



Tools

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Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education

Part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through effective communication

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Overview

The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education is a four-part resource that brings together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The toolkit defines family and community engagement as an overarching approach to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students' ongoing learning and development. The primary audiences for this toolkit are administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in diverse schools and districts. Part 3 is designed to show how cross-cultural and two-way communication enhances family and community engagement.



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Overview of the Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education

Family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of children’s school success, according to more than 40 years of steadily accumulating evidence (California Department of Education, 2011; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). In some communities, particularly culturally diverse communities, achieving a level of family and community engagement that supports student success is a challenge. The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education addresses this challenge by bringing together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources. Its purpose is to guide educators in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The primary audiences for this toolkit are administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers in diverse schools and districts.

This four-part toolkit defines family and community engagement as an overarching approach to support family well-being, strong parent–child relationships, and students’ ongoing learning and development. Although school engagement often refers to parent involvement, this toolkit broadens the scope to include other family and community members. This definition encompasses existing definitions (for example, in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) and emphasizes the importance of educators working as partners with families to support students in multiple ways. Toolkit activities can be used with or adapted for diverse groups.

The toolkit offers an integrated approach to family and community engagement. It helps educators understand how their own culture influences their beliefs and assumptions about families and community members and consequently their efforts to engage them in support of student learning. It also addresses how to build a cultural bridge through cross-cultural communication and uses strategies that build trust among families, community members, and the school. In addition, the toolkit helps educators understand how to use two-way communication with families to gather and share information about student interests, progress, and outcomes.

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific originally developed a toolkit in response to a request from members of the Guam Alliance for Family and Community Engagement in Education¹ for activities and tools to help them effectively engage families and community members from diverse backgrounds. A prior version of the toolkit was published and distributed to alliance members and has been widely shared within Guam. Teachers and administrators at three pilot schools, along with other school and community members, have received hands-on training on each toolkit part’s activities, and the toolkit has been presented to schools and at conferences across the region, such as the Guam Striving Readers Conference in May 2015, the Micronesian Teachers Education Conference in July 2015, and the Guam Family Outreach Conference in November 2015. The toolkit has also been introduced to teacher education students at the University of Guam and is listed as a reference in the Draft Literacy Plan developed by the Guam Department of Education. In addition, teachers have adapted the tools for use in their classrooms, noting, for example, that the Iceberg Concept of Culture activity “helps the students and the teachers recognize the diversity of [their] school cultures” and that it is “a great way to learn more about their students” (R. Abaday, teacher, John F. Kennedy High School, personal communication, May 13, 2016).

The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education addresses the challenge of achieving a level of family and community engagement that supports student success by bringing together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources

This version of the toolkit has been expanded for a broader audience. To expand the toolkit for use beyond the REL Pacific Region, the study team identified research and resources, including appropriate activities and tools, by conducting a web and database search (see appendix A for a full list of resources, including a description of how they were identified). Some tools have been adapted, with permission, for use in the toolkit. The toolkit is based primarily on research and supplemented by expert opinion from a variety of sources that address family and community engagement in diverse communities. It is applicable in a variety of contexts—and wherever educators are interested in enhancing engagement of families and community members in support of student learning.

Toolkit contents

The toolkit is presented in four parts. It includes information and activities that reflect research-based family involvement approaches associated with student learning. Each part of the toolkit focuses on an aspect of developing strong partnerships between schools and families and between schools and communities to support student learning. The four parts of the toolkit, published separately, are described below:

- Part 1: Building an understanding of family and community engagement (Garcia, Frunzi, Dean, Flores, & Miller, 2016a)

Educators build awareness of how their beliefs and assumptions about family and community engagement influence their interactions with families and the community and how the demographic characteristics of the families in their schools can inform educators about what might support or hinder family engagement with schools.

- Section 1.1: Reflecting on beliefs and assumptions
 - Section 1.2: Getting to know school families
 - Section 1.3: Understanding the influence of a cultural lens
 - Section 1.4: Acknowledging cultural differences
- Part 2: Building a cultural bridge (Garcia et al., 2016b)

Activities focus on tapping into the strengths of families and community members and helping families establish active roles in the school community in support of student learning.

