

Centering Multilingual Families in California Community Schools

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Introduction

Community schools are schools where the resources and voices of the staff, families, and community are organized around supporting student success. Community schools have shown promise in improving student learning and well-being, particularly with underserved populations.¹ While there are numerous national, state, and local initiatives supporting community schools, California has made the largest investment to date.

Administered by the California Department of Education (CDE), the **California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP)** has **dedicated \$4.1 billion** through 2030–31 to eligible public schools to develop “strong and intentional community partnerships ensuring pupil learning and whole child and family development.”²

Although this brief is designed primarily for educators and administrators, please note that meaningful family partnership must include families as collaborative stakeholders and decision-makers in determining what strategies may be relevant and helpful to your school community. Additionally, school staff would do well to consider engaging with community partners in the review and development of family-partnership strategies. Community partners often offer a broader perspective on families’ experiences and can bring specific skills and resources to the school community.

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

This brief provides useful guidance and resources for educators and administrators seeking to expand family-school partnerships* as part of their community school strategy.

Specifically, this brief can be used for:

- identifying areas of strength and growth for development of family-school partnerships;
- considering practices that could be implemented as part of a community school strategy (to be discussed and determined collaboratively with family leaders); and
- strengthening existing family-school partnership practices to support learning among students from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

*For a definition of *family-school partnership* and other key terms, see the Glossary on [page 4](#).



The Foundational Role of Family Partnerships in Community Schools

Students and families are at the center of community school strategies.³ Community school practitioners see students' families as partners in supporting students, not as "clients" receiving services or occasional stakeholders giving feedback. Rather than delegating "family engagement" to a siloed area of community school programs or services, practitioners infuse meaningful partnerships with families in all areas of community school development.⁴

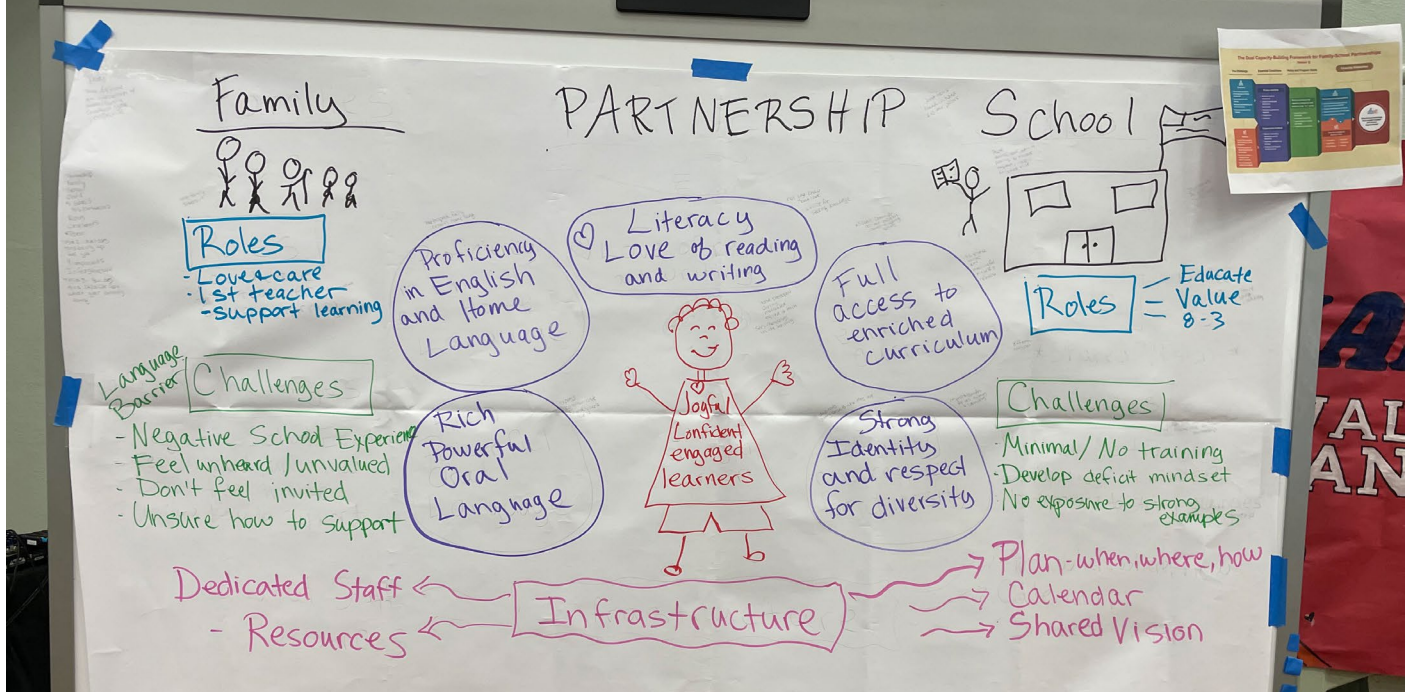
The CCSPP Framework outlines several areas in which family partnerships play a key role:

