also helping new families adapt to the norms of the system

Source: Child Trends¹¹

⁸ Bullets quoted, with minor alterations, from: Guerrero, C and B. Leung. “Communicating Effectively With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families.” National Association of School Psychologists.

<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/36/8/commatters.aspx>

⁹ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹ Adapted from: Ibid., p. 6.

Successful engagement programs build on the cultural values of families, stress personal contact, foster communication, create a warm environment, and facilitate accommodations for involvement such as transportation, translators, or related services.¹² That is, **family engagement is most effective when it seeks partnership**, an experience “in which student achievement and school improvement are seen as a shared responsibility, relationships of trust and respect are established between home and school, and families and school staff see each other as equal partners.”¹³ Joyce Epstein has identified six types of parent involvement over the course of her research and collaborations with other experts. Each type targets a unique aspect of school or family life, seeking family and community involvement to build a better learning environment for students (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Six Types of Parent Involvement

TYPE	TASKS
Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age. ▪ Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. ▪ Create two-way communication channels between school and home.
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. ▪ Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.
Learning At Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. ▪ Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.
Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.
Collaborating with the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. ▪ Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Source: Epstein and Salinas¹⁴

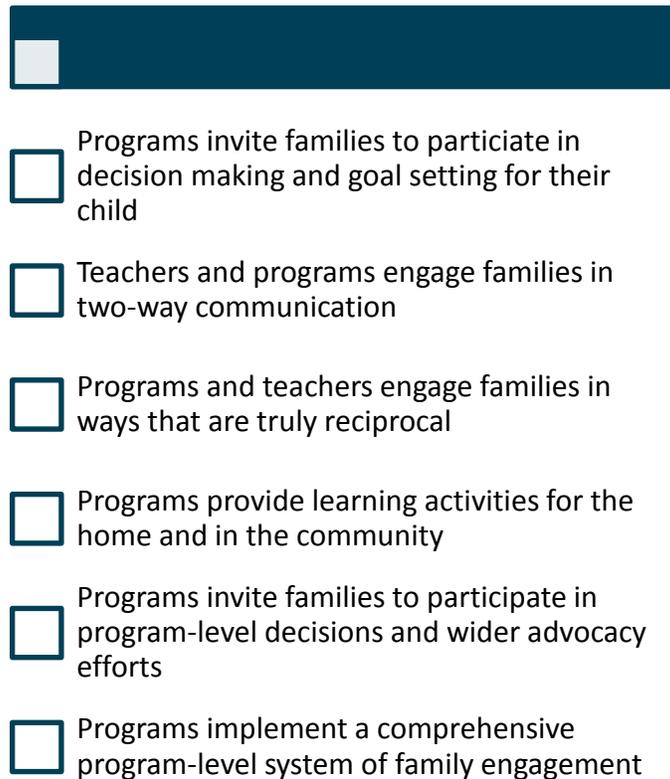
¹² Taken nearly verbatim from: “Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?” National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. September 2005. p. 1. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb5-diverse.pdf>

¹³ “Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.” SEDL and U.S. Department of Education. 2013. p. 5. <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

¹⁴ Epstein, J.L., and Salinas, K.C. “Partnering with Families and Communities.” *Educational Leadership* 61, 8 (May 2004): p. 13. http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200405_epstein.pdf

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers six guiding principles in engaging diverse families (Figure 1.3), based on “an extensive review of the research on family engagement” in cooperation with Pre-K Now.¹⁵

Figure 1.3: Effective Family Engagement Practices



Source: NAEYC

In updated terms, NAEYC’s best practices list reflects SEDL/U.S. Department of Education’s “4 C” areas guiding policy and program goals for family-school partnerships: **capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence**.¹⁶ In “Partners in Education,” SEDL and the Department outline a framework of “dual capacity-building” that established *process* and *organizational* opportunity conditions for building these four areas toward effective family-school partnerships (Figure 1.4). These conditions target all three of Moodie and Ramos’s barrier types, including structures, attitudes, and cultures.

¹⁵ “About the Engaging Diverse Families Project.” NAEYC. <https://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement/about>

¹⁶ “Partners in Education,” Op. cit., p. 8.

Figure 1.4: Opportunity Conditions for Building Family-School Partnerships

Process Conditions	Organizational Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to Learning: Initiatives are aligned with school and district achievement goals and connect families to the teaching and learning goals for the students. • Relational: A major focus of the initiative is on building respectful and trusting relationships between home and school. • Developmental: The initiatives focus on building the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program. • Collective/Collaborative: Learning is conducted in group rather than individual settings and is focused on building learning communities and networks. • Interactive: Participants are given opportunities to test out and apply new skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic: Initiatives are purposefully designed as core components of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround. • Integrated: Capacity-building efforts are embedded into structures and processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum, and community collaboration. • Sustained: Programs operate with adequate resources and infrastructure support.

Source: SEDL/U.S. Department of Education¹⁷

The subsections below explore specific practices that can contribute to building engagement with diverse families, within or outside of these frameworks. We must emphasize, as a final broad point, that family engagement is a long-term effort at its best, and affects multiple areas of schooling:

[...]family-engagement initiatives were often what she calls “one-offs” rather than long-term integrated efforts. **“Now, people realize the need to develop more robust family-engagement plans carefully linked to children learning in and out of schools and also develop the capacity of teachers to implement those plans,”** she said. “It can’t just be math help in 3rd grade.”¹⁸

Another source phrases this as “once is not enough.” That is, **effective engagement is a continuous practice**, with clear timelines or expectations communicated to families and repetition of “key actions” on a regular, dependable schedule.¹⁹ The strategies addressed in

¹⁷ “Partners in Education,” Op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁸ Reid, “Parent Engagement,” Op. cit.

¹⁹ “Reaching Out,” Op. cit., p. 6.

this report can contribute to such a sustainable system of family engagement, adapted to the unique experience and needs of a given school or district.

PROMOTE AND DEVELOP CULTURAL COMPETENCY

SEDL/U.S. Department of Education argues that our assumption of “collective capacity” related to serving diverse families is “deeply flawed.” We are not as prepared as we might think. Therefore, a key element in serving diverse families is to train educators for this service.²⁰ Educators argue that there needs to be better preservice and ongoing training on family engagement practice overall. Amber Brown and colleagues describe the value of one curriculum based on the National PTA Standards in family engagement, which covers six content modules: communicating with families, developing parenting skills, learning at home, volunteering in the school, advocacy and decision making on behalf of children, and collaborating with the community. Participants “showed significant improvement in knowledge and attitudes [related to family engagement] across all settings.”²¹ However, a key component in serving *diverse* families is cultural competency.

Cultural competency is broadly understood as the ability to communicate and work effectively across cultural lines by acknowledging and navigating differences in individuals’ worldviews. It emphasizes the ability to serve youth and families from diverse cultures in an effective and sensitive manner, keeping in mind that cultural differences may arise from a variety of family and individual characteristics, such as “race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, and age.”²² Figure 1.5 presents the key elements of cultural competency. These elements are interrelated – progress in one area often supports growth in another – and should guide the organization’s values, attitudes, policies, structures, and delivery of services.

²⁰ “Partners in Education,” Op. cit., p. 5.

²¹ Brown, A.L., et al. “Parent Teacher Education Connection: Preparing Preservice Teachers for Family Engagement.” *The Teacher Educator* 49 (2014): p. 146. EBSCO.

²² Olsen, L., J. Bhattacharya, and A. Scharf. “Cultural Competency: What It Is and Why It Matters.” California Tomorrow, 2006. p. 2. <http://www.californiatomorrow.org/media/ccompetecy.pdf>

Figure 1.5: Key Elements of Cultural Competency in Youth Development

KEY ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Valuing Diversity	Accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.
Having the Capacity for Cultural Self-Assessment	Understanding that our own cultures – all of our experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests – shape our sense of who we are, where we fit into our family, school, community, and society, and how we interact with youth.
Understanding the Dynamics of Cultural Interactions	Knowing that there are many factors that can affect interactions across cultures, including historical cultural experiences and relationships between cultures in a local community.
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Adapting to Diversity	Designing youth development services based on an understanding of youths’ cultures and institutionalizing that knowledge so that youth development professionals, and the learning environments they work in, can adapt to and better serve diverse populations.

