

# Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for Schools to Enhance Relationships with Families



This fact sheet is one of four developed by a collaboration of U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools technical assistance centers to enhance state and district implementation of the [Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#) to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn in environments that are safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair. Please view the supporting fact sheets here: <https://t4pcenter.ed.gov/SupportiveSchools>.

## Framing the Topic and Needs

Students deserve inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments where all children can thrive. To achieve this goal, it is critical for educators and families<sup>1</sup> to have opportunities to form relationships built on mutual trust and respect. These relationships are linked to learning and development strategies that focus on the strengths of students from diverse backgrounds and are culturally responsive<sup>2</sup>, respectful, and collaborative<sup>3</sup>. Relationships that benefit both educators and families can set the stage for robust, meaningful two-way communication between school and home. This type of

communication helps families understand what is expected of their students in school and provides significant opportunities for collaboration to help students meet or exceed those expectations.

Educators and families are important partners in addressing students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being. When students need additional supports, effective educator and family engagement is critical for student success. An effective partnership can lead to decreased student disciplinary issues, improved parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships, and an improved school environment.<sup>4</sup>



This fact sheet describes best practices that educators can implement to establish effective engagement that supports and responds to all students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. This approach includes implementing disciplinary policies fairly and consistently.

## Strategies or Practices to Address Needs

Effective family engagement fosters strong home-school partnerships. Educators can use a combination of family engagement and communication practices to develop and support effective engagement. However, it is important to remember that none of these is a one-size-fits-all practice. Instead, educators must tailor these practices to maximize the likelihood of both establishing positive family engagement and implementing fair and consistent strategies for student discipline.

## Strategy #1: Improve Communication Between School and Home

Robust, meaningful two-way communication between school and home is essential. To build positive, constructive communication, districts and schools can implement the following strategies when communicating with families regarding disciplinary practices:

- Be intentional, thoughtful, and welcoming from the start by emphasizing the importance of working together for student success and personally connecting with families via phone, social media, and face-to-face meetings at school or during home visits. Use each family's preferred contact method and preferred time, and if necessary, ensure that shared information is accessible to family members who have a disability that impacts communication and/or is translated into a language that the family members and caregivers understand. To prepare, districts and individual schools can train staff members on effectively engaging families in a culturally competent manner.



- Honor families' cultures and seek to learn more by getting to know each family. Invite families to share information about their cultures and primary languages. Depending on family availability, schools can host informal events (e.g., coffee hours, international nights, game nights, and open houses).
- Tap into families' knowledge regarding their children's learning styles, motivations, strengths, needs, stressors, and experiences. A family's perspective is essential in prioritizing and framing a child's strengths, challenges, and needs. Embracing families' insights about school- or family-related stressors that may be affecting their children's performance or behavior can offer mutual learning opportunities and prepare educators and families to collaborate effectively on addressing students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges and needs. One way to do this is by asking families to share information about their children's personal strengths and any other information they feel that educators need to know.
- Employ various communication methods to accommodate busy schedules, prioritizing two-way communication that is in languages that families understand and is accessible. This can include phone calls, formal and informal in-person conferences, emails, text messages, and messages on social media. Whereas one-way communication, such as newsletters and automated voice messages, may help deliver general information to families, two-way communication engages participants in listening and responding to confirm understanding and share information as needed. This type of dialogue is essential when addressing various issues, including new or ongoing disciplinary challenges, improvements, successes, and needs for additional supports.
- Provide student disciplinary policies and student codes of conduct to families and students. Ensure that these documents are easy to find, accessible, and written in languages the families speak or understand.



- Notify families immediately about incidents that may require student disciplinary action and their rights when responding to such actions. Include families in problem-solving and brainstorming solutions after incidents occur.
- Inform families of their civil rights. Students, families, community members, and others who experience or observe discrimination in education programs or activities can file a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights. To file a complaint, this [form](#) may be used. For more information, see “[How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office for Civil Rights](#)” and [this short video](#).

## Strategy #2: Intentionally Implement Family Engagement Practices

Home–school collaboration is essential in supporting students’ social, emotional, and academic well-being. To build and enhance home–school partnerships, educators can:

- Engage families rather than just involving them. Schools can facilitate engagement by providing training, coaching, practice opportunities, resources, and information to equip all educators and families with the skills and knowledge needed to implement effective family engagement that supports students’ learning and development. This should include opportunities to build on existing strengths and practice new skills and knowledge. Engaging families, rather than just involving them, creates an opportunity to cultivate strong relationships and gather valuable input. This can be achieved by developing opportunities for staff members to build authentic relationships with families and students. Examples include inviting families to school programming and events and giving families opportunities to engage in decision-making processes around student supports, discipline, and school climate.