- **Community school planning and development:** Family members serve on the community school advisory council;⁵ help plan actions based on results from assessments of assets and needs at the district and school levels; identify priorities for community school development and appropriate measures of success; and engage in ongoing monitoring and assessment. Community schools are more likely to reflect the priorities of families when they are deeply involved from the outset.⁶
- **Asset-driven and strength-based practices:** The assets and strengths of students, families, and their communities are powerful resources for community schools. They reflect "the collective wisdom derived from experience, family, history, and culture."⁷ The languages of students and families are also assets to be affirmed and sustained. Community schools prioritize individual and community wellness, centering the inherent strength and resilience of students and families while offering resources that are accessible, destigmatized, and culturally fluent.
- **Powerful, culturally proficient, and relevant instruction:** California's community schools enable "teaching and learning that is relevant to, inclusive of and centered in the wisdom, history, culture and experience of students, families and communities."⁸ Community school practitioners honor and incorporate students' and families' funds of cultural and linguistic knowledge

into learning. Community schools prioritize experiential learning that deepens connection to and engagement with the community.⁹

- **Shared decision-making and participatory practices:** California's community schools commit to authentic and dynamic collaborative leadership in school governance and operations. School stakeholders—including students, families, staff, and community members—have genuine engagement in decision-making about the school's climate, curriculum, and services. Schools and districts provide meaningful opportunities for participation and engagement at each step of the community school implementation plan.





Why does partnering with families matter? And why is it so challenging?

Families are essential partners in ensuring students' success. **Decades of research have found that increased family engagement is associated with positive student outcomes,**¹⁰ including, for example, increased cognitive development, vocabulary growth, literacy skills, expressive language, and math skills.¹¹ **Family engagement can be particularly beneficial for racially diverse populations and English learners (ELs).**¹² (See the pullout box titled "[Spotlight on Family-School Partnership in Redwood City, California](#)" for specific examples of successful family partnerships.)

Children learn better when program practices and environments respect and include the values, expectations, experiences, and languages that shape their lives at home.¹³ Incorporating students' home languages and cultures into their school experiences can help ELs develop strong positive identities and self-concepts, which are important protective factors; it also can lead to students' developing closer relationships with their caregivers and peers.¹⁴ In contrast, when home and school cultures become disconnected, students may see themselves as "bad learners" or lose self-esteem.¹⁵

Despite the potential benefits, many schools struggle to partner meaningfully with families.

Community school practitioners across California say their area of greatest success in community school development has been creating stronger relationships with families. It is also one of the areas of greatest challenge.¹⁶ School practitioners receive little training on supporting meaningful, authentic engagement with families in their children's learning and thus may not know how to bridge linguistic and cultural differences.¹⁷

Although the California Family Engagement Framework¹⁸—produced by CDE in 2014—provides detailed guidance for district leaders, many districts lack clear organizational goals and objectives on how best to engage families.¹⁹ As a result, school and district family-engagement efforts often take the form of "random acts"²⁰ or "unidirectional, segmented, and decontextualized activities and directives"²¹ rather than systemic, integrated, and sustained shifts in practice. Parents and caregivers might be told that they are going to be meaningfully included in decision-making but then face disappointment when they realize that decisions are made "behind closed doors" and they are expected to go along regardless of whether those decisions fit with their cultural context and priorities.²² As a result, schools often miss a critical opportunity to develop powerful partnerships with families in children's learning.

Glossary of Key Terms

Asset- and strengths-based approach

An asset- or strengths-based approach recognizes and builds on the funds of knowledge that families from diverse backgrounds bring to student learning. School practitioners who hold an asset-based view believe that it is the school's responsibility to create a welcoming, inclusive, respectful, and supportive atmosphere and to reduce barriers to engagement. They reject deficit narratives in which certain families are construed as disengaged because of a perceived lack of care or capacity.

Culturally and linguistically attuned

Culturally and linguistically attuned teachers “seek to understand the cultures and communities of their students and out of this understanding, create an environment that fosters connection and integration.”²³ Teachers use “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.”²⁴ To be linguistically attuned, teachers leverage and build on children's home languages in class. In culturally and linguistically attuned classrooms,

*Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum. ... Teachers build classroom communities that are respectful and support students in developing a strong prideful sense of identity and belonging while they are also learning to value and respect others who may be different from themselves.*²⁵

These culturally and linguistically attuned practices are supported by research on the science of learning and development.²⁶ Students learn more when they feel a sense of belonging²⁷ and when teachers build on students' “prior knowledge, experiences, motivations, interests, and language [skills].”²⁸

Family-school partnership

We use the term *family-school partnership* to emphasize the depth and mutually beneficial, bidirectional nature of the relationship between families and schools.²⁹ Leading education scholars have identified five elements that tend to characterize successful family-school partnerships.