Source: National Education Association²³

Cultural competency in family engagement practice similarly seeks to identify meaningful “terms of engagement,” as Sara Day coins, rather than describe individuals or groups as “hard to reach parents.” Her taxonomy of engagement, grounded in focus group methodology and literature review, emphasizes key elements required to encourage families to partner with schools. Many emphasize transparency, flexibility, non-judgment, and empathy – all means of building and sustaining authentic connection.²⁴ In particular, Day confirms the importance of tailored parent supports, flexible models of engagement, and two-way partnership between parents and schools.²⁵

²³ Table items adapted nearly verbatim from: “Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence to Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students.” National Education Association, 2008. p. 1.
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf

²⁴ Day, S. “‘Terms of Engagement’ not ‘hard to reach parents.’” *Educational Psychology in Practice* 29, 1 (2013): pp. 36-53. EBSCO.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Figure 1.6: Taxonomy of Terms for Parent Engagement



Source: Day²⁶

As De Luigi and Martelli note, “the blaming game” alluded to by Day “is not the only constraint that parents with lower economic, cultural, and social capital have to face in their interactions with schools.”²⁷ The ideas of what parent participation “should” be may reflect what disadvantaged parents do not have.²⁸ Furthermore, families may choose to participate in their children’s education outside of the reach of the school system. Poza, Brooks, and

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

²⁷ De Luigi and Martelli, “Attitudes and Practices,” Op. cit., p. 55.

²⁸ Stevens, S., and Patel, N. “Viewing Generativity and Social Capital as Underlying Factors of Parent Involvement.” *School Community Journal* 25, 1 (2015): pp. 157-174. EBSCO.

Valdés have suggested that Latino families engage in their children’s learning in important, research-recommended but “invisible” ways outside of school channels. “This finding,” they write, “presses schools and districts to recognize both the ways in which immigrant parents actually do the many things for which they never receive credit and the value of the other forms of involvement in which parents are active.”²⁹ Or, as LaRocque writes, “**Educators must broaden the definition of *acceptable forms of participation* to include ways that are more comprehensive, varied, and reflective of how families are able to participate.**”³⁰

Individuals at educational organizations must demonstrate strong cultural competency not only when delivering services to students and families, but also when interacting internally with district and school personnel. Thus the goals of cultural understanding and responsiveness should be integrated into the education system as a whole and not considered solely the responsibility of classroom teachers. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) notes that culturally responsive education has three dimensions of implementation:

- **Institutional:** the policies and values of the district and school administration
- **Personal:** the cognitive and emotional processes that educators must engage in to become culturally responsive
- **Instructional:** the materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction.³¹

The consideration of multiple cultural perspectives at all three levels is necessary to improve outcomes among diverse learners. For instance, the personal dimension involves critically reflecting on one’s attitudes and beliefs about oneself and others to uncover biases. For classroom teachers, these biases may influence interactions with students and families; for site administrators, these biases may influence interactions with students, families, and staff members, contributing to an unwelcoming educational and work environment. Beyond identifying and reconciling biases against certain cultural groups, NCCRESt emphasizes that educators should “explore their personal histories and experiences, as well as the history and current experiences of their students and families.”³² While classroom teachers’ acts of self-reflection will be particularly impactful on student learning, it is important for all educators to take stock of how their underlying beliefs influence their practices and policies to ensure effective and equitable delivery of education.

Figure 1.7 presents an overview of the distinct but complementary roles that administrators and teachers play in ensuring a culturally responsive educational environment. These roles align to the four key elements of cultural competency presented above in Figure 1.5.

²⁹ Poza, L., Brooks, M.D., and Valdés, G. “*Entre Familia*: Immigrant Parents’ Strategies for Involvement in Children’s Schooling.” *School Community Journal* 24, 1 (2014): p. 119. EBSCO.

³⁰ LaRocque, “Addressing Cultural...Schools,” Op. cit., p. 113.

³¹ Bullets quoted, with minor alterations, from: Richards, H., A. Brown, and T. Forde. “Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.” National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, 2006, p. 4. http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf

³² Ibid., p. 5.

Figure 1.7: Roles of Administrators and Teachers

KEY ELEMENT	ROLE OF DISTRICT AND SITE ADMINISTRATORS	ROLE OF TEACHERS
Valuing Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articulate a culturally proficient vision for the district and the site ▪ Establish standards for holding teachers and staff accountable for the vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach all subjects from a culturally inclusive perspective ▪ Insist on classroom language and behaviors that value differences
Having the Capacity for Cultural Self-Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess the district and site culture ▪ Articulate the cultural expectations to all who interact there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess own culture and classroom culture, as well as their effect on students ▪ Support students in discovering their own cultural identities
Understanding the Dynamics of Cultural Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help faculty and staff members learn to distinguish between behavioral problems and cultural differences ▪ Provide training and support systems for conflict management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use conflicts as object lessons ▪ Teach students a variety of ways to resolve conflicts
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Adapting to Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examine policies and practices for overt and unintentional discrimination ▪ Change current practices when appropriate ▪ Model and monitor school-wide and classroom practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn own instructional and interpersonal styles ▪ Develop processes to enhance them so that they meet the needs of all students ▪ Help students understand why things are done in a particular way ▪ Teach students appropriate language for asking questions about others' cultures and telling people about theirs

Source: National Association of Secondary School Principals³³

Like Brown et al., Murray, Mereoiu, and Handyside investigated the impacts of teacher preparation emphasis on parent communication. Specifically, they identified important changes in teacher candidates' beliefs and skills related to engaging parents of students with disabilities after a course on parent-teacher partnerships. Importantly, these teacher candidates moved from having low expectations of parent participation to understanding specific ways in which parents could contribute to the educational experience.³⁴ Collier, Keefe, and Hirrel similarly demonstrated positive impacts over a three-year period among graduate teacher candidates who participated in the Families as Faculty program, which focuses on the engagement of parents of students with disabilities. They noted that "while most teacher preparation programs in special education instruct teacher candidates on their role in IEP meetings and the paperwork process[...], teacher candidates have been found to be lacking in confidence and underprepared to engage with parents, especially those of children with disabilities."³⁵ Direct training that affects teacher and staff beliefs

³³ Table items quoted, with minor alterations, from: Nuri-Robbins, K. "Cultural Proficiency." *Principal Leadership*, September 2007, p 21. <https://www.nassp.org/Portals/0/Content/56015.pdf>

³⁴ Murray, M.M., Mereoiu, M., and Handyside, L.M. "Building Bridges in Teacher Education: Creating Partnerships With Parents." *The Teacher Educator* 48 (2013): pp. 218-233. EBSCO.

³⁵ Collier, M., Keefe, E.B., and Hirrel, L.A. "Listening to Parents' Narratives: The Value of Authentic Experiences With Children With Disabilities and Their Families." *School Community Journal* 25, 2 (2015): p. 239. EBSCO.

about the value and modes of engagement can thus improve schools' abilities to engage diverse families.