- Section 2.1: Tapping into the strengths of families and community members
 - Section 2.2: Establishing roles for building family and community engagement
- Part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through effective communication

Cross-cultural and two-way communication enhance family and community engagement.

- Section 3.1: Cross-cultural communication in a school community
- Section 3.2: Preparing educators for two-way communication with families

The toolkit is based primarily on research and supplemented by expert opinion from a variety of sources. It is applicable in a variety of contexts—and wherever educators are interested in enhancing engagement of families and community members in support of student learning

- Part 4: Engaging all in data conversations (Garcia et al., 2016c)

Educators learn which student data are important to share with families and community members and how to share such data in a meaningful way.

- Section 4.1: Determining what student data are important to share with families and community members
- Section 4.2: Presenting student data in meaningful ways

Each section includes an introduction, a discussion of key points, and activities for educators to use to understand the what, why, and how of family and community engagement. The activities, which are defined as structured learning experiences that involve discussing, reading, writing, or creating something for a specific purpose, include one or more tools (see appendix A for a description of activity and tool selection). The tools include activity sheets, graphics, handouts, worksheets, charts, scenarios, information sheets, information and note-taking sheets, graphic organizers, planning templates, and note-taking templates. Each activity includes the purpose of the activity, the materials and time needed for the activity, directions, and any other information or handouts necessary for conducting the activity.

The toolkit can be used to stimulate discussion and increase understanding about family and community engagement—both its importance and how to approach it

How to use the toolkit

The toolkit can be used to stimulate discussion and increase understanding about family and community engagement—both its importance and how to approach it. Some schools might choose to proceed systematically through each part of the toolkit, using each activity and associated tools. Other schools might focus on only one part of the toolkit or only some activities or tools from different parts, depending on the needs of educators and the strength of partnerships with their families and community members. Each part of the toolkit can stand alone or can be used with any other part or with all the other parts for a more comprehensive approach to family and community engagement. Facilitators (for example, school or district administrators) can choose from among the many options the one that is right for their school or district.

Introduction to part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through effective communication

Parent and community engagement depends on strong, trusting relationships (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Part of developing such relationships is building a bridge between home and school cultures, which was the focus of part 2 of this toolkit. Part 2 described the importance of getting to know family and community needs and strengths, and understanding the variety of roles family and community can take on when they engage with schools. Part 3 builds on the ideas presented in part 2 by focusing closely on communication, the key to trusting relationships.

Trust is defined as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 189). If families are to trust teachers and other educators, they must believe that school personnel are qualified, fair, and dependable, and have their child’s best interest at heart (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In most cases trust is built over time, based on interactions that occur on a daily basis and with consistent behavior from both sides. If the families and educators do not have experience interacting with one another, then they may rely on the other person’s reputation and on something they have in common, such as race, gender, age, religion, or upbringing (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When there are few things in common between families and educators, it will take time for trust to develop. The willingness to trust each other will be based on actions and perceptions of each other’s reliability, competence, honesty, and openness.

Families who get involved in schools are typically those whose home culture most closely matches the values reflected in schools. Racial/ethnic minority families, lower-income families, and families who speak limited English are often underrepresented in school-level decisionmaking and in family engagement activities (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). This is often the result of differing needs, values, and levels of trust rather than families’ lack of interest or willingness to get involved (Antunez, 2000; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 2001, cited in Brewster & Railsback, 2003). Conducting outreach activities that bring educators into homes, community centers, and villages shows respect in working with different cultures. When there are a number of school sites within the system, outreach activities should be consistent across the system. This builds families’ trust in the system; they can be confident that they will be treated the same at each school site.

Description of part 3 sections

Part 3 of the toolkit addresses two important parts of communication with parents and community members: cross-cultural communication and two-way communication. Cross-cultural communication involves recognizing that differences in culture can lead to confusion, frustration, and misinterpretation of messages. Families can be powerful partners in supporting the education of their children, but key to this partnership is educators’ listening to parent voice (Hidden Curriculum, 2014) as part of two-way communication.