- 1) **Linked to learning:** Engagement efforts and initiatives have a clear connection to the school's learning and development goals for students.
- 2) **Relational:** Engagement strategies are based on a foundation of trust and safety between families and educators.
- 3) **Developmental:** There is a mindset and action orientation toward growth and development of both educators and caregivers.
- 4) **Collective and collaborative:** There are engagement initiatives where families and teachers can partner in their learning through groups and networks rather than in isolated silos.
- 5) **Interactive:** The school's initiative plans include opportunities for practicing and coaching of learnings and skills.³⁰

Spotlight on Family-School Partnership in Redwood City, California

Redwood City School District (RCSD) has embraced the community school approach since 2003, when it established six community schools within its elementary school district. The community school initiative was developed as part of a cross-sector collaboration that included city government, two school districts, various community-based organizations, and health care providers. Meaningful engagement with families has been an integral component of the district's community school strategy.

One of RCSD's community schools, Adelante Selby Spanish Immersion (ASSI), has cultivated strong partnerships with the diverse families it serves, as described in a recently published case study.³¹ About 78% of students are Latinx,³² and 18% are White; nearly 50% are English learners (ELs). ASSI is known for its unique whole-school (all grade levels), two-way bilingual immersion program that celebrates bilingualism as a "superpower." The school holds the goal that all attending students finish fifth grade fluent in both Spanish and English. The school prides itself on "embracing and reflecting the values of its Spanish- and English-speaking families."³³

ASSI has developed multiple strategies to strengthen family-school partnerships.

- **Incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into learning:** For a unit on ancestors, second-grade students were asked to interview their parents and grandparents about where their family is from. (Note that with this activity, teachers need to consider how to be inclusive of families with children not being raised by their parents, such as having students interview any caregivers or important adults in their lives about their ancestors.) The purpose was to learn about family traditions and how school had been different for adults in the children's lives. Family members also led activities centered on culture or art. "For example, an ASSI teacher talked about how a parent demonstrated cheese making in her class and then let students sample the cheese with tortillas made by hand."³⁴
- **Have students show and tell their families about what they've learned:** Schools invite family members to visit the classroom before or after the school day for student-led "Gallery Walks" (similar to open house events) at the end of each four- to six-week thematic learning unit. One teacher described the Gallery Walks: "It's a really big event. The families come out and they get to see all their projects, and the students are talking, they're leading their parents around the classroom, showing them what they've learned."³⁵



Photo: Adelante Selby Spanish Immersion School

- **Create family time in the classroom:** These might include weekly “Family Days,” when family members are invited to the classroom to read to students or share a personal story. Caregivers might also come to class to help the child present a project they worked on together at home. One teacher described the Family Days: “Parents will come with the children, and they’re very proud, holding their project. And then they both talk about it in front of the other children—what they did, what they used. So it’s a very good [experience] for the parents to get involved with their education and their activities.”³⁶

One teacher shared how incorporating caregiver involvement has become embedded in lesson planning and development:

*Every time we have activities, and we have our Gallery Walks, we invite the families to come. ... And also we invite parents at the start of the unit. We send a letter home highlighting if any parent has a particular, like, something that they maybe do—a job, or the career involves something that we’re learning, or they have experience on that topic—and they want to come out and do a presentation.*³⁷

Engaging in these strategies has helped increase visits to the classroom and promote collaboration between caregivers and teachers, making family partnership “second nature.” As a result, teachers are engaging in more relevant and diverse teaching techniques, including embedding more cultural appreciation and family partnerships within daily lesson planning.

Additionally, the district has worked with the nonprofit organization [United through Education/Familias Unidas](#) to offer culturally attuned evening educational sessions for hundreds of families. In weekly workshops held over the course of nine weeks, program facilitators focus on helping parents and caregivers engage with their children’s education and community. Parents and caregivers also learn how to better support their children’s development in reading, math, science, technology, health, and arts. The program primarily serves low-income, Latinx immigrant parents. In-depth interviews with nine of the parents from Hoover Elementary Community School found that several elements of the program made it particularly effective. Parents appreciated the skillfulness and strengths-based approach of the instructors; that the program provided materials, childcare, and dinner; and that the program used culturally relevant books. Parents expressed feeling empowered, informed, and confident to support their children’s learning and development, even though in some cases they themselves had left school at a young age.³⁸ For example, one parent named several ways they learned to be more effective in partnering with the school, such as knowing about their children’s grades, what to ask teachers during family-teacher conferences, and the importance of visiting the classroom from time to time “to see what is happening.”³⁹

RCSD’s experience implementing multiple family-partnership strategies provides an example of how one district blends and braids these strategies as part of a comprehensive community school development strategy.