HIRE DIVERSE STAFF

While cultural competency is an ability that can be learned and refined, educators and professionals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are often in a better position to employ culturally competent (i.e., culturally responsive) practices in their interactions with youth. These practices are particularly impactful for youth who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds themselves and who may experience misunderstanding or miscommunication in mainstream environments that are less attuned to their cultural needs. In a comprehensive literature review on the effects of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in youth development programs, Linda Camino observes that **racial, ethnic, and cultural similarities between program staff and participants influence their relationships and interactions in a range of positive ways**. These effects include smoother communication, better understanding of participant experiences, and the presence of role models who represent youths' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.³⁶

Camino's review mirrors the large body of research that identifies positive effects associated with teachers of color in K-12 education. These studies find that students of color tend to perform better on a variety of academic and engagement outcomes when taught by same-race teachers.³⁷ Specific outcomes examined include "attendance records, disciplinary referrals, dropout rates, overall satisfaction with school, self-concepts, cultural competence, and students' sense of the relevance of school."³⁸ The National Education Association summarizes the findings from this body of research by stating that more teachers of color would help contribute to the following goals:

- Increase the number of role models for students of color;
- Provide opportunities for all students to learn about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity;
- Enrich diverse students' learning through shared racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and experiences; and
- Provide diverse students with cultural brokers, who are able not only to help students navigate their school environment and culture, but also able to increase the involvement of other teachers and their students' parents.³⁹

While the research tends to focus on outcomes for at-risk student groups, specifically Black and Hispanic students, the Center for American Progress further notes that all students

³⁶ Camino, L.A. "What Differences Do Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Differences Make in Youth Development Programs?" 1992. p. 36. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED362608.pdf>

³⁷ Boser, U. "Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis." Center for American Progress, May 2014. p. 3. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TeacherDiversity.pdf>

³⁸ "Assessment of Diversity in America's Teaching Force." National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, October 2004. p. 6. <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/diversityreport.pdf>

³⁹ Bulleted items adapted nearly verbatim from: Ibid.

benefit from a more diverse teaching force, which helps to provide positive role models from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, builds “social trust,” and broadens students’ understanding of the local community.⁴⁰ Moodie and Ramos argue, “there is also evidence that ethnic similarities between parents and program staff may matter to retention in parent training programs, but this evidence is limited.”⁴¹

CHOOSE OR DEVELOP CULTURALLY-RELEVANT PROGRAMMING

SEDL/U.S. Department of Education also argues that service must focus on building the capacity of families to engage with their children’s school.⁴² In particular, they often face “emotional challenges,” in LaRocque’s terms, related to mistrusting or misunderstanding the educational system based on past experience or having no experience with it at all.⁴³ Moodie and Ramos write that, “for family support programs to be successful, they must actively engage their participants – namely, parents – and must be sensitive to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the target populations they serve.”⁴⁴ They identify three options for selecting culturally-relevant programming: involving families in new development, adapting existing programs, and aligning offerings with specific needs.

INVOLVE FAMILIES IN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The first step in developing culturally-relevant programming is to include “cultural informants,” or a diverse and representative group of stakeholders, in the planning and implementation process.⁴⁵ **Diversity committees are one method of reaching out and incorporating the perspectives of diverse community members into the district’s programs and practices.** For instance, Big Star School District in Texas established a Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC) in response to its growing ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious diversity. The DAC includes both district personnel and community members and is tasked with addressing system-wide policy and professional development opportunities related to diversity.⁴⁶ Its mission is “to advocate for, promote, and ensure stronger relationships, improved communication, and enhanced understanding between Big Star and its diverse communities.”⁴⁷ After its founding, the committee led cultural competency training, attended by departmental representatives and two participants from each school once a semester for a three-year period. The training program emphasized religious expression in the workplace in the first year; age, generation, and experience in the second year; and economics and inclusion in the third year.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Boser, “Teacher Diversity,” Op. cit., p. 3.

⁴¹ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 11.

⁴² “Partners in Education,” Op. cit., p. 6.

⁴³ LaRocque, “Addressing Cultural...Schools,” Op. cit., p. 116.

⁴⁴ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁶ “Values and Ethics in Educational Administration.” Centre for the Study of Leadership and Ethics, 11.1, March 2014, p. 2. <http://ucealee.squarespace.com/storage/VEEA/VEEA%20Vol11%20No1.pdf>

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

The DAC resulted in a wide range of changes at the district, providing guidance on “religious issues, hiring procedures, student/parent conflict resolution, affirmative action policy, Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute, and the diversity leadership award.”⁴⁹ For instance, the district’s affirmative action policy led to the hiring of more diverse teachers and administrators, which better reflected the diversity of the district’s students. In another example, the program inspired a secondary school principal to model behaviors of advocacy for teachers in encouraging diverse students to enroll in Advanced Placement and Honors classes.⁵⁰

ADAPT EXISTING PROGRAMMING

Cultural adaptation is defined as “the systematic modification of an evidence-based treatment (EBT) or intervention protocol to consider language, culture, and context in such a way that is compatible with the client’s cultural patterns, meaning, and values.”⁵¹ Moodie and Ramos encourage a “three-phase process to culturally adapting existing programs,” drawn from the work of Domenech Rodríguez, Baumann, and Schwartz,⁵² involving:

- a rigorous review of the alignment of program concepts/techniques with the targeted participants’ culture(s), and a community needs assessment;
- the initial adaptation of materials and strategies to enhance their cultural appropriateness; and
- finalizing and field testing these adaptations.⁵³

This process may require significant changes to program design or delivery. In one cultural adaptation project, researchers made global adaptations, session-specific adaptations for five sessions, and completely replaced two sessions in a parent training program for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to make it more appropriate for the Latino/a community.⁵⁴ In another, researchers followed “clearly defined sequential phases” to adapt the Parent Management Training-the Oregon model (PMTO) to better suit Detroit’s Latino community (Figure 1.9).

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

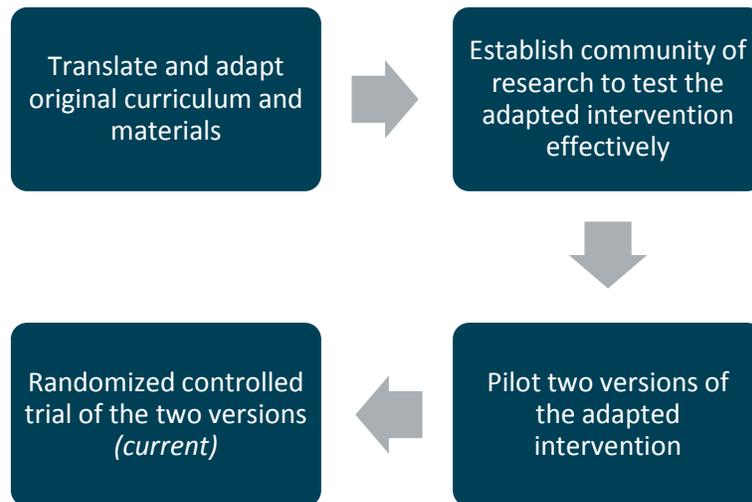
⁵¹ Parra Cardona, J.R., et al. “Culturally Adapting an Evidence-Based Parenting Intervention for Latino Immigrants: The Need to Integrate Fidelity and Cultural Relevance.” *Family Process* 51, 1 (March 2012).
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3313069/>

⁵² Domenech Rodríguez, M.M., Baumann, A.A., and Schwartz, A.L. “Cultural adaptation of an evidence based intervention: from theory to practice in a Latino/a community context.” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 47, 1-2 (March 2011): pp. 170-186. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21116707>

⁵³ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁴ Gerdes, A.C., et al. “Culturally adapting parent training for Latino youth with ADHD: Development and pilot.” *Journal of Latina/o Psychology* 3, 2 (May 2015): pp. 71-87.
<http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2015-18959-001>

Figure 1.8: PMTO Cultural Adaptation Process



Source: Parra Cardona et al.⁵⁵

The first version of the adapted program, *CAPAS-Original*, translated all core components of PMTO and included sessions “on family problem solving and monitoring [...] translated and refined by research colleagues conducting PMTO implementation in Mexico.”⁵⁶ The second version adds two new “culture-specific sessions” on themes identified by pilot participants as important: the stresses of immigration, and experiences of racial discrimination in a variety of contexts.⁵⁷ The experience of using these adaptations emphasizes the “critical role of culture in cultural adaptation,” in that **adaptation must go beyond mere translation to emphasize ideas and issues that are most relevant to the target population**. The researchers write that this cultural process “contributed towards developing a climate of trust among participants, which translated into high rates of retention, participant satisfaction, and intervention completion.”⁵⁸

However, LaRocque suggests a much smaller-scale change that adapts a program for cultural relevance: change the wording. As a specific example, she offers, “Instead of ‘Daddy/Daughter Day,’ have a ‘Man in My Life’ event” that allows the school to honor “blended or nontraditional family structures.”⁵⁹

ALIGN OFFERINGS WITH POPULATION NEEDS

A final practice is to align offerings with population needs. This may involve careful consideration of cultural values and expectations in the selection of programming. In the PMTO cultural adaptation project, for example, researchers began their effort by selecting a program “because of existing empirical evidence of its fit with values and parenting practices of Latino parents,” in particular “values of family cohesion (i.e., *familismo*) and

