

MAKING THE CASE

Experiences

Why Experiences Matter

Firsthand experiences are often one of the most effective ways to shift mindsets around family engagement. They help decision-makers feel the impact of prioritizing family engagement which in turn helps make it more likely that the work of family engagement will be valued, invested in, and sustained over time.

As a system leader, engaging in these experiences allows you to see the effects of family engagement, from relationship building to ongoing communication to academic partnering.

The Power of Experiences

BUILD BUY-IN

Hands-on experiences make family engagement tangible and relatable, increasing support at every level of the system. When teachers, administrators, and staff see leaders prioritizing family engagement through their actions, not just their words, it builds buy-in at all levels.

STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

When superintendents, school board members, and public officials witness high-quality family engagement in action, they are more likely to prioritize and champion this work.

DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

Experiential learning brings to life how shifts in policy, funding or practice are directly impacting students, families, and educators. These experiences connect leaders directly with the students and families at the heart of their work.



Key Considerations

- **Know Your Audience:** Tailor the experience to what matters most to the leaders you are engaging. Are they focused on academic outcomes, community trust, or resource allocation? Select experiences that align directly with their priorities.
- **Prep All Participants:** Set everyone up for success, leaders, families, and educators alike. Offer context ahead of time, clarify roles, and ensure that everyone understands the purpose of the experience. This helps create a respectful, productive environment where all voices are honored.
- **Create Space for Reflection:** Build in time after the experience for participants to reflect and discuss. What surprised them? What challenged their assumptions? What actions might they take moving forward? Reflection helps translate experience into insight and action.
- **Make It Part of a Broader Strategy:** Experiences are most effective when aligned with ongoing communications, data-sharing, and leadership development efforts. The experience should not be a one-off moment, but part of a larger movement towards valuing and investing in family engagement.
- **Ensure Authenticity:** Avoid showcasing a “perfect” version of family engagement. Real, sometimes imperfect, experiences often have the most impact. What matters is that the experience is genuine and reflective of everyday practices and relationships.
- **Protect the Dignity of Families and Educators:** Ensure the experience centers respect and agency for families and school staff. Avoid using them as props to persuade others, engagement should be about partnership, not performance.

Experiences that Build Buy-in

Use experiences, alongside data and stories, to make family engagement a visible, valued priority in your system. Some experiences to consider are:

- **Join a Home Visit as a Teacher's Partner:** Invite a leader to accompany a teacher on a home visit. Participating in the respectful, relationship-centered approach of a home visit helps demystify the process and demonstrates how it builds trust between schools and families.
- **Observe Academic Partnering:** Have leaders attend Student-Led Conferences, Parent-Teacher Conferences, or Academic Parent-Teacher Team (APTT) meetings. These experiences demonstrate how schools and families partner on student learning and goal-setting in real time.
- **Participate in a Staff Meeting Focused on Family Engagement:** Include decision-makers in a school's internal meeting where staff review family engagement strategies, reflect on data, and plan next steps. This provides insight into how engagement is embedded in school culture and improvement cycles.
- **Observe Professional Development on Family Engagement:** Invite leaders to sit in on a PD session, training, or learning community focused on family engagement. Seeing teachers build their skills to connect with families reinforces the importance of investing in this area.
- **Listening Sessions with Families and Educators:** Host small-group conversations where families and school staff share real stories of collaboration. Use prompts focused on what made the partnership effective and the impact of this partnership.
- **Shadowing a school-level Family Engagement Leader:** Let decision-makers spend a few hours following a school-based family engagement leader. This helps them see the relationship-building, communication, and coordination involved in high-quality family engagement.

Additional Resources

Home Visit Experience Prep PowerPoint

Use this to prepare senior leaders to attending relationship building home visits. This deck shares information on the why and the how of home visits.

Creating a Home Visit Experience

Use this resource to build a learning opportunity for central office colleagues. Includes roles, agendas, and debrief questions.

Parent Teacher Conference Observation Guide

Similarly, use this tool to help gauge the effectiveness of a parent-teacher conference and how educators implement this in practice.

Student Led Conference Observation Guide

If observing Student Led Conferences, use this to better understand the goals of this method of academic partnering.

APTT Observation Guide

Use this to better understand what to expect during an Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) Meeting.