Conducting outreach activities that bring educators into homes, community centers, and villages shows respect in working with different cultures

Section 3.1: Cross-cultural communication in a school community

When it comes to cross-cultural communication, how something is said can be just as important as what is said. For that reason, this section focuses on strategies and a tool to assist educators to examine their current use of cross-cultural communication and consider ways they might improve it.

Section 3.2: Preparing educators for two-way communication with families

Educators can use effective communication strategies to cultivate trusting relationships among the school and families and community members. This section presents ideas for listening to the “parent voice” and understanding the ways in which families can work with educators to support children’s learning.

Summary of part 3 activities and tools

The activities in part 3 of the toolkit are summarized in table 3.1, including the name and number of the activity and the tool type (information and note-taking sheet, information sheet, or note-taking template) included in the activity. Activity numbers include the number of the toolkit part, the number of the section, and the number of the activity within the section (when a section has more than one activity). For example, activity 3.1.1 is in part 3, section 1 of the toolkit, and it is the first activity in that section.

Part 3 of the toolkit addresses two important parts of communication with parents and community members: cross-cultural communication and two-way communication

Table 3.1. Summary of part 3 activities and tools

Activity number	Activity	Tool type included in the activity
3.1.1	Reflecting on building trusting relationships with families	Information and note-taking sheet
3.1.2	Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement	Note-taking template Information sheet
3.2	Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences	Note-taking template Information sheet

Source: Activities were developed by Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific for the toolkit, using sources listed in table A1 in appendix A.

Section 3.1: Cross-cultural communication in a school community

Communication is the basis for any strong relationship and is especially important for building a bridge to connect families and the community to schools (Baker & Manfredi-Pettit, 2004). In diverse communities, a particular kind of communication—cross-cultural communication—minimizes the confusion and frustration that people can experience when they enter an environment where not only their language, but also their attitudes, values, and behaviors differ from those of others (Archer & Silver, 1997). Under these circumstances, without cross-cultural communication skills, communication can be difficult, inaccurate, and stressful. Being skilled at cross-cultural communication involves:

- Understanding that there are different ways of communicating that reflect one’s culture.
- Acknowledging, respecting, and accommodating cultural differences in communication styles.
- Using strategies that remove barriers to communication that result from cultural differences.

As sociologist Dane Archer (Archer & Silver, 1997) states, “Culture is 10,000 different things, and we take our own culture for granted until we’re immersed in another culture where the rules, language, expectations, and gestures are different.” Striving together to recognize and understand the differences that separate people from different cultures can improve cross-cultural communication.

Key points

- **Communication is integrally tied to cultural backgrounds.** Culture influences the ways people communicate (for example, the tone of voice, amount of space between speaker and listener, eye contact). Cross-cultural communication considers these differences in communication styles. If educators fail to consider communication differences, families may be reluctant to participate in school functions because they might misinterpret or not understand what was being communicated. For example, a Chuukese parent in Guam, who was quoted in a study on culturally responsive parent involvement, stated that “school is not communicating clearly to the home so that may be one reason why the home is not participating in some of those expectations of functions that are held at the school” (Stoicovy, Murphy, & Sachuo, 2011, p. 13).
- **Using communication practices that are sensitive to language and cultural backgrounds encourages family and community engagement.** It is critical that schools acknowledge and view families’ cultural values as strengths (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). This includes translating important communications into the languages used in the school community, making families feel welcome in the school with signs in their language, and inviting role models from various cultures into the classroom (Halgunseth, 2009). Being sensitive about communication practices means paying attention to how words are used. For example, it is important to be aware of words or situations suggesting that all members of an ethnic group are the same. Suppose a classroom teacher schedules an event at 6:30 p.m. and one family arrives an hour late. It wouldn’t be appropriate to say:

“The Jones family always seems to be late. They must be (names ethnic group).” Statements like this can encourage negative stereotypes and be offensive to an individual and cultural group.