⁵⁵ Parra Cardona, et al., “Culturally Adapting... Relevance,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁹ LaRocque, “Addressing Cultural...Schools,” Op. cit., p. 115.

respect (i.e., *respeto*).⁶⁰ Moodie and Ramos note, however, that this can be a simple acknowledgement of the ways that a selected programming shares the community's values and perspectives.⁶¹

An additional alignment consideration is language. Muhammed Öztürk argues that limited English proficiency is one of the two most essential barriers to engagement among diverse families, based on a review of literature.⁶² Moodie and Ramos similarly argue that shared-language programs "may allow for more-effective collaboration between parent and practitioner."⁶³ This can be accomplished with the use of in-person translators, document and website translations, and other methods of facilitation. For example, elementary school principal Peter Moran, in Silver Spring, Maryland, uses "a bilingual parent-community coordinator [to] organize parent involvement meetings, plan family events, [and] establish links with community services and resources to help meet families' needs." Another principal from Cambridge, Massachusetts, "provides translators at certain events, such as family nights and parent conferences."⁶⁴

MEET FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE

One key recommendation from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (NCFCCS) is to "meet on their turf."⁶⁵ **Home visits are one option to meet parents where they physically are.** The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) model offers a replicable program to engage families in culturally competent and respectful ways. It was developed in Sacramento, California, through collaboration among the school district, teachers' union, and a community organizing group, and has since expanded to 17 states.⁶⁶ The model operates on five "non-negotiable core practices," including:

- Visits are always voluntary for educators and families, and arranged in advance.
- Focus of the first visit is relationship-building; we discuss hopes and dreams.
- Teachers are trained, and compensated for visits outside their school day.
- No targeting – visit all or a cross-section of students.
- Educators conduct visits in pairs, with reflection on assumptions, strengths, and bringing what they learned back to the classroom.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Parra Cardona, et al., "Culturally Adapting... Relevance," Op. cit., p. 3.

⁶¹ Moodie and Ramos, "Culture Counts," Op. cit., p. 11.

⁶² Öztürk, M. "Barriers to Parental Involvement for Diverse Families in Early Childhood Education." *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 3, 7 (October 2013): pp. 13-16.
<http://www.mcser.org/journal/index.php/jesr/article/viewFile/922/953>

⁶³ Moodie and Ramos, "Culture Counts," Op. cit., p. 11.

⁶⁴ Shillady, A. "Engaging Diverse Families: Two Principals Share Their Stories." NAEYC. September 29, 2014.
<http://www.naeyc.org/blogs/engaging-diverse-families-two-principals-share-their-stories>

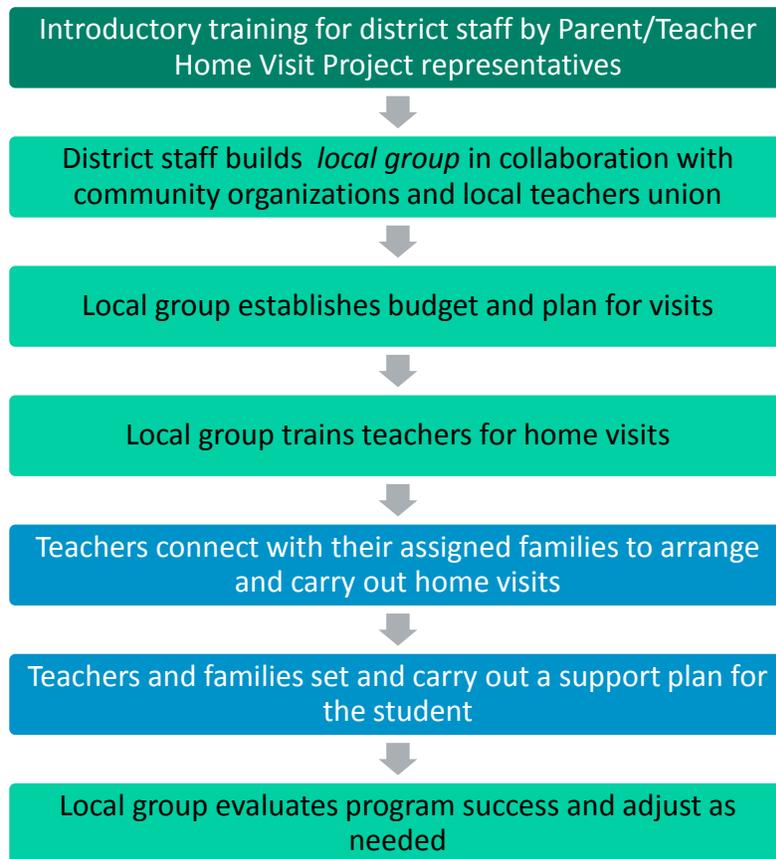
⁶⁵ "Reaching Out," Op. cit., p. 6.

⁶⁶ Home page. The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project. <http://www.pthvp.org/>

⁶⁷ "Model." The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project. <http://www.pthvp.org/model/>

In a March 2012 issue brief, the NEA Foundation highlighted similar efforts in Seattle, Washington, and Springfield, Massachusetts, as a way “to break the ‘cycle of blame’ for student underachievement or failure [...as] part of a greater strategy within each district to improve student outcomes and teaching effectiveness through union, district, and community partnerships.”⁶⁸ The model asks districts to build relationships with families through a series of home visits by trained teachers (see Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9: Home Visit Program Steps



Source: EdSource⁶⁹

Other methods of visiting families in the community include “meet-and-greet walks in the students’ neighborhoods,” and meetings or parent classes held at local spaces like churches or libraries.⁷⁰ LaRocque further suggests “the neighborhood library [or] coffee house.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Parent/Teacher Home Visits: Creating a Bridge Between Parents and Teachers as Co-Educators in Springfield, MA and Seattle, WA.” The NEA Foundation. March 2012. p. 3. <https://www.neafoundation.org/content/assets/2012/03/pthv-full-issue-brief-5.pdf>

⁶⁹ Raymond, J. “Home visits are key to kids’ success.” EdSource. October 14, 2015. <http://edsources.org/2015/home-visits-are-key-to-kids-success/88510>

⁷⁰ “Reaching Out,” Op. cit., p. 6.

⁷¹ LaRocque, “Addressing Cultural...Schools,” Op. cit., p. 115.

However, Nadine Finigan-Carr and colleagues compared the impacts of home visit versus group session parenting interventions among a sample of parents of urban young adolescents (ages 11-13) enrolled in public middle schools. The 144-family sample included a majority of “single, non-Hispanic, African American mothers.” The researchers found that, due to a variety of logistical challenges, **families were much more likely to successfully complete home visit programs compared to group-session programs**, although many expressed interest to be able “to hear the opinions of other parents, and to get out of the house.”⁷² Finigan-Carr et al. suggest that “future research might investigate the use of a safe intermediary, such as a church or a trusted community organization, to discern if that increases levels of comfort and facilitates participation in groups.”⁷³

REACH OUT FIRST

Certain schooling experiences may generate opportunities for parent input into their child’s education. For example, parents of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) are invited to a number of yearly and interim meetings to learn about their child’s progress beyond typical conferences. These parents may also need to give input and approval for accommodations and service designs for their child, and have due process rights to file a grievance if accommodations do not meet “free and appropriate education” expectations. However, researchers note that these parents are not more involved than families of students without disabilities.⁷⁴ In a sample of 96 parents who participated in focus groups and individual interviews, common discussion themes included that parent-school collaboration varies, and parents must initiate involvement.⁷⁵ The authors identify several practices to improve the school-parent partnership, including:

- Actively soliciting parent input
- Encourage staff to be accessible
- Communicating frequently through multiple means⁷⁶

ENGAGING AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

Bowman describes concerns among the African American community that comparisons between their childrearing practices and those of White peers “usually results in finding fault with African American ways of raising children.” Yet it is clear that these families provide for the children to the best of their ability, albeit while constrained within “White institutional arrangements.”⁷⁷

⁷² Finigan-Carr, N.M., et al. “Engaging Urban Parents of Early Adolescents in Parenting Interventions: Home Visits vs. Group Sessions.” *School Community Journal* 24, 2 (2014): p. 75. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1048631.pdf>

