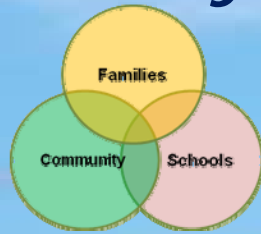


Family Engagement Action Plan



Alaska State Board of
Education and Early
Development



The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (EED) is committed to preparing every student to graduate high school ready for college and career. Research is clear that quality family and community engagement in student learning is critically important to achieving that goal. Family engagement also emerged as an idea of extreme importance to Alaskans in the development of the Alaska Education Plan.

Developed out of the thoughtful visioning of Alaskans from all walks of life at the 2008 Alaska Education Summit, the Alaska Education Plan supports the role of families, communities, and local cultures in the schools. As stated in the Alaska Education Plan: "Family engagement has emerged as a central focus in Alaska education. Viewing parents as the first and best teachers of their children goes beyond their role in early education. Engagement means involving families in every aspect of educational planning, implementation, and evaluation throughout their children's education."

Many in our Alaskan communities have been working diligently on improving family engagement for years by making concerted efforts to grow a culture of trust and partnership between families, community members, and formal educators toward the goal of growing successful and happy graduates. This collection of Family Engagement Actions seeks to be a starting point in consolidating efforts and ideas statewide as well in increasing the level of accountability around family engagement efforts for the betterment of student success.

As with the Alaska Education Plan, please consider these Family Engagement Actions an invitation to work together to achieve Alaska's vision for our children's education.



The Department of Education and Early Development (EED) relies on community members from around the state who are knowledgeable and passionate about improving learning opportunities for Alaska's young people. EED is grateful to the members of the Family Engagement Working Group, who include:

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Families play a critical role in student success. As noted by the Harvard Family Research Project:

From the time children are born, parents influence their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Parents' interactions and activities help shape children's readiness for school, and consistent engagement during children's elementary years is also related to positive academic and behavioral outcomes. Family engagement remains important in adolescence and predicts healthy youth behaviors and higher rates of college enrollment.

It is widely acknowledged that family engagement is a critical component of children's school success "from cradle to career." Research suggests that family engagement promotes multiple benefits for students, including improved readiness for school, increased achievement, superior social skills and behavior, and increased likelihood of high school graduation.

In the 2002 research review *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp conclude that there is a strong relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, economic status, or parents' level of education. It is clear that when families are involved in their children's learning, both at home and at school, their children do better in school.

Parents, educators, administrators, and the community share responsibility for family engagement. Three consistent elements of successful family engagement efforts that emerge from the research are that:

1. All parties work together to build a foundation of trust and respect;
2. Family engagement efforts and strategies are firmly connected to learning objectives; and
3. Efforts to reach out and engage parents go beyond the school house doors and do so consistently throughout the year.

(Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

It is clear that Alaska's efforts to support and improve family and community engagement efforts in our schools will pay dividends in meeting our state's goal to graduate all students ready for college and career.

The Six Components of Successful Family Engagement



The Alaska Family Engagement Plan is built around the following nationally recognized components critical to the goal of maximizing student success and achievement through family engagement:

Welcoming Every Family

Every family coming into the school or interacting with school personnel feels welcome.

Two-Way Communication

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

Sharing Power

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and work together to create policies, practices, and programs.

Supporting Student Success

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development, both at home and at school.

Collaborating with Community

Families and school staff are connected to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

Speaking for Every Child

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.





State Level

Overarching Actions

- Schools and districts are supported in developing annual Family Engagement Plans with the direct involvement of staff, students, families, and members of the community.
- Develop a statewide, public information campaign on the importance of family engagement.
- Develop a statewide system of support for districts and schools looking for additional assistance in their family engagement efforts.
- Provide resources to schools about partner organizations that can help schools with family engagement.
- Inspire action by recognizing excellence in culturally appropriate family engagement practices.
- Develop and distribute a toolkit of shared resources based on research and best practices on family engagement.
- Encourage each district to devote a portion of its in-service time every fall to offer training in family engagement in its schools.

Overarching Actions

- Encourage educators' professional development in family engagement.