- ***A variety of strategies can promote cross-cultural communication.*** Educators can promote cross-cultural communication by asking parents and family members early in the school year how they prefer to communicate and by using those preferred forms of communication as much as possible. Most important, educators should listen to and provide families the opportunity to give feedback on their children’s progress in a manner that is culturally appropriate for them (Halgunseth, 2009). In addition to developing relationships with families early in the school year before formal parent–teacher conferences, teachers can promote cross-cultural communication during parent–teacher conferences using the following strategies (Trumbull, 2011):
 - Begin the conversation on a personal level rather than starting with a formal progress report.
 - Allow the personal to be mixed with the discussion of academics.
 - Show respect for the whole family, instead of paying attention to only the child who is the focus of the conference.
 - Use indirect questions or observations rather than questions that ask for information about the child at home (for example, “Some parents prefer to have an older child help with homework...” rather than, “Do you or someone else help the child with her homework?”)
 - Discuss the student’s achievements in the context of all the students in the classroom, suggesting how the child contributes to the well-being of all.
 - Explain the goals and expectations of the school and help parents and family members find ways in which they are comfortable supporting their children’s learning.
 - Create a sense of common purpose and caring through the use of the pronoun “we” rather than “you” and “I.”

Toolkit activities

- ***Activity 3.1.1: Reflecting on building trusting relationships with families.*** Emphasizes that trust is an important foundation for building relationships with families and that trust facilitates communication. The activity also helps educators understand the various aspects of trust so they can build trusting relationships with families.
- ***Activity 3.1.2: Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement.*** Increases educators’ awareness of what communication strategies are currently being used schoolwide and at the classroom level. It also provides opportunities for educators to identify additional strategies that can be used to strengthen cross-cultural communication.

Activity 3.1.1: Reflecting on building trusting relationships with families

Purpose

To raise awareness of how to build mutually trusting relationships with families.

Materials needed

Sheets of blank paper (one per participant), chart paper, markers, copies of “Five facets of trust information and note-taking sheet.”

Time

45 minutes.

Directions

1. Distribute a sheet of blank paper to each participant. Ask participants to each think about a parent of one of their students whom they trust and write down traits of that parent that make him or her trustworthy.
2. Ask participants to share traits they wrote on their papers. As they share, record the traits on chart paper at the front of the room.
3. Distribute the “Five facets of trust information and note-taking sheet” and explain that whether you trust someone depends on many things. In this activity, we talk about those things as facets of trust. Think of a “facet” as a feature or characteristic of something.
4. Explain that this activity will occur in four parts and participants will have opportunities to discuss their responses between each part.
5. Ask participants to each think about the extent to which the parent they identified as someone they trust rates on each of the five facets of trust. Explain that they should use a rating scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning to no extent and 5 meaning to a great extent. Ask them to place their rating in the column labeled “Parent I trust.”
6. Provide a few minutes for table groups to share their ratings.
7. Ask participants to think about how they would rate a parent they do not trust on each of the five facets of trust and use the same scale to record their ratings in the column labeled “Parent I don’t trust.”
8. Ask table groups to share their ratings and then explain that research has shown that when one facet of trust is high, they all tend to be high. When one facet is low, they all tend to be low.

9. Ask participants to think about how parents and family members would rate them on each facet of trust and record the rating in the column labeled “Parents who trust in me.”
10. Ask participants to share their responses in pairs.
11. Ask participants to work on a plan for increasing their trust of parents and family members and increasing parents’ and family members’ trust of them.
12. Ask participants to share their plan in pairs.
13. Debrief the process as a large group by asking the following questions:
 - What did you learn about trust between you and parents or family members through this process?
 - Why is it important to increase trust on your part and on the parents’ or family members’ part?

Tool: Five facets of trust information and note-taking sheet

Part 1 directions

1. Think about a parent of one of your students whom you trust and write down traits that make that parent trustworthy in the space below.
 - Share the traits of this parent with the group as the facilitator records the group's ideas on a chart.
2. Review the five facets of trust in the chart below.
 - Rate the parent you identified earlier as someone you trust on the extent to which that person exhibits each of the five facets of trust. Use a scale of 1–5, with 1 being “to no extent” and 5 being “to a great extent.” Place their rating in the column labeled “Parent I trust.” Share your ratings with your table group.
3. Think about how you would rate a parent you do not trust on each of the five facets of trust and use the same scale to record your ratings in the column labeled “Parent I don't trust.” Share your ratings with your table group.
4. Think about how parents and family members would rate you on each facet of trust and record the rating in the column labeled “Parents who trust in me.” Share your responses with a partner at your table.