⁷³ Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁴ Rodriguez, R.J., Blatz, E.T., and Elbaum, B. “Parents’ Views of Schools’ Involvement Efforts.” *Exceptional Children* 81, 1 (2014): p. 80. EBSCO.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

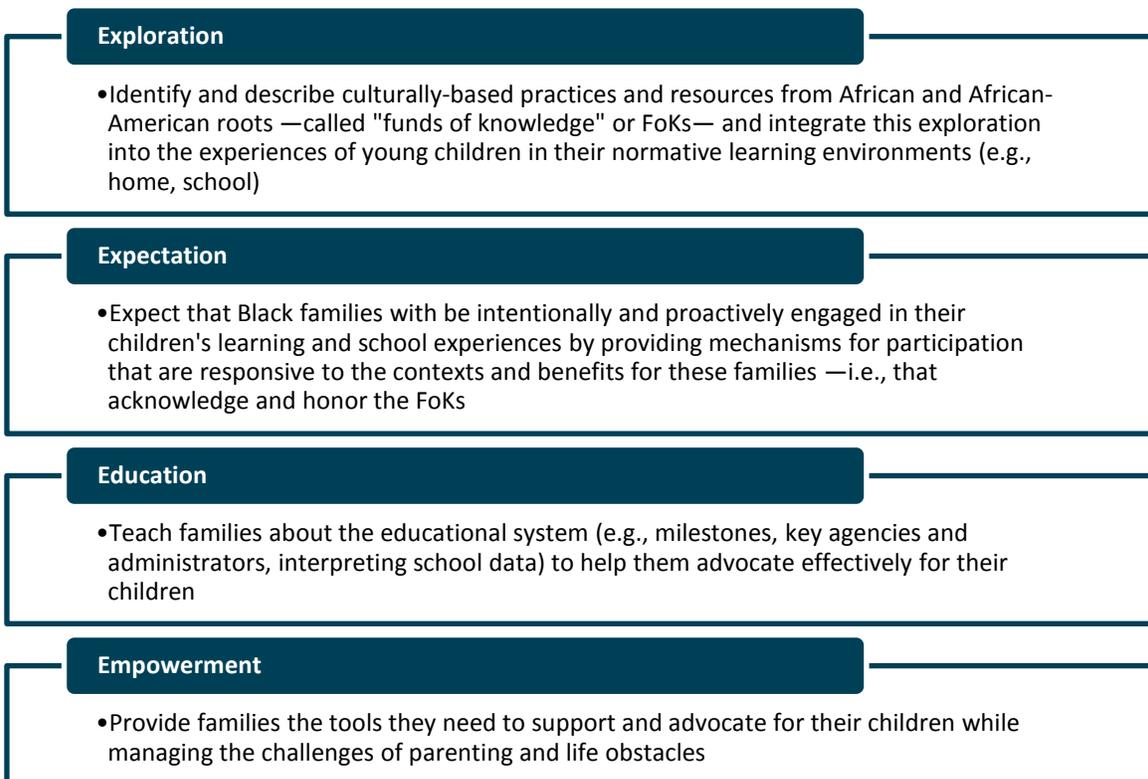
⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

⁷⁷ Bowman, B.T. “The State of the Black Child.” In *Being Black Is Not A Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child*. National Black Child Development Institute. 2013.

There are particular strengths of the community that schools can build upon to help African American families navigate and minimize the cultural gap. For example, African-American families often use extended family and friend networks to support parenting, thus it may be useful to **engage these extended networks in school outreach efforts**. These networks may include biological family, non-biological family, and church members.⁷⁸

More broadly, Iruka has proposed a cultural frame for “supporting and engaging Black families” called the 4Es: exploration, expectation, education, and empowerment (Figure 1.10). While these frames are broad, she offers sample practices that schools and districts can implement to build culturally-relevant family engagement systems. For example, to *explore* districts can host conversations through home visits that help teachers understand the practices that families engage in and value that they feel supports their child’s learning and development. Iruka cautions that “educators must be careful not to diminish the various activities, skills and routines in which families engage, no matter how different they may be from their own.”⁷⁹

Figure 1.10: 4Es Framework for Building Partnerships with Black Families



Source: National Black Child Development Institute⁸⁰

http://www.nbcdi.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Being%20Black%20Is%20Not%20a%20Risk%20Factor_0.pdf

⁷⁸ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 7.

⁷⁹ Iruka, I.U. “The Black Family: Re-Imagining Family Support and Engagement.” In *Being Black*, Op. cit., p. 21.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 21-23.

Some example practices suggested by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) aligning with Iruka’s framework include community forums, men’s panel, history nights, or an HBCU College Fair.⁸¹

ENGAGING HISPANIC-AMERICAN FAMILIES

In 24 interviews with suburban San Francisco Bay Area Latino families, Poza, Brook, and Valdés found that Latino parents were engaged in both traditional and novel ways in their children’s education despite significant logistical and linguistic barriers. Figure 1.11 displays the percentage of participants reporting the use of various engagement strategies on behalf of their children, in particular attending school events and meetings (83 percent), asking questions of teachers and staff (75 percent), and vying for new programs and services (71 percent).

Figure 1.11: Engagement Activities of Latino Parents (n=24)

STRATEGY	PERCENT
Asking questions	88%
Asking teachers/staff	75%
Asking family/friends: registration, materials, processes	58%
Asking acquaintances in culture of power – employers, church authorities, nonprofits – about rights, processes	46%
Attending	100%
School events, meetings	83%
Church	25%
Parenting/leadership workshops	25%
Adult education	38%
Altering/Augmenting	100%
Vying for new teachers or new teacher behaviors	8%
Vying for new schools	58%
Vying for new programs/services	71%
Citing children’s education as a motivating factor in migration	25%

Source: Poza, Brooks, and Valdés

This sense of engagement is reflected in findings from Quiñones and Kiyama, who draw attention to the importance that Latino fathers place on “cultivat[ing] education as a family and community affair.”⁸² The study involved 44 parents/guardians and 95 students across 31 focus groups at nine community locations, although the particular article draws upon findings from just 11 focus groups, including eight self-identified Puerto Rican fathers.⁸³ In spite of feeling compelled to participate, these participants were also critical of the dynamics of engagement, including communication practices and structural racism.⁸⁴ This

⁸¹ “Resources for Engaging African American Families.” National PTA. <http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4472>

⁸² Quiñones, S., and Kiyama, J.M. “*Contra la Corriente* (Against the Current): The Role of Latino Fathers in Family-School Engagement.” *School Community Journal* 24, 1 (2014): p. 161. EBSCO.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 164-166.

defensive position, particularly articulated in terms of attention devoted to African American concerns at the expense of attention to Latino concerns,⁸⁵ is reflected in certain critiques of South Bend’s African American advocacy unit, for example, profiled in Section II.

Districts may also need to consider the broader context of engagement, as distrust may run both ways. As an example, researchers McDevitt and Butler noted that “language barriers coupled with populist backlash against illegal immigration made data collection a formidable challenge” in engaging the Latino community.⁸⁶

However, Poza, Brooks, and Valdés also note that Latino parents may be more satisfied with “the higher quality of American schools in terms of teachers’ treatment of students and schools’ provision of services as compared to schools in the home country.”⁸⁷

Overall, these findings suggest that Latino parents want to be engaged, but may struggle to insert and assert themselves into the educational environment. Districts can support their participation by aligning programming and language to the norms of the local Latino and Hispanic communities. For example, researchers have identified four components of respect that play an important role in childrearing in some Hispanic-American communities (Figure 1.11). Interviewed Latino mothers commented to researchers that “mainstream American socialization, that emphasizes independence, open communication, and exploration, is inconsistent with Latino culture and its focus on *respeto*.”⁸⁸ In particular, schools might focus on engaging Latino male leaders, as part of their sense of self as well as the culture of *respeto*.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

⁸⁶ McDevitt, M., and Butler, M. “Latino Youth as Information Leaders: Implications for Family Interaction and Civic Engagement in Immigrant Communities.” *InterActions 2* (2011): p. 5. EBSCO.

⁸⁷ Poza, Brooks, and Valdés, “Entre Familia,” Op. cit., p. 133.

⁸⁸ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 7.