State Actions

- State EED to provide a list of organizations utilizing “best practices” in family engagement.

**Welcoming
Every Family**

- Send a letter to every newborn’s parent, emphasizing the important role the parent has as the child’s first teacher in learning.
- Send a letter to every five-year-old’s parent emphasizing the important role the parent has in student success at school, as a partner with the child’s teacher.

**Two-Way
Communication**

- A section of EED’s Web site is devoted to providing pertinent family information on available resources and allows families and students to provide feedback and ask questions.
- Actively encourage public input during State Board of Education and Early Development meetings and public interaction during EED leadership visits to districts and schools.

**Sharing
Power**

- Create opportunities for family engagement in all levels of decision-making, including decisions affecting all ages of children from cradle to career.
- Design and make available model policies supporting parent collaboration at district and school levels that support collaboration and parents as advocates.

Supporting
Student Success

- Develop accessible ways to help every Alaskan family be aware of what their child should know and be able to do academically and where they can go for help. Make readily available grade level expectations as well as learning stages for 0-5 year-olds (Early Learning Guidelines).
- Make available to families, schools, and districts materials that help families understand what they can do to support student learning. To the extent practicable, these materials should be translated into families' native languages.

Collaborating
With Community

- Formally recognize the role that partnerships play in engaging parents.
- Encourage local school districts to identify a Community Partner Liaison and work with a community advisory committee to develop an action plan for family and community engagement that builds local partnerships.
- Encourage schools to provide ongoing professional development training to school leadership and staff on culturally appropriate practices and policies, including creating a culturally welcoming environment for the community.

Speaking For
Every Child

- Make parental and student rights under local, state, and federal law easily accessible on the state education web site.

District Level

Overarching Actions

- Develop an action plan for family and community engagement to be updated annually.
- Provide ongoing training for teachers, administrators, and parents on family engagement.
- Provide resources to schools about partner organizations that can help schools with family engagement.
- Local school boards adopt a policy, resolution, or proclamation acknowledging the critical importance of family engagement in increasing student achievement.
- Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity as well as the unique demands of parenting children with special needs.
- Make available a list of family resources (community, school, faith-based) that is, to the extent practicable, offered in a family's native language.
- Develop incentives/awards for schools recognizing excellence in culturally appropriate family engagement practices.
- Devote a portion of in-service time in the fall to build knowledge about partnerships, including how to welcome and engage students and families, and to enhance staff skills in reaching out to families in a way that is strengths-based, collaborative, and supports families.
- A team of district employees and families develops a district-wide professional development program addressing strategies for culturally relevant family engagement in every school.
- Provide a district-level community liaison. The specialist/liaison would work with schools, families, students, and communities to support communication between schools and their communities.
- Create a pilot project modeling all areas of family engagement and incentivize schools to participate.

District Actions

Welcoming
Every Family

- Develop and distribute a district “map” (in multiple languages) so parents, students, and community members can easily find information and navigate the school system.

Two-Way
Communication

- Devote a section on the district’s web site to allow for input on what’s working in the community in terms of student and family support.
- Schedule parent/teacher conferences at times when parents can attend and consider holding them at locations other than the school building.

Sharing
Power

- Align principals’ performance as it relates to the promotion and support of effective family engagement practices.
- Support the creation of parent organizations at the district and school levels.
- Create teams of parents and professionals to guide decision-making at all levels.

Supporting
Student Success

- Provide cultural proficiency training for school staff and administration.
- Build or enhance student information systems that allow parents to have easy access to student academic, attendance, and other pertinent information.

Collaborating
With Community

- Coordinate and participate in events that support community groups.
- Make available cultural liaisons to assist in outreach to communities.
- Partner with community groups to increase public awareness of truancy laws, stressing the importance of school attendance.
- Collaborate with community resources (mental health, community-based organizations, etc.) to provide low-cost or no-cost parenting classes throughout the school district during the school year.

Speaking For
Every Child

- Make parental and student rights under local, state, and federal law easily accessible on the district web site.

School Level

Overarching Actions

- Employ a community café model of gatherings to maximize family involvement.
- Develop a family and community engagement plan with the active participation of students, families, and community members.
- Identify a family engagement specialist or liaison.

