

Family Engagement: A Rubric for Education Policymaking

Proactively building relationships and co-creating policy with stakeholders will not only help to ensure that policy effectively addresses their needs and aspirations, but it can also help state leaders be more effective and broaden ownership of policy solutions.

This rubric was designed by parent organizers to help state leaders take stock of their current practices around engaging families and can be used to identify strengths and opportunities.

Families

An inclusive understanding of families embraces all of the people who are involved in supporting and shaping students’ lives, including parents (biological, adoptive, and foster; and custodial and non-custodial), grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, other extended family members, and guardians. Policymakers can be inclusive of families by ensuring that all types of families are reflected in the images and descriptions of families, welcomed into discussions about how policy can best support student success, and respected for their expertise on what their children need and deserve.

	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	MASTERY
VISION SETTING	<p>We develop our vision and goals for student success without significant input from families.</p>	<p>We work with some families to develop our vision and goals for student success, but this is not consistent or inclusive of all families we serve.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We partner with high-profile family groups to set the vision for student success but do not have goals or specific mechanisms for including traditionally underserved families in these conversations. 	<p>Our vision and goals for student success are inclusive and created in collaboration with a diverse group of families, and families remain consistently engaged in monitoring progress toward our vision and goals.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We proactively reach out to families to engage them in developing vision and goals. We target outreach to communities that have not traditionally been engaged in these conversations. Once determined, we transparently share our vision and goals with families and make the vision and goals accessible through multi-media, diverse outlets, and translation in multiple languages.

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VISION SETTING	<p>We do not actively seek or incorporate families’ input on new programs or policies.</p>	<p>We are open to incorporating families’ ideas for new programs and policies if they advocate for them but may not actively encourage or seek their proposals.</p>	<p>We actively make decisions with families on how we can best support and develop students in our state. We respect their ideas and solutions and provide them the resources to lead change initiatives.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We co-create our policy agenda with families. • We share tools with families for how they can develop policies, like the Family-Led Policymaking Checklist. • We invite families to the state capital to share their hopes, dreams, and concerns. • With advance notice (at least 2-3 weeks), we invite family organizations to the state capital to lobby for and against education policies. • We support families in drafting policies and draft them on their behalf. • We are clear about policy areas that are open for input and change, and those that are not.
RELATIONSHIPS	<p>We have not developed trust and relationships with the families we serve.</p>	<p>We have relationships with some families or family-facing organizations, but we may not reach all types of families or consistently engage with them.</p>	<p>We continually seek out opportunities to build partnerships with family councils and family-facing organizations from a diversity of communities to develop and maintain trusting relationships.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We partner with community organizations to help connect with family-facing organizations and build relationships.
	<p>We do not understand the history and institutional barriers that make it difficult for families to trust us.</p>	<p>We have some understanding of the history and institutional barriers that make it difficult for the families we serve to trust us but are unsure how to earn their trust.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We know our government has ignored or disempowered families but are hesitant to articulate these issues in public or private conversations. 	<p>We understand the history and institutional barriers that make it difficult for families to trust us and take active steps to earn their trust.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are honest with families about ways our government has ignored or disempowered families and their communities, develop strategies to more authentically engage families, and ask how we can repair this harm.

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RELATIONSHIPS	<p>It is unclear who within our organization is responsible for developing and maintaining relationships with families.</p>	<p>We may have one person or a handful of staff who are responsible for engaging families, but leadership on family engagement is not widely dispersed.</p>	<p>Everyone on our staff understands that partnering with families is part of their job, and this expectation is reflected in job descriptions and performance management.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have well-trained, culturally-competent, multi-lingual staff dedicated to family engagement. • We have organizational and individual goals for family engagement and we routinely monitor progress toward meeting these goals with families. • We ask families for feedback on how we engage with them and adjust our approach as needed.
COMMUNICATION	<p>We offer relatively few ways to connect with us and provide feedback or may only share updates with families after decisions have been made.</p>	<p>We mostly share information outward and/or offer some opportunities to connect and share feedback but may be inconsistent about sharing updates and proactively seeking input from families.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a section of our website for families where we post information. • We develop relationships with local parent listservs to share information and invitations to engage in places parents already look for education information. 	<p>We offer families a variety of ways to provide feedback (i.e., written feedback, 1:1 meetings, roundtables, listening sessions, visits to communities, surveys), actively share updates and seek feedback from families about what is and is not working, and work with them to co-create solutions.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our communication with families is clear and free of jargon. • We partner with organizations and leaders trusted by families to communicate and seek feedback. • We have created tailored, accessible materials for family audiences, aligned to their interests, needs, and expertise. • We review our materials for cultural competence. • We leave enough time (i.e., 2-3 weeks) for families to respond to requests for feedback.
TRANSPARENCY	<p>We do not consistently make data available and share information about the policy development process and internal priorities with families.</p>	<p>We share data and information with families, but it may be difficult to understand and not consistently shared to inform the policy planning process.</p>	<p>We actively share data and information with families, ensure it is understandable, and facilitate discussions with families about what it suggests to them about how we can better serve students.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We ask families what data and information they would like to see and use this information to guide policy development from start to finish.

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INCLUSIVITY	Accommodations are rarely made for families so they can participate in our events.	Accommodations are sometimes made to remove barriers to family participation, like offering translation services or food at events, but these can be inconsistent or incomplete.	<p>We understand the barriers to participation facing our families and consistently vary meeting times (including weekends, evenings, early mornings), formats (townhalls, livestreamed or virtual sessions, roundtables, and focus groups), and locations (in homes, houses of worship, work sites, schools, and community centers) and offer a range of accommodations (including interpretation, translation, ADA-compliant meeting places, childcare, transportation, food) to remove major obstacles to families' participation.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We collaborate with community groups to be added to the agenda of already-scheduled forums, rather than adding new meetings. • We arrange childcare to encourage participation.
	We engage with families who reach out to us but have not cultivated relationships with the many types of families in our state.	We make some effort to proactively reach out to families who represent the diversity of our families, but we do not have a concerted strategy or definition of success.	<p>We understand the full diversity of families within our state and proactively engage with them based on a strategy designed to gather input from a fully representative group. When we are unable to engage a fully inclusive group, we listen to learn why and then adapt our strategy.</p> <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a clear strategy for family engagement and clear measures of success. • We don't make assumptions about or pigeonhole families, recognizing that some stakeholders have interest and/or expertise in many areas. We ask them where they want to contribute, rather than making assumptions.

Additional resources:

- Michigan Department of Education, [Strategies for Strong Parent and Family Engagement](#)
- You for Youth, [Family Engagement](#)
- Build Initiative, [Family Engagement Toolkit](#)
- Council of Chief State School Officers
 - » [Let's Get This Conversation Started: Strategies, Tools, Examples, and Resources to Help States Engage with Stakeholders to Develop and Implement their ESSA Plans](#)
 - » [Let's Continue this Conversation: How to Turn New Stakeholder Connections into Long-Term Relationships](#)