How to Center Multilingual Families in Your Community School: Four Integrated Approaches

Community schools present an opportunity to create structures and practices that support meaningful relationships with families, strengthen learning for diverse students, and build the school community's capacity to sustain success over time. These strategies and resources reflect the best practices of the [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#), which highlights the importance of supporting both families and educators in developing their capacities for partnerships.⁴⁰ As your community school team engages in plans and actions, consider the following four integrated approaches to create meaningful and sustainable family partnerships.

1 Welcome and build relationships with all families.

School practitioners can ask families of different backgrounds for feedback and reflect on the extent to which the school is creating a welcoming environment for families. Reviewing the current environment for families is part of a community school planning and needs assessment process. Engaging in shared reflection and taking responsive, targeted action to make improvements can strengthen trust between families and the school community. Knowing students and family members helps improve school safety, student engagement, and classroom management.⁴¹

Such relationships are mutually beneficial:

- Families help educators and school partners better understand the experiences and strengths of their children and communities, so the learning environment is more relevant and inclusive.
- Educators and school partners give families important information about the school and their children's learning, provide opportunities for two-way communication, and help families navigate the school system.

1 WELCOME AND BUILD – STRATEGIES

- **Reflect and take stock** of how you're progressing toward supporting meaningful family partnerships. Tools like the [Leader Actions Rubric](#) and the [Family Engagement Assessment Tool](#) can provide useful data. Use the results to help you focus on specific actions you will take to foster partnerships.
- **Hold a kickoff meeting inviting all educators and school partners** so that everyone is committed and ready to begin working together on cultivating family-school partnerships. Consider watching this [one-minute video introducing family-school partnerships](#) and/or the [recommended resource videos below](#). Here are some discussion questions for joint reflection:
 - What does it mean to hold an asset-based view of our families?
 - How are we doing with building trusting relationships with families, including those from historically marginalized groups? How can we improve?
 - How are we currently partnering with families to support student learning and development? What might we want to change, and why?

1 WELCOME BUILD – STRATEGIES CONTINUED

- **Consider the ways that families feel welcomed and invited.** Ensure that front office staff and principals greet and welcome families as soon as they walk through the door.⁴² Invitations to engage can be as simple as smiling, knowing caregivers and their children by name, or asking how they can help. Principals can also warmly greet families and students as they are arriving at and departing from the school.
- **Hire and support a school-based family liaison** to focus on fostering strong, trusting relationships by supporting communications among educators, staff members, and families. Liaisons do this by helping educators and staff members connect with families and the school community, organizing events, and checking in on families that are less engaged.⁴³
- **Build time into teachers' and administrators' schedules for family-partnership activities,** such as [home visits](#), [community walks](#), family-student-teacher conferences, and other regular and accessible communications with families. Ask caregivers what their hopes and dreams are for their children and discuss how they can best support their children's learning. Such interactions deepen a sense of connection, trust, and shared purpose.⁴⁴
- **Partner with community organizations and leaders to host specific orientations for newcomer families in their preferred language** (with an interpreter, if needed). This provides a welcoming environment for families who may be encountering the U.S. school system for the first time and creates space to address specific interests (e.g., community resources, English as a second language classes for adults, A–G college-preparatory coursework requirements, how to visit or volunteer at the school).
- **For incoming kindergarten students and their families, consider having an orientation** (ideally taking place in the May or June before kindergarten starts) that includes a school tour with activities like practicing buying lunch.⁴⁵ Ask current families who may have had similar experiences to help design and lead the orientation.

1 WELCOME BUILD – RESOURCES

[Cultural Curriculum Audit](#) ([link](#))

This short resource from Turnaround for Children includes prompts to facilitate analysis and reflection on the extent to which the current curriculum reflects the cultural and linguistic identities of students and families.

[Family Engagement Assessment Tool](#) ([link](#))

The Flamboyan Foundation developed a suite of tools to support leaders with relationship-centered, experience-driven, academically linked family engagement. The resources include a 15-minute online self-assessment tool for leaders.

[Family-School Relationships Survey for Parents or Guardians](#) ([link](#))

Learn more about caregivers' levels of engagement with the school as well as barriers to engagement that they face from outside factors (e.g., childcare challenges) or school factors (e.g., not feeling welcomed). The survey is available in 10 languages. Use [survey forms on the SurveyMonkey website](#).

