

## Teacher Learning Activity: Engaging Families at School

In order to provide equitable outcomes for a growing diverse student population, it's important that we truly examine our beliefs, actions and instructional practices. Culturally Responsive Teaching is more than simply celebrating diverse cultures or building strong relationships. It's identifying our students' varied perspectives and experiences in order to build bridges toward rigorous learning. It's knowing yourself, your own assumptions and biases, and how these impact interactions with others.

If you are interested in learning strategies to interrupt systems of bias and inequity, and exploring methods for making learning more relevant and rigorous for students, this activity will serve as a pathway towards that goal. It will also serve as a pathway towards that goal. It will also create a greater sense of self-awareness and a renewed focus on inclusivity and equity for all students.

### Activity Objectives:

Is your school simply involving families in their child's education or are they fully engaged? After reading about and discussing the difference between each phrase, use our Family Engagement Planning Tool to reevaluate a future school event. Consider barriers to participation and implement strategies to communicate with, engage and empower all families.

- To understand the difference between parent involvement and engagement.
- To evaluate current school practices related to the home-school connection.
- To plan a future school event using the [Family Engagement Planning Tool](#).

### Steps and Talking Points:

1. Brainstorm the difference between family engagement and family involvement. Record your responses. When you have a few examples review the image below:

PARENT INVOLVEMENT	PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT
When schools <i>involve</i> parents they are leading with their institutional self-interest and desires.	When schools <i>engage</i> parents they are leading with the parents' self-interests (their wants and dreams) in an effort to develop a genuine partnership.
When we're <i>involving</i> parents, school staff can fall into the role of a social worker who does things for parents, or who tends to tell them what they should be doing with their child.	When we're <i>engaging</i> parents, school staff act more as community organizers who help parents do things for themselves, and who elicit from parents ideas about what parents and school staff could be doing to better help their child and their community.
When we're <i>involving</i> parents, schools tend to focus on supporting students by strengthening and assisting school programs and priorities.	When we're <i>engaging</i> parents, schools support students by developing parent relationships and often working with parents to improve their local communities.
When we're <i>involving</i> parents, the parent is generally directed towards completing tasks selected by the school staff – or the parent may be a <i>client</i> who receives services and information.	When we're <i>engaging</i> parents, they are challenged to do something about what <i>they</i> feel is important to them. Staff learn what parents believe is important through developing a relationship.

From [Strengthening Relationships with Families in the School Community: Do School Leaders Make a Difference?](#) by Maria S. Quezada

2. Read the following article for greater detail: [Engagement vs. Involvement: Building an Inclusive School Community](#)

3. Compare initial responses with the new information gleaned from the resources and review your definition. Reflect upon the following questions:

- What impact can each perspective (involvement, engagement) have on families and ultimately student achievement?
- Which message is communicated to the parents of your school or district? Are you involving parents, engaging with them or both?
- Are all identity groups participating equally in their child's learning and in school events?
- How can we ensure that all families feel welcome, included, engaged and empowered in this community?
- How can we better understand the needs of our families and offer support?

4. Print the [Family Engagement Planning Tool](#) -- a step-by-step guide to the development of an inclusive school event. Walk through the process of planning a real school event such as a family math night, school open house or college fair. Record responses to be used for the actual event or to inform your process for planning events such as these in the future.

**Debrief:**

- What was it like to do this activity?
- What surprised you about this topic?
- What are your major takeaways from the readings, discussion, and planning activity?
- How might your family engagement processes change as a result of your learning?

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**Learners Edge offers a full facilitation guide on [Culturally Responsive Teaching for Districts](#).**