	Parent I trust	Parent I don't trust	Parents who trust in me
Benevolence The confidence that one's well-being, or something one cares about, will be protected and not harmed by the trusted person.			
Reliability Confidence that you can depend on another person to come through for you, to act consistently, and to follow through.			
Competence Belief in another person's ability to perform the tasks required by his or her position.			
Honesty A person's integrity, character, and authenticity.			
Openness The extent to which relevant information is not withheld.			

Source: Tschannen-Moran, 2014.

- In the space provided in the chart below, write a plan for increasing your trust of parents and family members and increasing parents' and family members' trust of you. Share your plan with a partner at your table.

My plan to increase mutual trust between myself and all parents/family members

What I will do to increase my trust of parents and family members:

What I will do to increase parents' and family members' trust of me:

Debrief directions

- As the large group debriefs with the facilitator, take notes in the space provided below.
 - What did you learn about trust between you and parents or family members through this process?
 - Why is it important to increase trust on your part and on the parents' or family members' part?

Activity 3.1.2: Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement

Purpose

To identify current communication strategies, assess their effectiveness for cross-cultural communication, and determine additional communication strategies needed.

Materials needed

Chart paper, copies of “Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement note-taking template” and “Cross-cultural communication strategies information sheet,” four different color sticky dots (for example, red, yellow, green, and blue), sticky notes, fine-tip markers.

Time

45–60 minutes.

Directions

1. Form groups of four participants using an appropriate strategy (for example, count off, self-select groups, or use color-coded name tags). If administrators are part of the large group, the small groups should include both teachers and administrators. Distribute copies of the “Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement note-taking template.”
2. Distribute chart paper with two columns, labeled “Classroom communication strategies” and “School communication strategies,” to each group.
3. Ask small groups to brainstorm and record on their chart paper all the communication strategies that they are now using in the classroom and the school to communicate with families.
4. Ask groups to brainstorm and record on their chart paper other strategies they could use in the classroom and the school to communicate with families.
5. Distribute and ask participants to review the “Cross-cultural communication strategies information sheet” and record any additional strategies they feel are important to include on their group lists.
6. Ask groups to identify two strategies from their lists of classroom strategies and two from the school strategies that they consider most important to use for home–school communication.
7. Ask groups to write their prioritized strategies on sticky notes and post them on the appropriate chart paper at the front of the room (one chart paper labeled “Classroom communication strategies,” the other labeled “School communication strategies”).

8. Read the sticky notes to the group, combining the ones that are the same or similar, while someone writes them on the appropriate chart paper for the participants to see.
9. Provide each participant with four sticky dots, one in each of the four colors available.
10. Ask participants to place two dots on the “Classroom communication strategies” chart and two dots on the “School communication strategies” chart beside the strategies they think are most important to use for home–school communication.
11. Ask small groups to discuss how the prioritized items for cross-cultural, home–school communication might be used in the classroom and at the school and to share their ideas with the large group.
12. Guide a group discussion, asking the following questions and encouraging participants to record their notes on the note-taking sheet:
 - How did participating in this activity increase your understanding of home–school communication?
 - How will this increased understanding change how you communicate with parents in the future?

Tool: Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement note-taking template

1. With your group, brainstorm and record on the chart paper all of the communication strategies you are now using in the classroom and school to communicate with families. Use the columns “Classroom communication strategies” and “School communication strategies” provided on the chart paper.
2. Now brainstorm and record on the chart paper all the communication strategies the group could use in the classroom and school to communicate with families.
3. Review the cross-cultural communication strategies for schools and classrooms below and add any additional strategies you think are important to the lists your group has developed.
4. With your group, identify two strategies from each of your lists, “Classroom communication strategies” and “School communication strategies,” that you consider to be the most important for home-school communication.
5. Write each of your group’s two prioritized strategies for each area on a sticky note and post the notes on the appropriate chart in the front of the room (that is, “Classroom communication strategies,” “School communication strategies”). Follow the facilitator’s instructions to identify your priority strategies in each category using the sticky dots provided.
6. With your small group, discuss how the prioritized items for cross-cultural home-school communication might be used in the classroom and at the school. Share your ideas with the large group when requested by the facilitator.
7. Think about and discuss the following questions with the large group. Record your own ideas and notes from the group discussion below.
 - How did participating in this activity increase your understanding of home-school communications?
 - How will this increased understanding change how you communicate with parents in the future?