1

WELCOME BUILD – RESOURCES CONTINUED

Leader Actions Rubric ([link](#))

This rubric from the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) helps you assess “leadership actions toward cultivating a school culture that prioritizes strong family-school partnerships. The rubric is both a reflection tool and a roadmap for school leaders that identifies specific actions leaders can take to create a school culture of partnership with families.”⁴⁶

Get to know one another and welcome families using these resources:**Affirming Language, Culture, and Identity in a New Mexico Community School** ([link](#))

This inspiring video showcases the Cuba, New Mexico, school district, which went from one of the lowest performing to one of the highest performing in the state after adopting community school strategies. Students feel greater connection and engagement from seeing their families and communities reflected in the learning environment. For example, at the request of the high school students, the school hired a Navajo company and students helped them build a *hogan*—a traditional Navajo dwelling and ceremonial building—on campus. They also built a traditional *horno* (oven) for baking bread. Adults from the community come to campus to share about their cultures and languages with students, educators, families, and community members. Community members and students also connect and share skills and knowledge through projects like cultivating native plants in the school garden.

Classroom Gallery Walks ([link](#))

Gallery walks are an exciting and meaningful way to share student learning with families. This resource from SEAL describes how educators can set up and use Gallery Walks as a strategy to empower students to “show and tell” their learning with family members. At the end of each unit, students take families on a classroom tour in which they show and tell what they learned, with students’ work displayed around the room. This strategy also supports students’ ownership of and leadership within their own learning and can be adapted to the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Family Empathy Interviews ([link](#))

A wonderful way to start the year is with family empathy interviews. Empathy interviews can be done systematically as part of parent-teacher conferences or informal welcome meetings. This SEAL handout guides conversations between educators, school leaders, and any families who are new to the school. These meetings are a way to get to know one another and open the lines of communication for respectful, reciprocal relationships. The meetings can help teachers and school leaders identify, incorporate, and affirm aspects of the child’s home language and culture in the classroom and school over the course of the school year.

Get to Know Students’ Home Cultures and Communities ([link](#))

This resource from Turnaround for Children offers simple activities that are particularly well-suited for upper elementary, middle, and high school settings and help teachers get to know students’ whole selves, including their cultures, families, and communities. The activities include a Community Walk and a Student Spotlight, where each student has a chance to share something with the class about their personal background. Students can also share about their identities, cultures, families, and communities using [self-portraits, as shown in this short video](#). For [activities geared toward bridging school and home in earlier grades, see this write-up](#).

1 WELCOME BUILD – RESOURCES CONTINUED

Parent Teacher Home Visits Program ([link](#))

This program was co-created by parents and educators drawing on community organizing principles to scaffold meaningful, voluntary home visits focused on supporting students' learning. The program has been evaluated in three national studies and includes multiple options for training and implementation support.

2 Build family and staff capacity to engage in collaborative leadership.

Collaborative leadership and shared decision-making are core elements of community school development. Families are critical stakeholders who join with school staff, students, and community members to participate actively in school decision-making. Some structures already exist in California to facilitate family leadership in school decision-making—for example, English Learner Advisory Committees (ELACs), School Site Councils, and Parent Advisory Committees—but these opportunities for shared leadership are not always fully realized. Meetings can often feel formulaic or like “checking the boxes” rather than opportunities for meaningful discussion and

decision-making. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework reminds us that both families and educators need training and support to realize families' full collaborative leadership potential.

Collaborative leadership is mutually beneficial:

- Families bring to light more complete information about student, family, and community priorities, helping educators make more informed, responsive decisions.
- Educators (and community partner organizations) can support families' leadership and skill-building efforts, benefiting families and the school community.

2 COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP – STRATEGIES

- **Foster the expectation that families are important stakeholders in school leadership and decision-making.** This will likely include unpacking some of the biases and challenges that can come into play when engaging in shared leadership, such as issues of power, voice, and agency. School and district leaders play an important role in setting the tone that families belong at the table.
- **Support educators' professional learning in meaningful collaboration and shared leadership.** Collaborative leadership happens through both formal and informal channels. Building educators' capacity for collaborative leadership can support collaboration not only with families but also among staff.
- **Invest in families' leadership and skill building.** Community-based organizations can make especially powerful partners in supporting families' skill building and leadership development. Community-based organizations that take a community-organizing approach may be particularly well suited to building family leadership and engagement.
- **Ensure that families actively participate in community school planning and development.** It is especially important to prioritize participation from traditionally marginalized groups. Learn from families and community partner organizations how best to support families' participation. Take actions to address any barriers to participation.

