



Webinar: Increasing Family Engagement Within Schools to Support Refugee Students

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Transcript

Introduction

Madina Masumi: Good afternoon or good morning, everyone, depending on where you are joining us from. Welcome to our training today, brought to you by Switchboard. My name is Madina Masumi. I am one of Switchboard's training officers, with a focus on youth and education, and I've joined Switchboard with a background as a licensed K-12 school counselor. Previously, I also worked as a case manager for many public assistance programs. I also bring with me a firsthand experience on the challenges of refugee integration, as the daughter of Afghan refugees. I'm excited to be here with you all today. Let's get started with our training.

Learning Objectives

MM: For today, we have three learning objectives for you. The first one is going to be, explain how the Dual Capacity-Building Framework supports the development of family engagement strategies, policies, and programs in school communities. The second is, we are going to describe culturally responsive strategies to enhance family involvement for working with newcomer students and their families. The third is, we are going to apply some practical tools and techniques to establish and maintain effective partnerships between schools and refugee families.

1. Dual Capacity-Building Framework

MM: Alright, so the Dual Capacity-Building Framework. In this section, we're going to dive in and learn about this framework model. It was first published back in 2013, by Karen Mapp, with the support of Paul Kuttner. There's actually been many updates made to the framework back in 2019. The reason this framework is so important to the field of family engagement, and why we're going to talk about it in depth today is because it really focuses on building the capacity of both families and educators, rather than putting all the responsibility into one party.

Poll Question

MM: Alright. We are going to start you out with a Slido. If you can scan the QR code on the left side of your screen, or you can go on to [slido.com](https://www.slido.com) and enter the corresponding number, which is 3438919, we'd love for you to answer.

What is your definition of "family engagement"?



MM: Okay, I see some participants typing. [silence] Involvements of family in decision making. Collaboration and communication with all members. Families feel empowered. Building a positive experience. Actively involved in their child's education. Again, getting involved. Ensuring they have cultural orientation.

Awesome. Lots of wonderful answers coming through. Lots of focus on how it helps families, and how it helps families get involved in their child's education. Family engagement really happens when families and schools are working together to support their child's learning and their development. It really has a big focus on building those strong, respectful relationships between families, between educators, and of course, bringing in the community to ensure that everyone is vested in the child's education. It's really like a multi-tiered approach. These are all wonderful answers. Thank you so much.

Guiding Beliefs of Family Engagement

MM: Alright. Before we talk about the Dual Capacity-Framework, we're going to talk about the guiding beliefs of family engagement. These are really going to ground us. This is important, especially in the context of today's training, because we're focusing on newcomer and refugee families. Of course, the first is that families want the best for their child, right? Every family, regardless of their background, they want the best for their child. Starting with this belief really helps us build positive trust and positive relationships with families.

The second is that families can help their child succeed, right? Families play a really important role in their child's success. They're going to influence the way their child learns, the way their child behaves in the classroom, and our role is really to empower families with the tools and support that they need to contribute effectively. Then the last is that families are the experts of their child, right? They have the best insight on their child. Their insight is so valuable to educators. We really have to listen and respect their knowledge to make informed decisions that benefit the student. Again, this is even more important when we're thinking in the context of newcomer families, because they are going to have different cultural beliefs than what is possibly the beliefs and values that are in their child's school. It's really important to hone in on that and get their voices heard.

Family's Role in Accelerated Learning

MM: Alright. When we are thinking about family's role in accelerated learning, this information is actually coming to us from the Flamboyant Foundation. They are a nonprofit organization that's done a lot of great work that's research and evidence-based in the field of family engagement.

What it's telling us is that families are the ones who are going to be able to communicate those high expectations to their child. They are able to talk to their child about the hopes, the dreams that they have, and goals that they have for their children in the future. They usually link that to educational success, right? Families can monitor their child's performance. They can be the ones who help keep track of their child's progress, whether it's through checking their grades, talking to them about what assignments are due, or at home, helping them find ways to properly manage their time and balance all the school and work and home activities that they have.

Of course, families help accelerate learning by supporting their learning at home, right? Creating an environment that's conducive to learning. Making sure their child has a place in the home where they can do homework, where they can study. They are the ones at home with their child, not the educators. It's very important to make sure that they feel empowered. Of course, guiding their child's education, right? Parents are



involved in all the decisions that their children make from a young age, and especially as they get older, when it comes to seeking out colleges, or enhancing their education after K-12.

The hope is that, as their child matures, they will place more of that responsibility on their child. These rules are really foundational in ensuring that students can succeed academically, with each rule contributing uniquely to the development and learning of their child. As we're going through today's presentation, I also want to note that—I want to clarify that from—when it comes to talking about newcomer students in schools, they might not necessarily be with their biological families.

Some are in foster care as unaccompanied refugee minors, and so I might add that additional context, and I want us to keep that in mind as well, is that not all children are going to be in their traditional biological families. Even when we're working with foster care agencies, or children are in a transitional home, it's important to think about this context of how they can also work to partner with schools.

Benefits of Family Engagement for Refugee Youth

MM: Alright. Benefits of family engagement specifically for refugee youth. Obviously, that is our focus for today. When we talk about education in the US, we often talk about achievement gaps, which are so important, but when it comes to refugee students, it's really important to recognize that there's also what's called an opportunity gap, right? Some refugee students may have had breaks in their education, they might not have had the same opportunities as their peers. When it comes to refugee families, one of the aspects that we focus on of why family engagement is so important is because it helps close the achievement gap and the opportunity gap.