- Increase families’ opportunities to serve as partners, co-producers, and co-creators of excellent education for all students.<sup>5</sup> Engage families in shared decision-making and policy development and implementation to create a school climate that advances student and school success.<sup>6</sup> This should include co-developing and implementing student disciplinary policies and codes of conduct, including actionable steps that families can take to reinforce social, emotional, and behavioral goals and practices at home. Involve families in strengths-based decision-making processes and modeling appropriate problem-solving approaches. This will increase their comfort with communicating their problem-solving strategies and exploring new techniques that might benefit themselves and their children. Strategies should also include using high-quality tools to measure families’ perceptions, monitor progress toward goals, and change policies and practices as needed.

## Strategy #3: Improve Systems to Sustain Family Engagement

It is critical to embrace effective family engagement practices organization wide. Schools can embed family engagement practices in all improvement strategies and support these practices with infrastructure and resources. To build such systems, districts and individual schools can:

- Establish family advisory councils that reflect the diversity of the school community. The purpose of such a council is to provide input on policy and programmatic priorities to improve outcomes for all students. Educators should schedule meetings that allow maximum participation and multiple methods of input.
- Engage the local family advisory council in co-creating effective alternatives to disciplinary practices that remove students from classrooms or schools. The council should emphasize strategies to eliminate practices that are discriminatory based on factors such as a student's race, national origin, or disability.
- Require that district and school improvement plans focus efforts on intentional family engagement.
- Integrate family engagement training into onboarding and professional development for all district and school leaders and educators.
- Integrate social–emotional learning components into multitiered system of supports frameworks, which can help to address disciplinary issues with families proactively and through less punitive measures.
- Co-develop systemwide family engagement policies and processes in collaboration with families. Evidence shows that family engagement in student learning and behavior is positive and improves students' attendance, behavior, and achievement.

## Resources

This list of resources will help educators, other school personnel, and families learn about, plan for, and implement best practices for family engagement to help reduce the need for disciplinary measures against students.

- [The World Café: Café to Go! Toolkit](#) — learn more about how to facilitate collaborative group conversations.
- Youth.gov's [family engagement webpage](#) — find more information on the impact of family engagement on youth and family outcomes.
- [Building Equitable Learning Environments Network](#) — find resources that support efforts to build equitable learning environments.
- The National Center for Healthy Safe Children's [Safe Schools/Healthy Students webpage](#) — find tools and resources regarding education, justice, social services, and mental health.
- The Nebraska Department of Education's [Nebraska CAFE](#) — learn more about creating a parent advisory group.
- The Michigan Department of Education's [family engagement webpage](#) — find an example of a family engagement framework.
- The Kansas State Department of Education's [District Tools website](#) — find an example of a family engagement survey.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Families” refers inclusively to parents, other family members, caregivers, guardians, and siblings, who may also be students.

<sup>2</sup> “Cultural responsiveness” refers to an ability to learn from and relate to one’s own culture and the cultures of others.

<sup>3</sup> Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2019). *The dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2)*. [www.dualcapacity.org](http://www.dualcapacity.org)

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement (Annual synthesis)*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Mapp, K. L. (2020). *Dr. Karen Mapp on parent and family engagement in education* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YXH8VfZ89Y>

<sup>6</sup> Constantino, S. M. (2020). *Engaging every family: Five simple principles* (Revised edition) (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

## For more information:



<https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov>



National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments  
Engagement • Safety • Environment

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>



<https://oese.ed.gov/student-engagement-and-attendance-technical-assistance-sea-center/>



<https://rems.ed.gov>



<https://www.pbis.org/>



<https://selcenter.wested.org>



<https://t4pacenter.ed.gov>

This document contains resources provided for the user’s convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject-matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education (Department). The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the Department or the Federal government, nor a preference/support for these examples as compared with others that might be available and be presented.

**Suggested Citation:** Office of Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center Collaborative. (2023). *Supporting students’ social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being and success: Strategies for schools to enhance relationships with families* [Fact sheet]. <https://t4pacenter.ed.gov/SupportiveSchools>.