⁸⁹ “7 Strategies to Integrate Hispanic Audiences.” National Parent Teacher Association. February/March 2015. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-pta/files/production/public/7%20Strategies%20to%20Integrate%20Hispanic%20Audiences.pdf>

Figure 1.12: Components of Respect in Latino Family Culture

Obedience

- An expectation that children do as they are told without question

Deference

- Courtesy given to elders and people of high social status

Decorum

- There are appropriate behaviors for different social interactions

Public behavior

- A set of boundaries imposed on the behaviors expressed by children in public situations

Source: Child Trends⁹⁰

In one study, Michael McDevitt and Mary Butler mapped the “information ecologies” of a Denver suburb, one-third of which identifies as Latino/Hispanic. These “ecologies” describe the ways in which individuals access and process information, with particular attention to the experience of “disconnection from credible sources” as well as defensiveness against information that challenges one’s norms.⁹¹ The researchers found that information mediation processes were “thwarted when parents and youth live in separate information ecologies, or when parents perceive information as a challenge to their authority.”⁹² That is, the students are put in a challenging position of knowing potentially more than their parents, which challenges the norms of respect and authority. The authors encourage schools to engage adults distinctly through channels they prefer, and not to assume that students’ preferences reflect their parents’.⁹³

Another characteristic of Latino culture that may influence family engagement is a stigma around mental health care. This will require a reframing of the benefits or contents of a program. “For example,” write Moodie and Ramos, “clinicians may help parents see how parent training programs address the needs of children with difficult temperaments or those exposed to stress (e.g., fighting in the home).”⁹⁴

A February 2014 report on “promising practices” in Georgia school districts emphasizes that “the community and school must empower parents and children with information” about

⁹⁰ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 7.
⁹¹ McDevitt and Butler, “Latino Youth,” Op. cit., p. 1.
⁹² Ibid., p. 16.
⁹³ Ibid., pp. 18-19.
⁹⁴ Moodie and Ramos, “Culture Counts,” Op. cit., p. 11.

how the education system works.⁹⁵ Figure 1.13 presents several successful examples of Hispanic/Latino outreach programs drawn from this report. Many of these focus on preparing students for college through providing tailored information, as well as tailored programming. Several efforts support student and community leadership, while others focus on school offerings.

Figure 1.13: Outreach Programs for Hispanic Families

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
CAMINO and Lumina Latino Student Success	Community-wide collaborative effort of individuals and organizations that will focus on policies, programs, and funding priorities to ease the transition from high school to college and promote college completion for Latino/Hispanic students.
Hispanic Scholarship Fund Resources for High School Students, Families & College Students	A webpage to help families understand college requirements and work together to achieve graduation, including links to outreach program descriptions and upcoming national workshops and seminars.
HOPE (Hispanic Organization Promoting Education)	A Georgia-founded, student-run nonprofit that promotes leadership, education, and community services in the Hispanic/Latino Community with leadership chapters that target Hispanic students in high school.
Junior Achievement Hispanic Outreach Program of Georgia	A specialty outreach effort of Junior Achievement which adds a supplemental lesson to the traditional K12 JA program which focuses on the important of staying in school, the importance of being bilingual, and viewing the family as an economic unit. It also supports a volunteer role model program.
Latin American Association’s College and Beyond Youth Programs	A range of services to improve academic achievement among Latino students, including core subject tutoring and targeted intervention strategies by addressing students’ needs in a holistic approach. It realigned an afterschool program in response to current research on Latino student needs.
Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education’s (CLASE) Useful Links	A webpage of links from the University of Georgia connecting readers to wider initiatives, resources, scholarships, and news.

Source: Georgia Family Connection Partnership⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “Promising Practices for Engaging Hispanic/Latino Students in Georgia.” Georgia Family Connection Partnership. February 2014.
http://www.gpee.org/fileadmin/files/PDFs/Promising_Practices_for_Engaging_HispanicLatino_Students_in_Georgia_February_2014__2_.pdf

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

SECTION II: CASE STUDIES

This section presents two case studies of districts recognized for their service to diverse populations.

WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Washoe County School District (WCSD) serves 65,550 pre-K through Grade 12 students in Reno, Nevada, with 10,348 students classified as English language learners and 8,794 with IEPs.⁹⁷ The student population includes a prominent minority of Hispanic or Latino individuals (39 percent), though Whites comprise the greatest subgroup (46 percent).⁹⁸

The district was recognized in *Education Week* for its service to diverse families.⁹⁹ Its dedication to family engagement is codified in Board Policy 5036.1, which defines the term “parent” expansively, establishes “six essential elements” to family engagement linked to the district’s strategic plan, and provides guidelines for implementation and reference to important supporting documents. Importantly, parents are considered to be “any caregiver/guardian who assumes responsibility for nurturing and caring for their children.”¹⁰⁰ The six essential elements are reproduced in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.1: Essential Elements of Family Engagement in Washoe County

ELEMENT	SUB-COMPONENTS
<p>Welcoming all families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promotion of an atmosphere for parents and families to visit the school their children attend in order to feel welcomed, valued and connected to the school community
<p>Communicating effectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning ▪ Effective communication requires school-initiated contact with the parent and parent-initiated contact with the school where both parties provide vital information about a child’s strengths, challenges and accomplishments ▪ To communicate effectively, both parties must be aware of and address issues such as cultural diversity, language differences and special needs ▪ Appropriate steps shall be taken to allow authentic communication between participants

⁹⁷ “Washoe County School District.” Search for Public School Districts, National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=3200480

⁹⁸ “About Washoe County School District.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/2614>

⁹⁹ Reid, “Parent Engagement,” Op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ “Board Policy 5036.1 Family Engagement.” Office of the Deputy Superintendent and Department of School-Family Partnerships, Washoe County School District. July 24, 2012. p. 1. http://www.washoeschools.net/cms/lib08/NV01912265/Centricity/Domain/161/5036_1%20Policy%20-%20Family%20Engagement.pdf

ELEMENT	SUB-COMPONENTS
<p>Supporting student success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration among parents, families and schools to support learning by pupils and healthy development of pupils at home and school ▪ Student achievement increases when parents are actively engaged in the learning process and the school system ▪ Schools shall provide opportunities for parents to learn effective ways to support their child’s educational needs including information about how to support learning at home, promoting effective study habits and monitoring their child’s progress through student achievement data
<p>Speaking up for every child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Empowerment of parents and families to advocate for their children and the children of other parents and families to ensure that all pupils are treated fairly, and have access to learning opportunities that support pupil achievement
<p>Sharing power</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promotion of an equal partnership between parents, families and schools in making decisions that affect children, parents and families and in informing, influencing and creating school policies, practices and programs. Schools shall actively enlist parent participation in decision-making ▪ Efforts shall be made to recruit and support participation by parents representing diverse student groups such as: English Language Learners, special needs, gifted and talented, and homeless ▪ The role of parents in decision-making shall be continually evaluated, refined, and expanded at the district and school levels
<p>Collaborating with community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration of parents, families and schools with the community to connect pupils, parents, families and schools with learning opportunities, community services and civic participation

Source: WCSD¹⁰¹

Two units support effective family engagement in the district: the Department of Family-School Partnerships (DFSP), and the Council on Family Engagement (COFE). The Department enacts programs and initiatives that serve the district’s vision in coordination with the Council.¹⁰² The Department head, Ms. D’Lisa Crain, commented in *Education Week* that the district’s efforts are less than a decade old: “in 2007 [...], she had a \$5,000 budget and one secretary. **Today, Ms. Crain’s department has nine employees and a \$1 million budget.**”¹⁰³ The Council serves primarily as an advisory body to support the School Board’s decision-making related to family engagement policy and recommended practice.¹⁰⁴ Specific focal programs include on-site and online opportunities that can serve a variety of parent needs and means. Most offerings are available throughout the year on an ongoing, ad-hoc basis; some are models or programs that establish the culture of the school (Figure 2.3).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 1-3.