When families are engaged, that leads to higher literacy rates among students, there's going to be higher test scores and academic achievement overall, attendance rates are better, there's going to be fewer disciplinary problems in schools, and of course, they'll have stronger social skills, and students are also more likely to go ahead and pursue a higher education. Really, when it comes to newcomer students and refugee students, all of these are so important because these are uphill battles that many of them are facing. Of course, supporting their acculturation and their integration, right?

When they feel more included in the school, when their families feel more engaged, these are all major benefits that you're going to see with newcomer students that are so important.

Dual Capacity Framework Model

MM: Alright. This is the Dual Capacity-Building Framework. Sort of the layout that we have. Again, this framework has become a very influential model through the years, because it's research-based and it's evidence-based, specifically on how to support the development of successful family engagement strategies, policies, and programs.

Like I said in the beginning, the framework really comes with the lens of supporting and equipping families and educators, because if too much responsibility is placed on families or on educators to be engaged and support their child, it's not really fair. The great thing about this framework is that it says, "Hey, both parties, all parties need to be invested to really help the child." In the context of parent engagement or family engagement, the framework really focuses on building the skills, the knowledge, and the relationships that are necessary for the successful collaboration.



It has four essential parts that we're going to break and break down in the next slides to come. They're addressing capacity challenges, so what's getting in the way of families engaging? Essential conditions, which talk about the process and the outcomes necessary to have effective family engagement program. Then program policies and goals. We're going to focus on the four Cs, and then of course the results of effective family engagement. What are the capacity outcomes?

Capacity Challenges in Family Engagement

MM: Alright. Capacity challenges in family engagement. This, again, helps us understand why. What is getting in the way of families engaging with schools? Some of the reasons are that school staff and families just don't have the opportunities to build this partnership. They don't have the capacity to do it. It's no surprise in the world that we live in today, educators have so much on their plates. They're very overwhelmed, and they sometimes might see a family engagement initiative as extra work, right?

It just might be an added pressure that they might not see the value in necessarily. They don't want to take that time to do it. Really, in the long run, we know that if families are more engaged, they become partners, and actually helps educators so much. They also might not have the training to work with newcomer families. This involves really understanding culturals, having cultural humility, and they might have not had that professional development on how to reach out to families.

In my own experience working in the public school system, I sometimes would hear teachers say, "Oh, those families don't ever show up. They don't come to the meetings." Or, "They don't attend these events." The reasoning behind it was not always known, right? So it's really important for us to know why. Maybe it's transportation, maybe it's a language barrier, and so when educators don't have that capacity or training to understand those things, this can get in the way of engagement. Then the last capacity challenge is that families might not understand their role in family engagement, or lack the communication with the school.

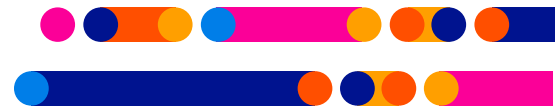
We're going to talk about this more later, but of course in some cultures, they might see the school and what happens at home as two completely separate entities. So they might not feel like they need to be involved in the school. I know my own family is from Afghanistan, and what happened at school and what happened at home were kept very separate. That was a big transition and learning curve for my own family when I started, because my parents didn't understand how involved they had to be in my education until I really got into kindergarten and they began to understand the effects that it was taking when they weren't as involved.

An important note that I want to say for URMs is that URMs may not have family or siblings here to support them, so their family setting might not know how best to support the child to succeed in school. It may take extra time for foster homes or case managers to really learn ways to foster a unique success for URM. That's an important thing to consider when working with them.

Essential Conditions

MM: Alright. Essential conditions. To explain essential conditions in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework in a simple way, I think of it as a set of building blocks, like we have in the image here, that are needed to really create an effective partnership between schools and families. The collaboration between families and schools has got to be meaningful, it's got to be culturally relevant, and it has to be relational, right? Built on trust. The students, it has to also connect to student learning.

Every initiative, every activity that is planned with family engagement, you have to really think about, is this going to help student learning in the long term? Because evidence shows over and over that if it's not connected to student learning, it's not going to be effective, and actually families don't buy into it as much.



Again, it has to be culturally responsive and collaborative, right? Getting families involved. When an effective process is in place, you're going to have outcomes that are systemic, integrated, and sustained. What does that mean?

Systemic means that the practices and strategies for family engagement are going to be embedded across the education system. It's not going to be just in one school, it's going to be districtwide or even statewide. It's really going to be woven into everything that the school does. Integrated, again, means that it ensures that family engagement is connected to all the key areas in the school. For example, curriculum development. Even in curriculum development, you could think of ways of, how are we going to engage families in this learning? I'm going to give examples of this later when we get into Section 3, on specific strategies.

Then sustained, right? It's got to be something you can do long-term. It's got to be something that it's not just like a one and done. It's something that it's not just like a one-time event. It's something that really can happen over time, that you can build on and continue to evolve. Those are the process and the outcomes necessary.

Policy and Program Goals of Family Engagement

MM: Then on this slide, policy and program goals of family engagement. An effective family engagement program will build and enhance on these four Cs that you see on the slide, both for staff and for families.