2

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP – STRATEGIES CONTINUED

- **Create multilingual opportunities for families to ask questions, make comments, and share their experiences.** Do more than simply providing interpreters at events and meeting spaces. Foster safe spaces for non-English-speaking families to communicate in their home languages. Also encourage families to share their experiences, questions, and concerns on their own terms (not just in response to a specific agenda item). One group of educators shared:

Families shared their stories, and educators were not allowed to speak but asked only to listen [with live translation into English as needed]. Both families and educators felt that this experience established trust. For educators, it also gave them a better understanding of students and their families.⁴⁷

- **Incentivize opportunities for educators and families to learn together.** Engaging in shared learning is a powerful opportunity for building trust and collaboration. Educators and families “need opportunities to practice new strategies and receive feedback, support, encouragement, and coaching from each other and their peers.”⁴⁸ Educators and families can choose learning topics based on the assets and needs assessment. For example, learning could focus on how to increase trauma responsiveness at the school, including for specific types of traumas faced by undocumented or refugee families.

2

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP – RESOURCES

Collaborative Leadership Practices ([link](#))

In the Partnership for the Future of Learning's *Community Schools Playbook*, chapter six, on *collaborative leadership practices*, can help district and school leaders and their staff understand and apply these practices. The document also provides examples of collaborative leadership practices at various community schools.

Collaborative Leadership Tools and Activities (for Teams) ([link](#))

Use this toolkit and set of activities from the Center for Community Schooling at the University of California, Los Angeles, to engage with your team on defining the collaborative leadership practices that the team will undertake. Activities center on gaining clarity about your team's roles, responsibilities, and needs; determining how the team makes decisions; setting the agenda; taking notes; and naming next steps after meetings.

Dual-Capacity Framework for Family Engagement ([link](#))

This concise and useful document provides a framework for collaborative leadership in the context of powerful family engagement that supports student learning.

Introduction to the California English Learner Roadmap ([link](#))

The California English Learner Roadmap (2017) is an essential guide for school communities in supporting EL success. ELs benefit when educators and other school staff, families, students, and community members all understand and work together to implement the EL Roadmap's principles. School and district staff can facilitate an interactive workshop with families (in ELAC or other group settings) as an introduction to the EL Roadmap using this resource from SEAL. By adapting the English- or Spanish-language slides, you can lead a jigsaw activity, share with families how the EL Roadmap is being implemented at the school site, and invite families to contribute ideas of their own and get involved in EL Roadmap implementation at the school.

2

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP – RESOURCES CONTINUED

Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement through an Equity Lens ([link](#))

This resource from CDE provides guidance on how educators and families can collaboratively support student learning and success. The guide uses a continuous improvement framework and emphasizes specific strategies and activities to build educators' capacity for meaningful family engagement.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) ([link](#))

PIQE provides many kinds of trainings for educators, staff, and families to support family leadership, advocacy, and participation in strengthening students' education.

3

Build families' capacity to provide supports for student learning at home.

Successful students often have families who are involved in supporting their learning outside of school. "Learning at home" is the type of family engagement most commonly found in the research literature to be positively associated with student achievement, particularly among historically marginalized populations like lower-income and multilingual families.⁴⁹ Family support for learning at home could include providing dedicated space and time for doing homework, participating in homework that is designed to be interactive, talking about children's experiences in school, and reading to children in the home language.

Parents and caregivers from historically marginalized groups are often engaged in their children's learning and development at home in ways that are invisible to educators, which can lead educators to underestimate the contributions that those families are making. For example, one study of Latinx mothers published by Child Trends found that mothers frequently

give advice to their children designed to instill social-emotional qualities that support learning, such as resiliency and perseverance, and that these contributions often go unrecognized by school staff. Dual-capacity professional development means helping educators first recognize families' strengths by supporting their children's learning at home then build on those strengths to further at-home learning.⁵⁰

When schools build families' capacity to provide supports for student learning at home, both families and educators benefit:

- Families are more likely to engage in these learning activities and be more confident and effective in doing so.
- Educators learn about and appreciate the many ways that families can support learning at home, leading educators to be more proactive and successful in partnering with families to support student learning.

3

LEARNING AT HOME – STRATEGIES

- **Dedicate time during staff and teacher collaboration meetings to plan how educators can partner with families to support at-home learning.** This time should include highlighting the strengths of families, such as ways they may already be supporting their children's learning at home. It could also include brainstorming at-home activities that are accessible to families with different levels of formal educational experience (for example, different levels of literacy or numeracy). The following strategies and resources offer some ideas.

