

# Budgeting for Family Engagement at the School Level



Family engagement is not an add-on—it is a core strategy for improving student achievement and strengthening school communities. When schools invest in building authentic partnerships between educators and families, students are more likely to succeed academically and socially.

However, not all family engagement strategies yield the same impact. Especially in tight budget environments, school leaders must make intentional choices about where to invest time, resources, and staff capacity.

This resource is designed to help school leaders prioritize investments that strengthen relationships, support academic partnership, and contribute to long-term school improvement, not just short-term participation.

## How to Use This Resource

- **Prioritize high-impact strategies over low-impact activities.** Use the impact and cost indicators in the guide to help drive budgeting choices, focusing on strategies that build relationships and support academic partnerships intentionally, not just incentive strategies or events.
- **Sequence investments strategically.** Start with relationship-building strategies to create trust, then layer in academic partnering approaches to help families support learning outside of the classroom.
- **Align budget decisions to broader strategy.** Ensure that your budget choices reinforce a school-wide approach to family engagement where educators, school leaders, and staff share responsibility. Make sure that investments are more than just one-time efforts or designated roles that “do” family engagement.

# Building Relationships + A Welcoming Environment

*Strong relationships and trust at the foundation of effective family engagement. Without this, academic partnerships are less likely to succeed.*

Strategy	Impact	Cost
<b>Welcome Letters and Surveys to Families:</b> Teachers send home a letter to each student and/or family before the start of the school year to introduce themselves and get to know more about the child.	Low	\$
<b>Multilingual Signage:</b> Clear, multilingual signage helps families navigate the school and signals they belong. Invest in durable, professional materials.	Low	\$\$
<b>Welcome Phone Calls:</b> Prior to the start of school year, teachers call each student and family to introduce themselves and hear from families about their expectations for their child. This is an inexpensive, yet potentially high-yield strategy to build trust.	Medium	\$
<b>Get to You Know Meetings in Classrooms:</b> Informal classroom visits before school starts help families and students feel comfortable and connected.	Medium	\$
<b>Community-Based Conferences:</b> Host a meeting for families somewhere that is comfortable and convenient for them. By moving the location from the school site into the community, the school is demonstrating an investment in meeting families where they are.	Medium	\$
<b>Family-Oriented Bulletin Board:</b> Maintain a family-oriented bulletin board in a space frequented by families. This is a place to share photos of students learning, timely school-related information, and ideas for how families can support learning at home.	Medium	\$

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<b>Staff Walking Tour of Community:</b> Schedule a staff field trip in the school community during preservice week to help build teachers' understanding of student and family life outside the school. Invite a veteran teacher and a key community member to act as "tour guides" ensures the tour will include information that will be of genuine use to teachers.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>\$\$</b>
<b>Family Advisory Council Stipends:</b> Invest in a structured family advisory council and compensate family leaders for their time. This helps to signal that the school values family voice as a genuine partner in decision-making, not just an audience for school communications.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>\$\$\$</b>
<b>Relationship Building Home Visits:</b> Relationship Building Home Visits are one of the most impactful family engagement strategies.	<b>High</b>	<b>\$\$\$</b>

# Supporting Families As Academic Partners

Once relationships and trust are established, schools can focus on helping families support student learning.

Strategy	Impact	Cost
<b>Classroom Showcases:</b> Students work collaboratively with their teachers to develop and facilitate activities that teach families to support student learning at home.	Low	\$
<b>Grade-Level Newsletters:</b> Newsletters provide families with activities they can do at home to support a current areas of focus. This is a low-cost strategy that can be easily published with existing school resources.	Low	\$
<b>Recognition for Academic Growth:</b> Periodically recognize families of students who have made significant academic improvement. This could be award ceremonies, student-family lunches, or other incentives.	Low	\$\$
<b>Weekly Data Folders:</b> Share student progress in key academic areas to help open a dialogue between home and school about learning. This helps families better understand expectations of their student and the role that they can play in monitoring his/her/their progress.	Medium	\$
<b>Classroom Data Meetings:</b> Bring families together to talk about high-level trends in the classroom on a current focus area. This helps orient families to what teachers are working on with students.	Medium	\$
<b>Class Communication Tools:</b> Invest in a two-way communication platform to allow staff to message families in their home language without a separate translation step.	Medium	\$\$

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<p><b>Virtual Conferences:</b> Offering families the option to meet virtually remove barriers related to transportation, work schedules, and childcare. Schools that offer both in-person and virtual options consistently see higher family participation. The cost is low if the district already has a video conferencing platform.</p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>\$</b></p>
<p><b>College Tours:</b> In this high impact/high-cost strategy, secondary school students make a guided visit to a college campus with families and teachers. These visits serve multiple purposes: students experience a college campus in action; students and their families share an experience that can spark a discussion about college; teachers can better understand how to help families approach the path to college; families can better understand the path to college.</p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>\$\$\$</b></p>
<p><b>Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) Classroom Data Meetings:</b> APTT is a structured, evidence-based model in which teachers facilitate whole-class family meetings. Families review real data, set goals with the teacher, and leave with specific activities to practice at home. This is a high-cost, high-impact strategy that requires teaching training, stipends, and material costs.</p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>\$\$\$</b></p>