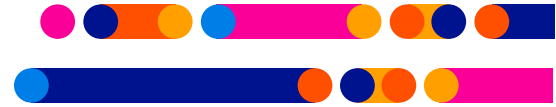
Capabilities is the first one. This is skills and knowledge that are necessary for effective engagement. What does that really mean or look like? This includes like human capital skills, your knowledge. For example, for educators and administrators and staff, they should know who their families are. They should know who their students are, including the challenges that they are facing. Families, on the other hand, might learn how to navigate certain nuances within a school. They might learn how to check their child's grades online, and to navigate all those confusing tech systems that schools have.

Connections. Those include important relationships and networks or social capital. For example, staff and families should have strong access to cross-cultural networks, and build them on trust and respect, right? Confidence. This includes an individual's level of self-efficacy on their belief and on their capabilities. All of the programs and initiatives that happen in family engagement should really build confidence and have families and educators come to a point where they're like, "Yes, I can be involved in this. I can make a difference. I can engage with the school." It really builds up on their confidence.

Cognition. This includes a person's assumption and their beliefs and their worldviews. For example, earlier, when I was talking about teachers who feel like, "Oh, family engagement, I don't have time for that." Or, "It's not a part of my job." They come around, and they understand. They begin to build on their cognition of why it's important, and why it is actually helpful. Similarly, if parents think that it's the school's job alone to educate their child, they may be less likely to provide at-home support. This changes when they have more cognition and awareness of the value of family engagement. The goal is for these four Cs to be met, right?

Capacity outcomes. Last but not least, if a school partnership is following the Dual Capacity Framework model, and things go as planned, it leads to successful family and school partnerships where both educators and families feel empowered and connected to the learning, right? For educators, this involves thinking about opportunities when they can create partnerships with families and have them be a part of their child's educational journey, but also focusing on their child's social, emotional, and behavioral development. Engaging families as co-creators while honoring their funds of knowledge. That means that educators learn to collaborate effectively with families.

They are really leveraging the family's insights and the strengths that the family brings to support the students. Because remember, we said as a guiding belief that families know their child best. How can we really extract that knowledge from families? How can we get them to share that wisdom with us? This includes, of course, involving families in the decision-making processes. Even things like co-creating a behavior plan for a student



who might need it. Get the family's insight. Are they using something similar at home? What works well? What doesn't?

That can actually help alleviate a lot of stress along the way. You might come to a more effective system of supporting the student faster when you're co-creating. Of course, creating welcoming cultures, right? Educators develop a deep understanding and respect for cultural backgrounds through effective family engagement. They know who their students and families are. They know about the experiences they've been through if they're newcomers. They're really doing a lot of listening and creating a welcoming school climate for them.

Capacity Outcomes

MM: Alright. Families gain a better understanding on how school systems work, right? That's the result that we want. They understand policies, they understand practices and expectations, and they feel really empowered to navigate the system more effectively. What do these mean? Families get into these diverse roles as co-creators. Again, that's an example of they're working with educators to plan things like even curriculum, school events. Again, that behavior plan that I was talking about earlier. Families as supporters. What does that mean? They are supporting their child's emotional, academic, social growth.

They're creating a home environment that helps encourage learning and growth. Then families as encouragers. They are their child's biggest cheerleader, right? They're celebrating the successes, and they're helping their child overcome challenges. Families as monitors. They are tracking their child's progress. They're involved. They know how to check those confusing systems for grades and report cards and emails. They have access to resources and support if they need it. Then families as advocates. They are feeling empowered to speak up on behalf of their child's needs and their child's rights.

You really want a family to get to the point where they feel like this, because again, they know their child best. They are even ensuring that their child is receiving all the appropriate services that they need. Families as models. Families serve as role models for their children. They are going to be the ones who are demonstrating behaviors and attitudes and values that will last with their children for a lifetime. This is sort of the outcomes that you want from an effective family engagement program. This is what you want to see from educators. This is what you want to see from families, if the program is going successfully.

This is actually, you all, how the Dual Capacity Framework model looks. If you Google this, if you want to learn more about this framework model, when you do, this is how the model looks. There's a website called dualcapacity.org, that you could learn a lot more about it. The reason that I broke it down in the slides that you saw previously in the way that I did is that I feel like it's an easier way to explain the model, rather than just looking at this at a glance. I just wanted you guys to see this visual, because this is what you will see if you want to learn more about it.

2. Building Bridges with Newcomer Families

Alright. We are going to move on to our second section, on building bridges with newcomer families, and really understanding what newcomer families or refugee students are coming in with, and why cultural humility is so important. The reason is that—oh, actually, let's go ahead and do this Slido.

Poll Question

In your opinion why are family engagement initiatives increasingly important when working with refugee and newcomer populations?



MM: Helping families feel welcome. Building culturally relevant diverse programs. Building trust. Self-sufficiency. Feeling included. They can see familiar faces. Building community. Reducing confusion. Families feel understood. Yes, a lot on trust, right? Builds trust, support. I see a lot on building trust in communities. Yes.

Thank you, guys. Yes, we saw that in that first section about the reasons why family engagement initiatives are so important in general. I think that if for people who work with newcomers or refugees, I think we understand it. We see why. Of course, why is it so important for them to feel connected in their child's education?

Core Stressors of Newcomer Students and Families

MM: I definitely think that newcomers are already facing so many stressors. Actually, we're going to get on that right here in the next slide. Thank you guys for these wonderful responses. Yes. Let's talk a little bit about core stressors of newcomer students and families. Families that are coming in to schools have already gone through so much in their migration journey, right? There are stressors that they may have faced before they even left their home country. Beginning, of course, with trauma that they may have been exposed to. Of course, we know with refugees, they are leaving not because they want to, it's because they don't have a choice, right?