Tool: Cross-cultural communication strategies information sheet

Cross-cultural communication strategies: classroom

- Invite families to join class trips, student presentations, potlucks, group walks, and so on.
- Express high expectations for family–school communication.
- Meet families at the school, home, or a community location based on family choice.
- Always listen to the families’ voices by providing opportunity for two-way communication.
- Begin the conversation on a personal level and mix personal talk with academic talk during the conference.
- Help families find ways to support their children’s learning.
- Ask families what communication methods are best for them and use multiple communication methods.

Source: Goodwin & King, 2002; Graham-Clay, 2005.

Cross-cultural communication strategies: school

- Collect information about families’ work setting when inquiring about children’s family and afterschool arrangements to determine the most effective ways of communicating with and engaging families.
- Create flexible scheduling for the timing of school–family interactions so that all families have an opportunity to participate in both formal and informal activities.
- Use a range of technological tools, if possible, to communicate between educators and families to increase information sharing.
- Redefine and expand what family involvement means so that both families and educators recognize a wide range of possible ways that families can contribute to the education of their children.
- Make video clips to welcome families and to present different topics (for example, how to read with a child, or how to play a math game).
- Always provide translation of written materials and interpreters for meetings.
- Provide transportation to bring families to school meetings.
- Provide child care in the school when families are in meetings.
- Survey, inventory, and address families’ concerns, perspectives, and ideas, and plan parent–teacher seminars based on survey findings.

Source: Ferguson, Ramos, Rudo, & Wood, 2008.

Section 3.2: Preparing educators for two-way communication with families

The African proverb, “It takes a whole village to raise a child,” serves as a reminder to educators that education is a partnership and partnerships require frequent, two-way communication. In two-way communication, both people listen to each other, gather information, and are willing to work together in harmony (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, 2006). During two-way communication, the people involved interact—they ask questions, paraphrase, and check to be sure they understand what the other person is saying. This interaction determines the outcome of the communication (for example, a decision or an agreement). By contrast, in one-way communication one person provides information, attempts to persuade the other person, or asks the other person to do something (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, 2006). One-way communication practices include parent newsletters, report cards, websites, and home-school newsletters. Two-way communication involves school-initiated and family-initiated communication. Examples include dialogue, phone calls, conferences, and open houses (Trumbull, 2011). For effective family engagement, both one-way and two-way communications are necessary. Strategies for improving two-way communication include:

- Enhancing the understanding and use of basic communication skills (for example, active listening, respecting others’ points of view, and using nonverbal communication).
- Increasing educators’ and schools’ capacity to engage parents in dialogue.

Key points

- ***Educators need professional development in using basic communication skills to engage families.*** Many educators feel that they have not been adequately trained to communicate and work effectively with families (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Educators benefit from training in basic communication skills, such as observing verbal and nonverbal behaviors, using dialogue for two-way conversations, using active listening, asking questions that are not offensive, and other skills that enhance communication and relationships with parents. In addition, while some parents may prefer to meet with educators face to face, others may prefer more indirect modes of communication. In either instance, social media and technology may play a role in communicating with parents and families. For example, districts might provide a downloadable phone application that uses push notifications to apprise parents of assignments, attendance, and grades. In other words, all families do not respond to the same communication strategy in the same way. As a result, it is essential that educators know multiple ways to communicate with all the families in the school community.
- ***Listening closely to “parent voice” helps educators understand the challenges that students face and rethink their practices.*** A strategy for encouraging communication with families is to create opportunities for parents, educators, and community members to share success stories and effective strategies for supporting student learning. By focusing on positives, all partners can share what is working and what is not working in a way that promotes new ideas and strategies. An important part of listening to the parent voice is recognition of diverse

family structures that may include mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, and so on (Goodwin & King, 2002; Graham-Clay, 2005; Trumbull, 2011).