3 LEARNING AT HOME – STRATEGIES CONTINUED

- **Provide families with data on their children’s progress in school in a form that they can understand and use.** Make sure that multilingual families understand their children’s progress in oral language, reading, and writing in English and, if possible, in the home language. Include additional data, such as attendance and behavior. Make suggestions for how to support the child’s learning growth at home given their performance.
- **Learn about students’ interests and provide regular updates to families on how their children are growing and learning,** such as through texts or calls to each family telling them a specific positive about what their child did in class that day. Give families specific, actionable information and resources on how they can better support their children.
- **Hold family information nights** and workshops on how to support learning and reading at home using culturally attuned books and pedagogy. Provide childcare, food, meeting materials, and follow-up materials and resources. Be sure that recommended activities are accessible to families with varied levels of literacy and numeracy, and across different home languages.
- **Encourage teachers or other school staff to invite families to school to celebrate their children’s progress as a community.** For example, teachers could recognize academic achievements, social-emotional skills, and citizenship.
- **Create your own family academy or family-teacher team model.** You may already have educators in your school or district who are doing this work. Ask around—if you do, consider how you can leverage their expertise (and compensate their time) to expand opportunities for more families.

3 LEARNING AT HOME – RESOURCES

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams ([link](#))

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams is a program that reconfigures the traditional parent-teacher conference to provide more opportunities for parent-teacher collaboration, including targeted strategies for supporting student learning at home.

Rediscovering Joy and Laughter in the Home ([link](#))

This SEAL resource folder includes a family workshop PowerPoint and a handout with six strategies for families, both in Spanish and English. The strategies include talking often with your children, creating a web-of-joy art project, preparing a meal together, telling the story of the child’s name, looking through old family photos, and connecting around music in the home.

Family Teacher Teams ([link](#))

This video showcases the potential of creating your own family-teacher learning teams. Cajon Valley Union School District’s Family Teacher Teams create opportunities for families and teachers to collaborate to support student learning.

Family-Educator Learning Accelerator (FELA) ([link](#))

This toolkit supports educators with engaging families in practicing at-home strategies to support student learning. The approach is based on 5- to 10-week cycles in which educators and families work with students to practice specific skills that build toward concrete learning goals.

3 LEARNING AT HOME – RESOURCES CONTINUED

Family Engagement Nights ([link](#))

Family Engagement Nights bring families and their children together on campus to engage in hands-on learning activities related to specific topics or skills, such as a math night, reading night, or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) night. See examples from [San Francisco Unified School District](#) and [Oakland Unified School District](#).

Interactive Read Aloud Workshop and Handouts ([link](#))

Schools can use the Interactive Read Aloud resources from SEAL to share tips with families on reading with their children. This strategy encourages caregivers to pause and ask questions that engage children and develop their literacy skills. Handouts are available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

Raising a Reader ([link](#))

Raising a Reader is a program focused on increasing families' involvement in their children's early literacy. The program supports building strong literacy habits and strengthening family-child relationships through reading.

4 Actively work with families to promote home language development and multilingualism.

Research finds that systematic, deliberate exposure to English, combined with ongoing opportunities to learn in and develop the home language, result in the highest achievement in both the home language and English by the end of third grade and beyond.⁵¹ Multilingualism provides other benefits in social and economic realms—for example, affirming students' home languages can support positive cultural identity and be a protective factor for students from marginalized backgrounds.⁵² Multilingualism can also be an asset in career and vocational development, leading to higher earnings.⁵³ However, parents or caregivers who speak a language other than English often believe that their children need to focus only on learning English to gain proficiency and succeed in school. An exclusive focus on English learning can lead to missed opportunities for economic, social, and cognitive development for students.

Even if a school does not have a bilingual program, it can still celebrate multilingualism and help families understand the benefits of maintaining the home language.

The CDE is recognizing the achievement of bilingual and biliterate students through the [State Seal of Biliteracy program](#), a special recognition for qualifying high school students upon graduation. Other Global California 2030 initiatives increase access to dual immersion programs and bilingual teachers and recognize students' bilingual achievements throughout their school careers, beginning in preschool.

When schools work with families to promote home language development and multilingualism, both benefit:

- Multilingual families are more likely to use their home languages with their children. All families are more likely to support educators' efforts to help their children gain proficiency in languages other than English.
- Educators improve their supports for home language development in the classroom and ensure that students hear consistent messages promoting multilingualism.