They're forced to flee their countries. There's so much that they go through in their journey, before they even set foot on to the final home of where they resettle. They may have been exposed to war. They may have been exposed to loss of loved ones. We really have to take that into account, because all the trauma that our students go through, they're bringing that with them into the schools, and that's going to affect their ability to adjust. All right? Then acculturative stress, right?

Once newcomers are arriving into our schools, they're facing all of these challenges of adopting into a brand new culture that's completely unfamiliar to them, while they're navigating an entirely different educational system. Of course, at home they might be having even more conflicts with their families. Families are stressed out as well. There might be shifts in family dynamics. We know that students and children tend to sort of integrate at a quicker rate than their families, and that can cause tension as well. Then, of course, there are the resettlement stressors that families are facing.

They're trying to navigate learning a new language. There's a lot of financial barriers. Families are trying to get a job. They're trying to get into housing. So, they are facing all of these different stressors, and it's difficult for them to adjust. Then the last one is isolation, right? Students already who are coming in have lost so much of their social support system. They might not feel like they belong. The differences in cultural norms can add to that, and so there might be a big feeling of disconnect.

When we're thinking about URM students, really, they have their own unique set of stressors as well, because they have no family ties, no family support. That's even an important thing to keep in mind when working with them. When you see this, when you see all of these things that newcomer students are coming in with, it really gives us a good, even deeper understanding of why is family engagement even more important for this population, because they may be facing all of these or some of these at the very bare minimum.

Practice Cultural Humility

MM: Alright. Practicing cultural humility, right? Why is that such a key piece here when we're working with newcomers? Really, cultural humility, the biggest thing we have to understand, it's a lifelong learning process. We can never come to a point—it used to be called cultural competence, but competence sort of makes it sound like you get to arrival point of then you know. If educators and schools understand the importance of cultural humility, that's a really key piece when working with newcomers. One of those things is to focus on individuals, right? Recognize and value each family's unique background and experiences.



We can bring up the points for this slide on cultural humility. Then avoid making assumptions, right? Ask questions to really understand families, their perspectives, their needs. Don't make assumptions. I think this is something that as educators, from my own experience, sometimes we are quick to make assumptions about families. Like I said earlier, when teachers think, "Oh, that family, they never participate in the parent meetings." Or, "They never show up." Why aren't they showing up?

If we understand the previous slide, if we understand the trauma that they've been through, or the fact that they have a language barrier, or a transportation barrier, that really helps us dig deeper to understand and avoid making those assumptions. Practice active listening, right? This is so important for educators, because we love to talk, right? We love to teach, we love to talk, but really, as equally important as that, maybe even more important, is to listen to our family's needs. What do they want? What are they trying to teach us? I think that that really helps also when they are entering our scope for us not to come across as intimidating.

When we're listening more, and we're learning more, it's less intimidating. Then, of course, I already emphasized on prioritize learning and keeping an open mind. That's a key piece of cultural humility. It's that lifelong learning piece. Establish personal connections with families. Even if it's something so small, families will remember that. I used to try to do that all the time with newcomer families, with all families as a counselor. Find something that you have in common, whether it's a song that you both like, whether it's a color that you both like when it comes to students or even families, because people remember those connections, and you can build on that. You can build trust on that.

This is super important, because if you have all these family engagement strategies in a school or a community organization, but you're not practicing cultural humility, there's going to still be a huge disconnect. It's not going to effectively work. You have to understand how to reach out to newcomer families by meeting them where they're at, and practicing cultural humility. It's a key piece, really, that I can't emphasize enough.

Essentials When Working with Refugee Youth and Families

MM: Alright. We can move on. Another thing when working with refugee youth and families is that you are going to always want to use professional interpreters. The reason that I say professional interpreters is because sometimes schools can get in the habit of using even school staff to interpret things if they speak the same language as a family member, but that might not necessarily be the best case scenario. Of course, we never want to use students. We never want to use students to interpret to their families. Any type of a setting that puts a lot of pressure on the child. It actually takes away a certain amount of power from the parent, too, or the family. We don't want to do that.

We also want to respect different communication practices. What I mean by that is that some cultures communicate more non-verbally than verbally. They might have different mannerisms for communication, they have different styles. Some make more eye contact, some make less. Really get to know the families you're working with, and understand the rule in how they tend to communicate. Understand the role of collectivism. This is really key, because as we know, in the U.S., we're an individualistic culture, right? It's more on the focusing on each student, on each child, which of course we want to do, but there are so many cultures where the families, it's all hands on deck.

It's takes a village approach. You might be meeting one day with the aunt, you might be meeting one day with the older cousin who goes to the school, who is giving you some type of insight on the family. Rather than us jumping to conclusions or judging, we have to understand the role of collectivism in different cultures, and really be open to that. Of course, partnering with community organizations, cultural brokers, and refugee agencies. This is going to be huge when working with your newcomer families to really get the buy in and get them engaged into the school. Find unique ways to do that as well.