- ***When educators increase their capacity to engage parents in dialogue, there are benefits for families, students, and educators.*** Effective dialogue is based on mutual concern, trust, and an ability to appreciate one another's perspective (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Parent-teacher conferences are a typical way that schools communicate student progress with parents. If teachers understand and use dialogue and other culturally competent techniques, these conferences can be a time when families and teachers talk with each other about the students' strengths and needs and develop clear, shared outcomes that reflect both the teachers' and the families' perspectives. Some strategies suggested by the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (2006) that help teachers engage parents in dialogue during parent-teacher conferences include:
 - Provide families with a planning guide for parent-teacher conferences that will facilitate two-way planning and communication.
 - Have an interpreter and maintain eye contact with the family.
 - Always start with positive statements and open-ended questions.
 - Give families enough time to provide feedback.
 - End with a thank-you and a summary of how the conference has helped the teacher better understand the student and how to work with the family to help the student achieve success.
- ***A number of strategies are effective for two-way communication when families have limited English skills.*** A challenge to two-way communication between the school and home may be the families' limited ability to communicate in English. Educators need to remove this as a barrier to communication by considering positive strategies such as the following (Brewster & Railsback, 2003):
 - Translate materials to the home language.
 - Use bilingual staff members to help provide a direct link between families and the school community.
 - Provide transportation to bring families to school meetings or meet at a community location. Be open to hosting school meetings in a location where families feel comfortable (for example, community centers, or local businesses).
 - Build a parent-family-community network for families who speak the same language to promote mutual support and help create a more comfortable environment for attending school events.

Developing and maintaining trust takes frequent interactions; demonstration that student's best interests are at heart; open, honest and respectful communication; and an understanding and acceptance of communication differences. Through effective communication, families and educators become partners in students' learning and the families feel more empowered to be involved in their children's school.

Toolkit activity

- **Activity 3.2: Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences.** Encourages the flow of dialogue during parent–teacher conferences so that the time spent is worthwhile for the family and the teacher.

Activity 3.2: Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences

Purpose

To facilitate a process by which teachers consider their past parent–teacher conferences and plan how to use more two-way communication in the future.

Materials needed

Copies of “Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences note-taking template,” copies of “Culturally responsive strategies from the literature information sheet.”

Time

30–45 minutes.

Directions

1. Distribute the “Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences note-taking template.”
2. Ask participants to think individually about their typical parent–teacher conference and record their thoughts on the “Past conference practices” section of the “Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences note-taking template.”
3. Ask participants to share the thoughts they recorded with a partner.
4. Distribute the “Culturally responsive strategies from the literature information sheet” and ask participants to read and discuss it in their table groups.
5. Ask participants to think individually about what they just read and discussed and then record in the “Future conference practices” section of the note-taking template some of the culturally responsive methods they might use to increase the effectiveness of their parent–teacher conferences in the future.
6. Ask participants to share with a different partner at their table their methods for increasing the effectiveness of their parent–teacher conferences.

7. Ask table groups to think about the following questions:
 - What did you learn from participating in this activity?
 - How will you use what you learned to improve your parent–teacher conferences in the future?
8. Ask each group to report out one idea or strategy they learned and one way their conferences will be improved in the future.

Tool: Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences note-taking template

- Think individually about your typical parent–teacher conference and record your thoughts in the “Past conference practices” section of the “Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences note-taking template.”
- Share the thoughts you recorded with a partner when requested to do so by the facilitator.
- Read the “Culturally responsive strategies from the literature information sheet” and discuss it with your table group.
- Think individually about what you just read and discussed and then record in the “Future conference practices” section of the note-taking template some of the culturally responsive methods you might use to increase the effectiveness of parent–teacher conferences in the future.
- Share with a different partner at your table your methods for increasing the effectiveness of your parent–teacher conferences.
- With your table group, think about the following questions:
 - What did you learn from participating in this activity?
 - How will you use what you learned to improve your parent–teacher conferences in the future?
- When requested by the facilitator, your group should report out one idea or strategy you learned and one way your conferences will be improved in the future. Use the space below to take notes from the group discussion.