¹⁰² “Welcome to the Department of Family-School Partnerships.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Domain/161>

¹⁰³ Reid, “Parent Engagement,” Op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ “Council on Family Engagement.” Washoe County School District. <http://washoeschools.schoolwires.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=792>

Figure 2.2: Washoe County Family Engagement Programs and Initiatives

PROGRAM/INITIATIVE	FREQUENCY	DESCRIPTION
Academic Parent Teacher Teams	Ongoing	A specific model for data sharing from West Ed; the district supports school implementation.
Climate Survey for Families	Annual	Continuously reviewed set of items distributed to families to improve family engagement in the district.
Family Friendly School Walk-throughs	Annual	Council volunteers assess school physical environments, telephone customer service, and school websites for parent friendliness and provide schools reports with their findings and recommendations.
Infinite Campus Parent Portal Outreach	Ongoing	Online documents and staff contacts to help parents use the primary portal for monitoring student achievements, calendars, and tasks
Parent Teacher Home Visit Project	Ongoing	Training and implementation support for Title I schools to conduct home visits with families.
Parent University	Ongoing	On-site classes with childcare, interpretation, and content experts on select topics throughout the year
Parent University Family Access Days	Semi-annual	Full-day workshops on college and careers for PreK-12 families offered on site at the University of Nevada, Reno, with transportation provided, in partnership with UNR and Truckee Meadows Community College.
School Performance Framework-Family Engagement	Ongoing	Each school maintains a plan on family engagement tied to its School Performance Plan, scored on evidence and quality of the plan to address national standards for family engagement.

Source: WCSD¹⁰⁵

One unique offering at WCSD include Council-led **family friendly walk-throughs** that allow volunteers to assess the school environment for family friendliness. This was first offered in the 2005-2006 school year. It includes “a school site visit, a website review, and a phone call.”¹⁰⁶ These walkthroughs are conducted annually and based on a rubric identifying 15 “high quality” practices that might be observed, with “emerging” and “low quality” variants of each for reference. The high quality practices are reproduced in Figure 2.4 below and emphasize clear signage, inclusion of all languages in print and verbal interactions, and opportunities for families to access all needed materials in a comfortable place including reference materials, computer access, and related options.¹⁰⁷ Online documentation is also offered in both English and Spanish.

¹⁰⁵ “Programs & Initiatives.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/768>

¹⁰⁶ “Family Friendly Walk-Throughs.” Washoe County School District. <http://washoeschools.schoolwires.net//site/Default.aspx?PageID=930>

¹⁰⁷ “WCSD Family Friendly Schools Walk-Through Rubric.” Washoe County School District. October 17, 2013. <http://washoeschools.schoolwires.net/cms/lib08/NV01912265/Centricity/Domain/161/Family%20Friendly/WCSDFamilyFriendlyWalkThroughRubric%20FFS%20Walk%20revision.pdf>

Figure 2.3: WCSD Family Friendly Schools Walk-Through Rubric

High Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entrance to the front office is clearly marked.• There is a visitor policy that requires check-in upon entering and wearing a visitor ID.• Welcome sign is displayed in all appropriate languages.• Front office staff includes individual(s) fluent in families' preferred language.• Office staff answers phone calls in a helpful, friendly and professional manner. They are informed about school policies and procedures.• Campus maps are visible and available in a handout.• New families are provided with school information in one packet, calendar, or a convenient way.• A suggestion box is prominently displayed in high parent traffic area.• An area exists in the school where parents can go for information about school policies/procedures.• There is a designated area that provides books, materials, resources, written material and a computer for families.• Upcoming events for family participation are posted in several languages and are in an area accessible to visitors.• There is evidence of partnerships with surrounding community and local businesses.• There is a school mission statement posted in a conspicuous area.• There is evidence of learning on campus: multipurpose room or where there is space available for all grade levels.• Campus is clean and free of litter.

Source: WCSD¹⁰⁸

In addition to these broad family engagement best practices, WCSD maintains an Equity and Diversity Department that leads equity and inclusion efforts for staff and parents in both English and Spanish, and with particular attention to Title VII Indian Education considerations. The Department is led by a Coordinator, and staffed by a secretary, two Equity & Diversity Specialists, and one Indian Education Specialist. Its “major function” is to “focus on the transformation of our district to systematically address sustainable equitable access and support for all students and their families; **a collective pursuit of cultural proficiency.**”¹⁰⁹ Its guiding tool is called *The Equity Lens*, a series of questions that must be considered “for any policy, program, practice, or decision,” as outlined in Figure 2.5 below.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Welcome to Equity & Diversity.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Domain/485>

Figure 2.4: The Equity Lens

- What racial/ethnic groups are affected/impacted?
- Does the program ignore or worsen existing disparities?
- How have stakeholders been involved?
- What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes?
- How can negative impacts/barriers be mitigated?

Source: WCSD¹¹⁰

Specific strategies offered by the Department focus on supporting ELLs, adding diversity to the curriculum, and creating a “culturally conscious campus.”¹¹¹ The “For Parents” section – again, offered in both English and Spanish – provides insights on school communication, social identity, and pedagogies and practices. It also encourages parents to get involved in “**systemic reform**” to improve “biased curriculum standards and instructional practices.” It offers links to the district’s volunteer services page, to “Email our Governor,” and to a program called Bridges Out of Poverty.¹¹²

Examining Title VII services, in particular, we get a better sense of the ways WCSD engages diverse families, specifically. Washoe serves three “local tribe entities,” including the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, and Nevada Urban Indians, Inc. The Indian Education unit focuses on **506 forms**, which “document a student’s American Indian and Alaskan Native ancestry,” and thus supports the amount of funds available to the district to support its Indian Education Program.¹¹³

Beyond this basic service, it provides **surveys** for four Indian education stakeholder groups: parents/guardians, middle and high school students, elementary school students, and Natchez students.¹¹⁴ It also encourages parents to join a **Parent Advisory Committee**, which “serves as a liaison between parents of our tribal communities and the Title VII Program.” Committee members meet monthly during the school year to perform both administrative tasks related to grant funding and to “consult with WCSD on development, operation, and the evaluation of the program.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Strategies for School Educators and Administrators.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/3099>

¹¹² “Equity & Diversity for Parents.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/2979>

¹¹³ “Welcome to Title VII – Indian Education.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/1968>

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Title VII – Parent Advisory Committee.” Washoe County School District. <http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/3420>

SOUTH BEND COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) serves prekindergarten through Grade 12 students in South Bend, Indiana.¹¹⁶ Current student headcounts (Fall 2015) indicate a total student population of 18,680, approximately a third of whom identify as Black (35 percent) and a fifth as Hispanic (20 percent), while a large minority identify as White (33 percent).¹¹⁷ The district is led by a “**Cultural Proficiency Vision Statement**,” which states that SBCSC

will embrace its diversity and communicate high expectations for a diverse population of stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community. We will seek to know ourselves and work to build positive relationships that exhibit respect, dignity, and acceptance of all cultures, resulting in a positive impact on school climate, student engagement, and student achievement.¹¹⁸

The current strategic plan (2014-2017) clearly states, “**Inequity is everyone’s problem and equity is everyone’s responsibility.**”¹¹⁹ Additionally, three of its six current strategic goals highlight the importance of engaging and supporting diverse students and families:

Goal 2: Provide effective instructional program for diverse learners

Goal 5: Strengthen and enhance productive partnerships with parents and community stakeholders

Goal 6: Integrate culturally responsive, multicultural, multilingual best practices¹²⁰

Objectives under these goal areas focus equally on African American students and students with disabilities, looking at curriculum, parent involvement, and pedagogy. Specifically related to parent involvement, the district set out to “inform and rally citizens of St. Joseph County” by providing explicit, welcoming structures for meaningful participation (Figure 2.6).