Creating Culturally Inclusive Schools



MM: Alright. Creating culturally inclusive schools. There's lots of different things that can be done both on a classroom level and a school level to make sure that we are practicing our cultural humility. In the classroom level there's, create lessons that align with the student's interest. This really requires knowing your students, right? Knowing what they're interested in, knowing what their background is like, and finding opportunities to be able to share that with everyone in the class so that they can also learn. Bridge between American and newcomer culture, and explain school routines, like after-school events to families. This is really an important one.

In the classroom level, we always like to talk about a literacy concept called mirrors and windows. That goes aligned with saying have, in your classroom library, for example, have books that are mirrors, where students can see themselves, their own culture, their beliefs, their backgrounds, in the books that they read. Then also offer windows, right? Also allow them to look out and learn about someone else's culture, someone else's beliefs. Really, that's an example of sort of bridging that gap between cultures, having all the students in the class learn and reflect on them about themselves, but also about others.

Explaining routines, I think that's really important for newcomer families, because when there's after-school activities, a lot of times families, newcomer families, have certain expectations. Their child's going to arrive at a certain time. They're not going to understand the need or-- There needs to be some buy-in for the after-school activities and events. Really communicating that to family, or the importance of that is going to be super important.

On a schoolwide level, or a district level, make sure that you have practices that are accommodating for religious or cultural traditions that schools have. Make sure that your staff is reflecting your student population. Make sure that there's diverse staff members, but also that there's a lot of initiatives on training on cultural humility. Avoid school jargon as much as you can, right? We know, for anyone who works in the education realm, that we use a lot of jargon, and a lot of acronyms, and a lot of confusing words. For newcomers, this can sound like a completely different language. I know that's something that my family struggled with so much, and it was very difficult for them. Please try to avoid that because that makes people feel like they're not well-equipped to understand what's happening in schools.

Stages of Newcomer Parent Involvement in Schools

MM: Going to move on. This is stages of newcomer involvement. According to two experts in the field of family engagement, by the name of Han and Love, there are four stages of immigrant parent involvement. The more schools know about why each newcomer family came into the U.S., what their hopes and aspirations are, and how well-prepared they are to partner with the schools, the better schools are positioned to help families transition to a new school and culture. What Han and Love imply is that immigrant parents really move through four stages of parent involvement.

The first is cultural survivor. Cultural survivor may be recently arrived immigrants. Many will be really concerned about those-- They might be going through those stressors that I talked about in a couple slides earlier. They might be thinking about where they're going to live, how they're going to provide for their family. They're just in that survival mode, trying to learn the basics of how to navigate a US school system, just trying to figure out how to even enroll their kids in school.

The second is cultural learners. Cultural learners are going to feel a little more comfortable with the school system and may want to learn more about what is taught in the school, what the culture is like in the school. They might be a little more comfortable attending some workshops as long as it's in their native language or they have interpreters available. They probably will be likely to participate in parent conferences with some language support.

The third is the cultural connector. This is when families are becoming more familiar, even with educational terminology, with policies, with procedures. They may wish to work with cultural survivors and learners to help



them and encourage them to understand more and be a part of school programs and activities that support their children and their parents.

Then we have cultural leaders at the top of that pyramid. These are the people in the school, the parents and the families, that often become the voice of their cultural, their ethnic and their language community. They are even the ones that are the advocates for parents that are in the other stages. They might be the ones leading some of the trainings and workshops for parents that are really helping them navigate the nuances in school systems.

Discussion Question

What are some ways that schools can support and encourage families to become "cultural leaders"?

MM: While you guys are answering this question, that pyramid diagram really makes me reflect a lot on my mom. When I went to school here in kindergarten, at the end of kindergarten, I couldn't even write my name properly. My fine motor skills were very poor. She didn't know that the importance of her and my father being partners with the school, like I said, with the engagement.

She worked her way up that triangle. I always think of by the time 12 years later, my younger sister was in kindergarten, my mom actually did a presentation for the school about Afghanistan and talking about our culture. She really moved her way up that pyramid and became more involved because she became more comfortable. I see professional interpretation as a must, supporting those immediate needs, making them feel included, putting out a survey, more trainings, having after-school programs, inviting families to tell their stories. That's very powerful. Equal opportunities for parent volunteering. We're going to talk more about that in a bit. Our school has a culture night. More informed teachers. Thank you guys so much.

3. Strengthening Partnerships Between Schools and Newcomer Families

MM: Let's move on to our third section on strengthening partnerships between schools and newcomer families. In this section, we're going to talk about specific strategies and tools and initiatives that work really well for a high family engagement. We're going to start you guys out with one other Slido.

Poll Question

Share an example of a family engagement initiative that you believe creates a high impact.

MM: By high impact, I mean it makes an oomph. It really gets families engaged. It's successful.

Home visits. We are going to talk about that. No phones and socializing with families during lunch and mealtimes. Showing we care about their beliefs. Monthly orientation workshops. Adult ESL classes that are free for the community. Laptop drives. Wow, that's nice. I don't know that everyone could afford that, but that's cool. Tours of the school before children start. Recognizing holidays. Multicultural events. This is wonderful. More on home visits.

Impact of Family Engagement Strategies

MM: Let's talk about strategies that are impactful on student learning. For anyone here working in the school, or even if you work in the community-based organizations, schools plan a lot of events. Organizations like the PTA really help support these initiatives. While the events have different reasons and different purposes, some of these initiatives don't really give that high impact on engaging families. This doesn't necessarily mean that



we should avoid them altogether, but if our goal is to get families to get more connected to the school, it's really an important consideration.