4

PROMOTE HOME LANGUAGE AND MULTILINGUALIS – STRATEGIES

- **Invest in professional development for teachers on the benefits of bilingualism.**
Understanding the specific benefits of bilingualism will support teachers' capacity to support bilingualism and communicate its benefits to families.
- **Provide training for educators on how they can support use of home language and bilingualism to enhance students' at-home learning.** Even in nonbilingual programs, educators can support and engage students' home language abilities, including leveraging families' home language abilities to support student learning. For example, educators can encourage family members to read and tell stories to their children or engage in cultural learning activities (e.g., cooking, dancing, music) in their home languages.
- **Work with teachers to incorporate home languages in the classroom,** such as displaying visuals on the walls with the different home languages of their students; inviting students and/or families to present something in their home languages, like a song or book; or asking a student or family member how they say a word or phrase in their home language and then having all students in the class learn how to say it in that language.
- **Include “language learning goals” in parent-teacher conferences and class meetings.**
At the beginning of the school year, teachers can talk with families about their language learning goals for their children. Teachers can ask families to share their thoughts on the children's bilingual development and how it may relate to their goals. These conversations can also be an opportunity to communicate with families about the benefits and importance of maintaining home language development as well as to learn from families how they wish to share their home language and culture with their children.
- **Provide clear, accessible information to families about available bilingual programs and certifications for their children.** If bilingual programs are available in your school or district, make sure that families are aware of them. There may be other bilingual support programs (such as the State Seal of Biliteracy program) in which students and their families can participate. Providing accessible information also means making sure that families are empowered to learn about and seek bilingual program options in the school, district, and beyond.
- **Invite families and the school community to join in celebrations of emerging bilingualism among the students.** Participating in [CDE's Biliteracy Pathway Recognitions](#) program is one great way to do so. These are awards ceremonies typically held at schools “to recognize preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and middle school students who have demonstrated progress toward proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.” The three types of recognition are biliteracy program participation, home language development, and biliteracy attainment. Of course, teachers and educators can incorporate their own creative ideas for how to celebrate bilingualism with their students.

4

PROMOTE HOME LANGUAGE AND MULTILINGUALISM – RESOURCES

A Child’s Home Language ([link](#))

In this one-minute video, SEAL founder Dr. Laurie Olsen speaks about the importance of families using the home language with their children. Short clips show family members reading to students in their home language and classroom projects involving families.

Bilingual and Dual Language Education—Families ([link](#))

This SEAL video features families and students reflecting on the benefits they have experienced from bilingual or dual language education. It also discusses research supporting recent bilingualism and policy changes in California involving bilingual education. A shorter version of the video focusing on the interviews, called [Bilingualism: Through the Eyes of Families](#), is also available.

Californians Together ([link](#))

Californians Together has published several useful resources, including elementary, middle, and high school teacher toolkits to accompany the English Learner Roadmap. They also provide an overview of various bilingual programs and pathways (e.g., the State Seal of Biliteracy program) and offer many other useful related toolkits (e.g., increasing bilingual student and family participation in the Local Control and Accountability Plan process).

¡Colorín colorado! ([link](#))

This website provides numerous resources to support biliteracy in English and Spanish at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The organization emphasizes a collaborative-partnership approach with families and provides resources and activities for both educators and families.

Early Edge California ([link](#))

This organization provides tools and training for early childhood educators (infant-toddler, preschool, and transitional kindergarten) to support dual-language learners’ school success.

Multilingual Learning Toolkit ([link](#))

This website provides numerous tools for teachers to support dual-language development and integrate bilingual learning into the classroom in early education settings. The toolkit includes sample lesson plans, graphic organizers for lesson planning, and a “resource walk” through an extensive array of resources from SEAL and other experts.

Raising Bilingual Children Workshop ([link](#))

As a school or district leader, you can join with representatives from families or the larger community to co-lead this interactive SEAL workshop for families around fostering the development of bilingualism in their children. It includes PowerPoint presentation slides in English and Spanish to adapt and use. In addition, you can use any or all of the following resources:

Informational flyers to send home:

- Bilingualism myths and research in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
- Nine Ways to Support Your Child’s Bilingualism in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)

Activity:

Family members write a poem addressed to the child using the “[Because I Am Bilingual](#)” [poem templates](#) (and [video of the original poem read by the author Alma Flor Ada](#) in English and Spanish). There are three templates: one for family members who are bilingual, one for monolingual English speakers, and one for monolingual Spanish speakers.

Conclusion

In community schools, deep partnerships with families of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are essential to “the way we do school.” Most schools and districts already have some activities and structures in place to engage with families, but many are seeking more effective approaches. Community schools present a unique opportunity to reinvest strategically and systematically in family-school partnerships.

We hope the strategies and resources listed here provide some useful guidance to schools and districts considering how to enhance their partnerships with families. Please share these integrated practices, strategies, and resources widely and use them in your school communities to strengthen family-school partnerships that center students’ languages and cultures.



For more free resources on community schools, visit cslx.org.

For more free resources on supporting English learners and their families, visit seal.org/resources.

Endnotes

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