¹¹⁶ “South Bend Community Sch Corp.” Search for Public School Districts, National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=1810290

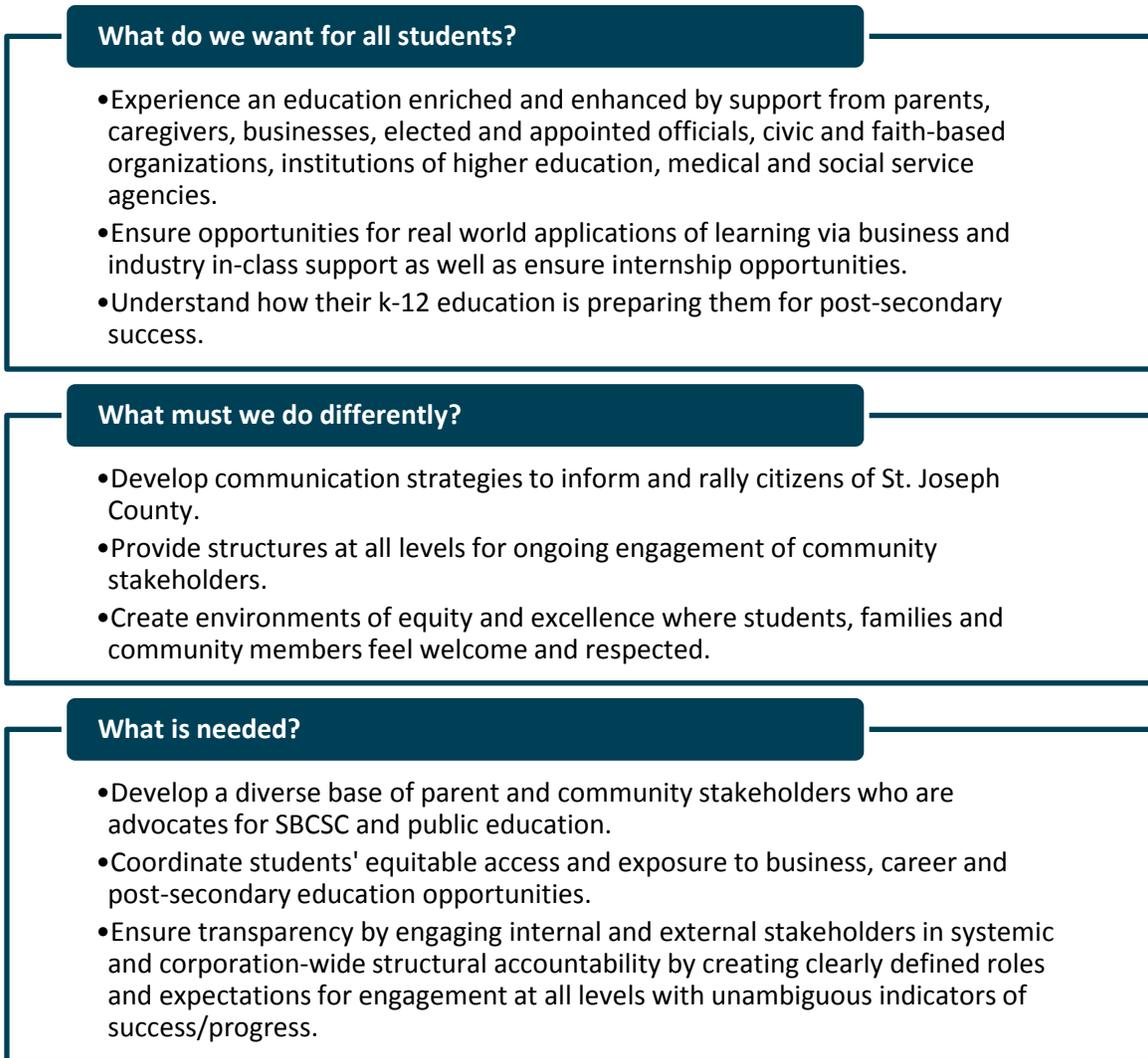
¹¹⁷ “Pupil Enrollment # by Grade.” South Bend Community School Corporation. October 1, 2015. p. 2. https://www.edline.net/files/_OVCOI_/82bebe5a29c225483745a49013852ec4/15student_count.pdf

¹¹⁸ “Cultural Proficiency Vision Statement.” South Bend Community School Corporation. https://www.edline.net/pages/SouthBendCSC/About_Us/Cultural_Proficiency_Vision_St

¹¹⁹ “Choosing to be Exceptional: Strategic Plan 2014-2017.” South Bend Community School Corporation. October 21, 2013. p. 4. https://www.edline.net/files/_xLAuj_/c18b74dad5a50e2e3745a49013852ec4/Strategic_Plan.pdf

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Figure 2.5: Critical Questions for Goal #5, Strengthen and enhance partnerships with parents and other stakeholders



Source: SBCSC¹²¹

SBCSC’s Parent Involvement Policy outlines specific ways and means for Title I school families to engage with the district in their children’s education, particularly the **Parent Advisory Council (PAC)**. This opportunity begins with an informational meeting at the beginning of the year “to inform parents of their children’s participation in Title I, the purpose and requirements of Title I, and the parents’ rights and responsibility to be involved with the program.” In particular, the document draws attention to expectations that the meetings “will be held at times that are convenient for parent participation and will include translation for parents with limited English proficiency. Childcare will be provided.” PAC will

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 28.

also host an annual May meeting “to review current Title I program effectiveness and inform the decision-making and planning processes for future Title I programs.”¹²²

Title I parents are also supported through monthly workshops and programs to cover state standards, curricula, and assessments, technical assistance, and strategies for participating in the classroom and home learning experience. The document defines a space for parent information, called the Parent Resource Room, and the availability of a designated Family Community School Specialist at each Title I site. Other volunteering and advocacy opportunities are encouraged.¹²³

Leary and Parker highlighted SBCSC’s efforts at **including Latino parents of students with special needs**, noting greater representation of Hispanic students among special education (19 percent) compared to the district’s general population (16.4 percent).¹²⁴ According to their article, the district began by acknowledging an achievement gap, then examined the factors influencing that gap to identify specific ways that parent involvement could improve the district’s unique experience. The district transformed the challenges of parent participation — language barriers, emotional barriers, barriers related to poverty — into a positive experience: **home visits**. This became, Leary and Parker write, “an apt environment for mothers to talk about fears and goals for their children. [...] Home visits facilitate communication and further encourage parental involvement down the road as parents are more willing to attend meetings associated with special education and to volunteer in school.”¹²⁵

It also maintains a **Department of African American Student & Parent Services**. Created in 2013, the department serves to address historical and “entrenched” inadequacies in the district’s service to African American families. According to an article in the *South Bend Tribune*, the department was created in response to “a group of black community leaders” who petitioned the School Board on the heels of a reporting series on “the disproportionalities between black students and others,” in particular the over-identification of African American students as cognitively or emotionally disabled. Director David Moss originally set out to build community partnerships such as tutoring centers and cross-district initiatives for black students.¹²⁶

However, the department has faced controversy and inadequate district support in its roughly three years of operation. An article from May 2015 drew attention to the department’s limited means: “Moss has an assistant but no other staff. He also has a

¹²² “Title I Parent Involvement Policy.” South Bend Community School Corporation. July 2014. p. 1.
https://www.edline.net/files/_3PBn0_/91d15fe4aa84ed453745a49013852ec4/Title_I_Parent_Involvement_Policy_2014-2015.pdf

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Leary, C., and Parker, C. “Advocating for Children with Special Needs.” *Involving Latino Parents in Education* 4, 5 (Fall 2010): p.1. <https://latinostudies.nd.edu/assets/95352/original/studentbrief4.5.pdf>

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Kilbridge, K. “A new voice for local black students.” *South Bend Tribune*, November 13, 2013.
http://www.southbendtribune.com/news/local/keynews/education/a-new-voice-for-local-black-students/article_04b8028c-4bf7-11e3-b72f-001a4bcf6878.html

minimal budget,” yet is, “with a salary of \$110,500, [...] among the highest-paid employees in the district.” Among the “incremental” practices Moss has rolled out include embedded efforts within other departments to focus on behavioral and academic challenges among African American students, cultural sensitivity trainings for staff, and support networks for African American males.¹²⁷ One effort, however, faced such backlash that it was never implemented: college tours for Grade 3 black students.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Kilbride, K. “Critics question South Bend’s black student services office.” *South Bend Tribune*, May 3, 2015. http://www.southbendtribune.com/news/local/critics-question-south-bend-s-black-student-services-office/article_9802c34f-a919-592e-92b6-fb144f84fe01.html

¹²⁸ [1] *Ibid.* [2] “School field trip causes controversy among some parents.” ABC News 57. April 16, 2015. <http://www.abc57.com/story/28816153/school-field-trip-causes-controversy-among-some-parents>

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