We have the spectrum of low-impact activities all the way to high-impact. Low-impact strategies are often things that are school-led. They might involve one-way communication like reaching out to our families through a newsletter or an e-mail. We think like, "Oh, we're e-mailing out the whole family. Everyone should know about this," but how often are families actually reading them? How often do they understand what they're reading? These really are activities or initiatives that are meant to inform families or to educate families rather than to engage families.

Actually, this includes events like PTA meetings or even fundraisers. Another one that really surprised me when I initially learned about this is parent volunteers. This is because if parent volunteers are disconnected from the learning and focus more on things like cutting out shapes for teachers or making copies of something for teachers, this is going to have really a minimal effect on student achievement. Now, if parent volunteers are doing some type of activity in the classroom, for example, like helping the teacher with a math or literacy block, that's more targeted. That's actually more high-impact and it's helpful.

I don't want to discourage anyone from parent volunteers as a high-impact activity, but we have to be careful about how we're utilizing parent volunteers. High-impact strategies are more often learning-focused. They can sometimes be individualized but not necessarily, and they're going to help build relationships and support academic achievement. The key piece of high-impact activities is that they are getting families involved in that learning process. Some examples of high-impact strategies and one of my absolute favorites are community walks.

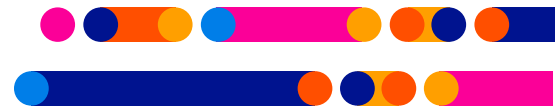
This is something that I did every year I worked as a school counselor. One week prior to school starting, we would create teams of teachers that were in three and four so that nobody was alone. Each teacher would go with a specialist. For example, I, as a counselor, would tag along with a classroom teacher and maybe one other specialist, and we would visit that teacher's entire class. We would walk through the neighborhood. It was a community walk, and we would visit their class, say hello, give them a pencil, and they would see their teacher that day and find out who their teacher was.

We would not allow to go inside the family's home. Some districts are very strict about that. That's why home visits are not even a practical option for some districts, but there's ways to get around that. Another example of a really high-impact activity is interactive projects or homework where it requires students to really go home and discuss what they're doing with their family or even get their family to help them. Sometimes this is things like creating a family tree or things that really engage families to participate with their child. The really powerful part about this type of an activity is that parents don't even have to be in the school. They don't have to take time to take off time from work and go to the school. It's something that they're doing with their child and they're engaged in their child's learning. They know exactly what's happening in the classroom. This is so ideal for newcomer families because we know that they have a lot of limitations when it comes to activities that are going to require them to come into the schools.

Of course, another high-impact strategy is anytime schools find ways to share data with families about students' skill levels and how they're doing, whether it's part of an assessment, and really helping newcomer families understand this assessment. For my family or families I've worked with in the past, it's confusing to say, "Oh, this is our beginning of the year and then our mid-year and then our final. What does that mean?" Really breaking those things down, but sharing data with families and this concrete numbers can also be very helpful.

Family Engagement Tools and Strategies

MM: Can we move on to the next slide? Again, this is just a overview for you guys again on some of the higher-impact initiatives that schools can offer. I'm going to be talking more in detail about a few of these in the next slides, specifically home visits and family liaisons and family workshops. Of course, the adult English classes



listed on here can also be part of the workshops, and that's a wonderful strategy. I did want to touch on the community schools briefly.

What are community schools? These are public schools that act as a hub for the community. The reason I wanted to highlight this is because this is a super great strategy or initiative to have for newcomers, because what it does is it finds ways to bring the community into the school. Really the school is like this community hub. For an example, a dental office that's in the community may have a specific week where they offer screenings for children and come and allow children to do checkups.

For example, in the school that I worked at, the local YMCA would actually utilize our school gym after school hours to provide after school daycare, actually at low or no cost to many families. Finding ways to have the community come into the school and create this hub where everyone's working together, this is a really powerful strategy or initiative, I guess I should say. If you want to learn more about community schools, you can search a Google search coalition for community schools, and you get a lot more information about that.

Home Visits

MM: Home visits. Home visits can be very helpful to do if you are allowed in the beginning of the school year. That's a great time to do it. Again, because so many districts are not allowed to do it, there's really creative ways to work around this. For example, the idea that I talked about earlier of the community walk where teachers buddy up and drop something off to a student or even something like picking up the phone as a teacher and calling families at the beginning of the school year is really helpful. Introducing yourselves, maybe having a couple questions you want to ask.

What this does is it's very tailored, and it really helps right off the bat, get to know your families, it builds trust. One of the questions that a lot of teachers asks are what are your hopes and dreams for your students? That's always a great question to ask to gauge a lot of information for families. There's a direct connection between home visits, or even those community walks, and higher attendance rates and higher literacy rates. That is a very powerful tool for family engagement.

Family Liaisons

MM: The next slide is family liaisons. They're sometimes referred to as cultural brokers, and these are my favorite people at a school. They're usually school-based, and they play such a strong critical role in really strengthening connection between families and schools. This really leads to a higher level of engagement and better student outcomes. If you have strong family liaisons, they're going to be relationship builders. They know how to build trust with families better than anyone in the school, and this is so important for newcomer families.

While a liaison doesn't necessarily have to be from the same background as the family that they're supporting, it is a bonus if they are. For immigrant or refugee families, liaisons really can help them navigate all the complexities of a new educational system. They can provide guidance on enrolling their children in different activities. They can help them understand report cards, progress reports, or even help them set up parent-teacher conferences.