Welcoming Every Family

- Create a network of mentor parents to assist new families in learning about the school.
- Establish a parent resource room/office to be the hub for support for students and family needs.
- Host special traditional celebrations afterschool/weekends. Provide a “community center” (e.g. weekend bingo, tutoring, beading, open gym opportunities, arts/crafts, and educational workshops).
- Consider offering incentives for teachers and community members to come in and credit for students to tutor peers.
- Distribute a family-friendly school walk-through checklist and provide incentives to families to participate.
- At preschool/kindergarten orientations, share information with parents on how to be engaged.

Two-Way Communication

- Complete a beginning of school year family engagement survey, make adjustments based on results, and survey again at end of the year to determine the effectiveness of school efforts. Share results with all families.
- Provide parents with student grade-level expectations, report cards, conferences, and follow up as needed.

School Actions

Two-Way
Communication

- Provide parents and staff with current contact information and include preferred ways and times for parents, teachers, and staff to reach each other.
- Utilize all existing communication systems (PowerSchool, newsletters, Back-to-School information, Robocalls, etc.) to keep parents informed and engaged.
- Encourage parents and teachers to communicate regarding students' positive behavior and achievements.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for informal interactions between staff, administration, and families.
- Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
- Regularly distribute student work for parental/family members' comments and review.

Sharing
Power

- Provide opportunities for parents to join committees that set school policies, goals, or evaluation of programs.

Supporting
Student Success

- Encourage teachers to keep families and students informed and reminded about homework through multiple means of communication, such as emails and a Homework Hotline.
- Provide training to help families understand and prepare for transitions into elementary, middle, and high school.
- Provide information or training for parents about testing so that they understand what type of testing is being given and how results will be used to increase academic success.
- Sponsor academic workshops and distribute information to assist families in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.

Supporting
Student Success

- Help parents and students understand future career/college pathways. Have materials and counseling available to explain living wage, career options, and pathways for gaining necessary skills for applying to college/voc-tech.
- Provide workshops that help parents and students make connections between coursework choices and future careers.
- Provide parents with an annual school calendar of important dates and events and develop a web site that is user-friendly and contains current contact information.
- Create a database to capture what families can do in terms of volunteerism or services to the school.
- Provide training for parents so they can know and understand school and district discipline processes.
- Provide training for in-school parent volunteers. Provide opportunities for parents who are unable to come to the school during the day to volunteer in other ways.

Collaborating
With Community

- Use community facilities (library, museum, community hall) for learning opportunities.
- Make local agencies and businesses aware of local school happenings.
- Recruit community members to volunteer in school (e.g. seniors' bus).
- Participate in community clean-up or beautification projects.
- Sponsor a community health fair at the school.
- Invite community organizations to promote and provide leadership training for parents.

Speaking For
Every Child

- Provide training for parents so they can know and understand school, district, state, and federal student and family rights as well as resources available.

Overarching
Actions

Community Level

- Encourage cultural organizations to collaborate with schools. Work with elders and longstanding respected people in the community who can share clear messages with families about the value of education.

Welcoming
Every Family

- Make a unified effort with all entities (medical, social, educational organizations, etc.) to engage each set of parents as a child is born to help the family know how special they are, what their role is, and how to connect with resources. Provide ongoing support for families to know what to do and who to turn to when they are not sure.

Two-Way
Communication

- Continually assess needs and share information about family resources and opportunities with families and schools.

Sharing
Power

- Community agencies collaborate with schools to educate and support parents in sharing power in decision-making that impacts policies and programs affecting children.

Community Actions

Supporting
Student Success

- Partner with schools to provide social work and case management to support families of children with extended absences.
- Attend celebrations of student talent and achievement, supporting every youth.

Collaborating
With Community

- Community advocacy groups, partnering with school districts, work with groups such as School Business Partnerships, Chambers of Commerce, and Rotaries to educate business owners on the importance of family engagement and what they can do to help. For example, a business owner can allow employees time off to attend parent-teacher conferences or volunteer at a school.

