

# Budgeting for Family Engagement at the System Level



At a time when districts are making difficult trade-offs, family engagement is not a “nice to have”—it is a strategic lever for improving student outcomes.

When families and educators work in true partnership, students are more likely to succeed academically and socially. Investing in family engagement helps schools build the relationships and conditions necessary for that partnership to take hold.

Importantly, budgeting for family engagement is not only about dollars. Districts must account for three critical resources:

- **Funding** (e.g., stipends, tools, programs)
- **Time** (e.g., protected time for outreach, relationship-building, and follow-up)
- **Attention** (e.g., leadership priorities, inclusion in plans, accountability structures)

When all three are aligned, family engagement becomes embedded in how a system operates—not treated as an add-on.

## How to Use This Resource

- **Use this as a lens for budget decisions, not a checklist.** Apply these principles when reviewing new and existing investments to ensure alignment with student outcomes and family engagement.
- **Audit both new and legacy investments.** Use this resource to assess whether current spending reflects your priorities or simply historical patterns.
- **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.
- **Facilitate leadership team discussions.** Use the discussion guide to surface assumptions, identify gaps, and strengthen alignment across teams.

## Anchor Your Budget to Strategy, Not Programs

Avoid funding activities simply because they have always existed. Start with the student outcomes you aim to improve and define how families contribute to those outcomes.

If a clear connection between the investment and family partnership cannot be articulated, reconsider the investment.

Prioritize strategies that build relationships and partnership over time, such as:

- Home visits
- Community walks and listening sessions
- Family advisory councils
- Stipends for family leaders
- Dedicated staff time for family partnership work

These investments may require funding, time, or both—and should be evaluated accordingly. To learn more about high-impact family engagement strategies that matter most for student academic and social-emotional learning, check out [\*What Kinds of Family Engagement Are Most Effective.\*](#)

## Invest in System-Wide Infrastructure that Removes Barriers

**People.** Family engagement should not be owned by a single role. Instead, embed it across the system

- Integrate family partnership responsibilities into teacher and leader roles
- Allocate resources (e.g., stipends, adjusted schedules) to support this work
- Ensure expectations are explicit and shared across staff

**Tools.** System-level investments can improve quality and reduce costs.

- Centralize contracts for communication platforms, translation services, and websites
- Leverage volume purchasing to reduce costs
- Ensure consistency for families across schools and transitions

**Clear Expectations.** Provide schools with clear guidance on what high-quality family engagement looks like.

- Define baseline expectations for communication and partnership
- Align policies and guidance to best practices
- Connect school-level spending decisions to system priorities

## Embed Family Engagement in Major Initiatives

Family engagement is most effective when integrated into core strategies, not treated as a separate program. Make it standard practice to integrate family partnership into the district's biggest investments. Ask every major budget request to answer: *"How are families engaged as partners in this investment?"*

Examples:

- *Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*: Include family training on how to reinforce strategies at home or provide dedicated time for staff to communicate progress to families about interventions
- *Literacy initiatives*: Fund take-home materials and family learning opportunities
- *Postsecondary readiness*: Include family workshops and advising sessions as part of helping families understand how to support and guide this part of their child's educational journey.

When family engagement is built in from the start, it is resourced appropriately, not added as an afterthought.

# Reviewing your Budget Through a Family Engagement Lens

Use the discussion guide below with your senior leadership team before committing resources. These questions are designed to ensure that family engagement has been meaningfully considered throughout your budget allocation.

## Strategic Alignment

- *What specific student outcomes is this investment designed to improve, and how do families factor into achieving those outcomes?*
- *Does this investment reflect what we've heard from families about their needs and priorities? What evidence do we have of that?*
- *Which families are most likely to benefit, and which might be left out?*

## Family Voice and Access

- *How were families involved in identifying the need this investment addresses? If they were not, how can we bring their voice in before or during implementation?*
- *What barriers might prevent families, particularly those furthest from existing systems, from engaging? (Consider language, transportation, work schedules, and trust.)*
- *What resources are built into this investment to actively remove those barriers?*

## Resources and Accountability

- *Beyond the dollar cost, what does this investment require in terms of staff time, and is that time protected?*
- *How will we know if this investment is strengthening family engagement, and who will we ask?*
- *If it isn't working for families, what's our process for adjusting or stopping it?*

**Key Takeaway:** Family engagement is not a separate line item on your budget. It is strategy that should shape how systems allocate resources, design initiatives, and define success.

Districts that align funding, time, and attention to family partnership create the conditions for sustainable, system-level impact.