In many of the schools that I've worked at, in all of my experience as a counselor, parent liaisons, family liaisons, they become the strongest advocates for their families because their entire focus is on that, on understanding the unique needs of each family, the challenges that families are going through. I think that they're a huge asset to have. Oftentimes, when family liaisons build strong relationships with families, the families, they will directly call the liaison before they call the school to tell them things like they're moving, or we've had families call our liaisons to say, "I don't have money for rent this month. I don't know what to do. We don't have food this month." They get a lot of great information. A strong family liaison within a school is a very powerful tool.



Family Workshops

MM: Another powerful initiative are family workshops. This is a wonderful way for families to better become acquainted with how school works, with the practices that are in a school. It really gets them engaged. Schools can really be creative. They can be so creative on how to host these. For example, as a counselor, we did family workshops on helping parents cope with their child's anxiety. We did stress busters for families. We did parent workshops on time management. We really would try to be thoughtful about when we would have these workshops.

For some families, it worked really great. It's great if you can offer multiple time slots if your schedule allows. For example, in one month, you can do four workshops, but at different times. Sometimes we would do it right first thing in the morning when they would drop their child off to school. The workshop would be right after students are settled in their classroom. Then the parents would come into another classroom, and we would host a workshop or a coffee talk of some sort.

Sometimes they work better right before dismissal so that then they can finish the workshop, pick up their children, and go home. Then obviously, sometimes they work better at night when parents are off of work. I think it's good to do some data collecting to find out what works best for families. Don't just host at a random time and then have no one show up. Families tend to come if you're offering a learning connection, an opportunity for them to learn something new.

It's always really helpful if you can have food involved. Of course, allowing them to bring their children who are not necessarily school-aged so that they don't have to worry about child care. This is really helpful for newcomer families. Another concept that I want to talk about is academic parent teacher teams, APTT. This is something that started in Arizona. What it entails is that teachers invite all of the parents that are in their class at one time, and they talk to the families about just like maybe one learning standard that they have for that year.

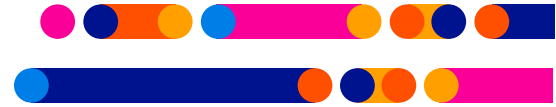
Then they share with the families where the class is or where their child is on this specific learning standard. Then they share that with the parent, and they offer the specific data to families, and then they create goals together with the family on each specific child, and they give the parents specific strategies and activities that they can do at home to build on this one standard. They may give them learning kits, they may send books home.

This is such a powerful tool that's been used because, again, parents and families want specific tools on how they can help their children academically succeed. This is such a powerful tool. The teacher puts in this time in the beginning of the year, but they build on it, and at the end, the results are really great because they have this great partner at home helping them on this specific standard, whether it's like a reading goal, whether it's a math goal. You can tailor it to each child, but this is a really unique strategy. You can learn more about it. It's called APTT, and again, it started in Arizona.

Additional Engagement Tools

MM: Some additional family engagement tools that I wanted to talk about are—sorry, I'm having a little glitch on my slide here—are family engagement toolkits. The dual capacity framework model has its own toolkit that is available. This is a great resource for schools to utilize because it really goes into lots of detail about different initiatives and activities, and it provides you with your own framework on what to utilize in a school. Family resource centers are wonderful. Sometimes these are community-based, but sometimes they're school-based. In the district that I worked in, we had our own family resource center.

This resource center offered lots of different workshops for all types of students and families, whether they're migrant students, whether special education students, ELL students, general education students. There was



this constant hub, this place where families could go to, where they had library, where they could check out books, where they could attend trainings, whether they could talk to family resource specialists, and that's a very powerful thing. That's more of a district-wide resource to have if you have the funding available for that.

Some school districts partner with family reunification programs to offer tailored training and services on families who are reuniting after being separated, and they really bridge that gap into the school and provide supports within the school. Of course, we gave lots of examples of workshops that offer parenting classes that build on a specific skill for parents or something that they might need help in. I think that's a really good area to, again, collect data from what are parents needing support on? Where do we need to build that capacity?

Providing some monthly activity calendar to families is very helpful. Make sure that they know well in advance what types of engagement activities and opportunities are being held at the school. Give as much headway time as you can. I think schools nowadays are doing this earlier and earlier. I'm already getting activities for my entire year of my children that they're starting school next week, and I'm getting already a calendar for every activity in terms of workshops and parenting that are planned. That's insane. If you can give that lead way, that's great.

Then family events that are hosted at schools, that can be very wonderful too. We had a program at one of the schools I worked in where we offered free adult English classes to newcomer families. The wonderful thing about this program is that it was held once a week, and it was during the time where their children were attending class and so they didn't have to worry about the childcare. They were learning English. Then at the end of the course, it was I think like a quarterly thing. It was for three months.

Then they would get to bring in foods from their culture, share things about their culture. It was very empowering for families because they were able to connect with one another as well as the school. Letting them host their own events and take onus of that is very powerful as well.

Increasing Family Attendance

MM: How do we increase family attendance at these school events? It's wonderful to have these events. It takes lots of time to plan events but if we don't have enough attendance, then it's not going to have the reach that we want it to.