Speaking For
Every Child

- Community businesses enhance efforts to be family and young person friendly, making all feel welcome to conduct business.

Family Level

Overarching Actions

- Begin work to develop a collaborative relationship with your child's teacher and principal early in the school year.
- Maintain high expectations for your children and share them with the teacher.

Welcoming Every Family

- Build relationships with other families and talk about how to help each other in supporting children.

Two-Way Communication

- Provide teachers with important information you feel may impact your child's learning. (Changing family circumstances.)
- Inform the teacher when you notice your child having difficulty with homework.
- Read all materials sent home from school and ask questions when an item is unclear to you.

Sharing Power

- Help set goals and develop a personalized education plan for each child.

Family Actions

Supporting
Student Success

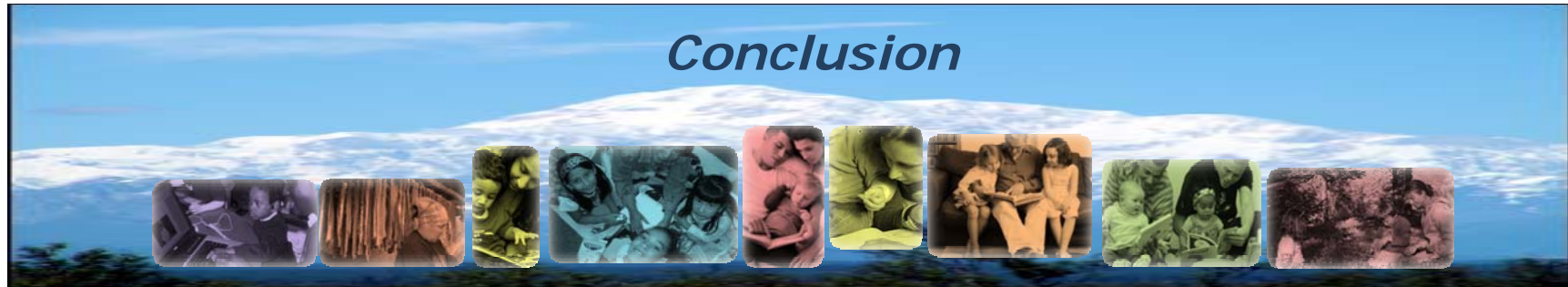
- Attend school meetings on learning expectations, assessments, and grading procedures.
- Create regular routines at home (meals, homework, sleep).
- Work with your child to find a place for homework that is comfortable, quiet, and well lit.
- Discuss your child's school day and homework daily.
- Set the expectation for your child that attending school is a "non-negotiable" unless he/she is sick.
- Identify non-academic activities that can motivate the child's interest in learning.
- Talk to your children often about the value of education and its importance to their future.
- Attend school activities and training opportunities that will help you support your child's learning.
- Read every day, by yourself and with your child.
- On homework, let your child find the solution if at all possible. Give guidance, not answers.

Collaborating
With Community

- Encourage student engagement outside the school day, such as attending local sporting events, engaging in youth activities, or participating in service-learning projects.
- Encourage student community service.
- Thank local merchants and other business owners who support activities at school.

Speaking For
Every Child

- Honor your school's processes as you advocate for your child and other students.



These identified actions are the result of many Alaskans coming together in the Family Engagement Working Group, looking at research, and considering what we already have in place here in Alaska. We respected that every Alaskan family and community looks a little different, that many families have different feelings about formal education, and that families speak many different languages. We also respected that all families want the best for their children. Students thrive when they know that everyone around them - in the home, in the community, and in the schools - has the highest expectations of their behavior, schoolwork, and citizenship and wholly support them.

Overwhelming evidence shows that effective family engagement has a large positive impact on student success and readiness for career and college. Just a few nods to the concept is not enough, family engagement must become an integrated core value of the Alaska education system. As we move forward to grow Alaska Family Engagement, we must be diligent to monitor how these actions are affecting student success.

The actions identified in this plan encourage people at all levels in the education system to foster more opportunities for intentional engagement between families, communities, teachers, staff, district, and state level administrators. Our State Education Plan clearly states that when we partner with families, and respect the culture of every family, students will succeed.