



ADVANCING EQUITY

Practice Brief:

Supportive Family Partnerships



Learning Objectives

After reviewing this practice brief you will be able to:

1. Describe the importance of actively collaborating with families in supporting student development in the classroom and beyond.
2. Reflect on your current practices of collaboration with families, including opportunities to move in the direction of more equitable and consistent partnerships.
3. Identify general strategies for creating supportive family partnerships.
4. Apply specific strategies for collaborating with families in your own classroom context.

Background

Traditional models of engaging with families typically involve limited, one-way interactions that focus on teacher-identified problems. Families are given few opportunities to share their own experiences, ask questions, and be otherwise involved in guiding their child's education.

Examples of equitable family partnerships might look like phone calls home when a student has misbehaved or when there is a problem with their grades. It might look like sending updates home about what is being learned in class without asking for parent input or feedback. It might look like sending homework home for parents to help with without considering parents' time, skills, or culture.

Families should have a relationship with at least one trusted staff person or teacher who is approachable, friendly, respectful, receptive to concerns, and a champion for the student and family. Families should feel welcome and valued at the school. Finally, families should experience receptivity, transparency, empathy, and flexibility from school staff regarding communication as well as collaborative efforts to support learning and success.

Educators should be accepting of and respectful towards cultural differences around communication. Educators should practice self-awareness regarding their own culture and values and how that might interact with families' diverse cultures and values. Educators should show understanding of how various factors—such as systemic oppression, power dynamics, previous experiences—may influence interpersonal dynamics and experiences.



Key Strategies & Takeaways

At the beginning of the school year:

Reach out to all families to introduce yourself and share your contact information



Ask families how they would like to be contacted about their child's progress and how they would like to participate in their child's learning this year.

Ask families to share knowledge about their student's experiences, interests, hopes, struggles, and family cultures and traditions to help better understand and support them throughout the school year.

Throughout the school year:

Invite families to come to the school at times that are convenient to tour the classroom/building, observe a class period, participate in school events, and meet with you or other staff that support their child.

Use intentional homework—that is either optional or flexible in due date—to involve families in students' learning; share upcoming lessons/topics and invite family feedback, input, or participation.

Find accessible ways to share student/class success stories and progress updates, translated into families' native languages (e.g., through Talking Points).

Use parent conferences to solicit feedback from families about their student's progress, their hopes for their child's learning/development, their questions or concerns about the class

Recognize that families are a rich community resource.



Consider how you might make it a weekly practice to keep parents in the loop.

Conclusion

Supportive, equity-focused family partnerships are built on regular, reciprocal communication, meaningful and flexible opportunities for family involvement, and intentional efforts to address barriers and to reflect family cultures and values in the classroom/school environment.