Of course, making sure that we provide interpretation and translation. I've talked about that, but not just at the event necessarily, but in any correspondence that you're sending to families in a letter or an email, make sure that it's translated in the family's home language. That's going to be very important. Making sure that it's kid-friendly. If you have the option to provide childcare, this really helps families. It ensures that they don't have to worry about bringing their smaller children along and making sure that you involve community organizations can be helpful. It also helps family connect the dots.

For example, when I was younger, we had the public library come in to the school and talk to families. My family didn't know about the public library. That didn't exist in Afghanistan. My mom was like, "Oh, there's a place where you can go get free books and check them out." She didn't know about that until she came into some, it was a back to school night event or something like that. The library had a little desk where you could make your own card. Really finding unique ways to bring in community is going to be helpful for newcomers because it shows them how everybody's connected all around.

Then of course, when we're working with URM, foster care programming, you have to make sure to see if there are other families in the same school district that could assist with carpooling or attending events together to make sure that the URM students have an opportunity as well to participate. Obviously you can't ask for the youth's names and it has to be confidential, but just being able to connect foster parents to one another is really helpful and empowering to them.



Language Access

MM: Language access, interpretation and translation. I think most of you know this, but it's really important to know that federal language access laws are there and they ensure that refugee families and anyone else who has a limited English proficiency have access to all the necessary language services so that they can participate in any educational program and service. It's not just a best practice, it's the law. We have to make sure that families who are English language learners have these resources available to them and we need to be advocates and make sure that if they don't, that we are doing everything we can that they are able to get it. I know this is still a limitation for so many schools.

Case Scenario: The Azad Family

MM: Now, I have a little case scenario for you all about the Azad family. I'm going to read it and then we're going to have a Slido to follow on this. The Azad family are Afghan newcomers who recently moved to the United States. Their son, Ahmad, nine, and daughter, Amina, six, are attending your school. They seem shy and appear to be struggling to make friends due to their limited English proficiency and cultural differences. The Azad parents are eager to support their children but they feel overwhelmed by the new educational system and are unsure how to effectively navigate or how to effectively engage with the school. They have noticed that their children are becoming increasingly withdrawn and anxious about attending school.

We have one last Slido for you guys.

Discussion Question

What culturally responsive strategies or tools would you implement to foster effective family engagement for the Azad family?

I see some answers coming in. Use a family liaison, Zoom meeting with parents, ESL classes for parents and children, support groups, communication with pictures, advocate an interpreter use, warm environment, encourage low-impact engagement activities at first to start to feel more comfortable around the school and know who is at the school more, take the family to meet the school counselor and discuss concerns, family tree phone call interpreter, have a community leader help with the school tour, talking with parents and encouraging after school programs and bring in other refugee children.

Thank you so much for those wonderful responses. I think lots of those can be utilized. A lot of the things that you guys said, there's not necessarily one correct answer to that. It was nice to see you all responding with some of the strategies that we were talking about earlier. We have just a couple minutes, maybe for one or two questions from the chat. I'm going to check to see what we have here.

Discussion Question

How can we engage families who are working 24 hours?

MM: They're so stressed out and they don't have time to do any activity. That's a great question. When we were talking earlier about low impact versus high-impact, some of those low-impact activities, while they're useful or helpful in some contexts, are not necessarily going to be helpful for newcomer families because things that are helpful for newcomer families is things that require less time and for them not having to necessarily always



come into the school because we know some are working one, two, three jobs. They're adjusting to both spouses maybe working, whereas before maybe one was more available to be with their children, so it is difficult.

One of the examples that I gave earlier on finding ways where they can be part of their child's homework or helping their child with a specific project that they have, or even the example I gave about the AAPT that I talked about that's utilized initially in Arizona, where if they learn about one learning standard that their child has and really helping ensure that their child is continuing to build on that knowledge in that one standard and that activity. Maybe it means reading their child a book at night or helping their child do a math problem from an activity that the teacher provides. That's still engagement.

Engagement doesn't necessarily mean that the family's coming physically to the school. It means that they are partnering with the educators in their child's education. There's different ways that we can go around that.

Discussion Question

How can we support teachers understanding how to read children's behavior when a child is under stress or misbehaving?

MM: There's different things you can do, but one of the biggest things as a resource is to talk to your school counselors, your school psychologists, any mental health support staff that you have at schools because these are the people in the school who are trained to understand children's behavior at a higher capacity. I think really leaning into those resources within your school or whether having the people in that school provide trainings. Like I know as a counselor, we had a whole unified mental health team and we would provide training to teachers in the beginning of the year on social emotional learning, on identifying possible trauma, on cultural humility.

Really tap into those resources that you have within the school to help build capacity of teachers because you're right, they're not necessarily trained on and probably not on recognizing trauma. Utilize the resources you have within the school, but also if you're a school that has a high level of students that have potentially faced trauma, make sure that you provide those professional development opportunities to your staff on identifying what those are so that they are well equipped. That comes with PD and utilizing resources within your school.

We are going to move on. If you have any other specific questions, please reach out to me through an email and I would kindly request you guys just to take 60 seconds really quickly to do the survey that we have. You can scan that QR code. It is a short survey. It's going to really help us improve our training and technical assistance in the future.

Conclusion

MM: I hope that our training today has been helpful to you all and that the three learning objectives that we had slated for you were met. Again, you will receive a copy of this deck and along with these recommended resources, if you want to learn more about family engagement. We have lots of other resources. Please stay connected with Switchboard. Reach out to us with any technical assistance requests that you have. Thank you again and I hope you all have a wonderful day.

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