Tool: Planning for two-way communication at parent-teacher conferences note-taking template

Practices	Past conference practices	Future conference practices
Method of greeting the parent and opening the dialogue		
Percent of teacher talk and parent talk	Percent of teacher talk	Percent of teacher talk
	Percent of parent talk	Percent of parent talk
Topics discussed		
Questions asked of the parent(s)		
Frequency of the use of the words "we," "you," and "I"	<p>We</p> <p>You</p> <p>I</p>	<p>We</p> <p>You</p> <p>I</p>

Tool: Culturally responsive strategies from the literature information sheet

- Begin the conference by talking on a personal level rather than on an academic level.
- During the conference, maintain a 50 percent teacher/50 percent parent talk time.
- During the conference, mix talk about the student's educational growth with talk about the student's social development.
- Discuss the student's achievement in the context of all the students in the class (that is, how the student contributes to the well-being of others in the class).
- If a parent does not understand or speak English well, provide an interpreter (do not use the child as an interpreter).
- Use indirect questions or observations about the parent's goals for the child or about how they support the child in the family. For example, if inquiring about homework, you could ask, "What are some barriers to your child completing homework?" or "Some parents prefer to have an older child help with homework..." rather than "Why doesn't your child complete homework?" or "Do you help your child with homework?"
- Express commitment to open and frequent home-school communication, and ask parents how they would best like communication to occur.

Source: Goodwin & King, 2002; Graham-Clay, 2005; Trumbull, 2011.

Appendix A. Activity and tool selection

The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education was originally developed to provide activities and tools to help educators in the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific Region understand why and how to engage parents, families, and community members from diverse cultures, specifically in Guam. REL Pacific developed a toolkit for schools in Guam in response to a request to help them more effectively engage all their families, not just those from a particular economic or ethnic group.² Like many schools on the U.S. mainland and in the REL Pacific Region, Guam's schools have an increasingly diverse population.

To expand the toolkit for use beyond the REL Pacific Region, the study team identified resources with appropriate activities and tools by conducting a web search using ERIC, Google, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Education Journals using the following search terms: parent engagement, parent involvement in the REL Pacific Region, cross-cultural communication with families, building trusting relationships with parents in the REL Pacific Region, Micronesian education, indigenous learning, cultural competency with families and communities, cultural beliefs and assumptions, community partnerships, parent information resource centers, federal policy parent engagement, and access and equity for families. The web search focused initially on publications released after 2000. Because this focus yielded few publications related specifically to the culture and context of the REL Pacific Region, the search was expanded to 1990. Additionally, the study team reviewed websites of nationally recognized centers, including the Center for Study of Social Policy; Center on Innovation and Improvement; Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; Harvard Family Research Project; McREL International; National Center for Parents with Children with Disabilities; National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education; SEDL; and WestEd. These sites were accessed to review their resources and to identify commonly referenced websites that might also serve as resources.

In reviewing the resources, the study team looked for appropriate activities and tools. It adapted some activities and tools and developed others to fit the topics in each section of the toolkit. These activities and tools reflect the study team's experience working with a variety of schools, including those in the REL Pacific Region, on the U.S. mainland, and in Canada. Each activity in part 3 is listed in table A1 along with a description of how it was adapted or developed and its source.

Some activities and tools developed by the study team are based on general group processes (such as, inner and outer circle and carousel brainstorming) for exploring people's knowledge or beliefs about a topic or for generating ideas. Some are based on an existing graphic, and others were developed based on cited research. For example, "Activity 3.1.1: Reflecting on building trusting relationships with families" was developed based on research by Megan Tschannen-Moran, who provided suggestions for and feedback on the activity when asked for permission to use her five facets of trust framework.

Taken together, the activities in the toolkit provide many avenues for educators to enhance their understanding of family and community engagement in education and their ability to involve families and communities as partners in supporting student learning.

Table A1. Development of activities and tools in part 3 of the toolkit

Activity number	Activity name	Development	Citation
3.1.1	Reflecting on building trusting relationships with families	Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific staff developed this activity and used an existing framework as the basis for the associated tool.	Information about the facets of trust is drawn from Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). <i>Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools, 2nd ed.</i> San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. Used with permission. Tschannen-Moran provided suggestions for this activity.
3.1.2	Understanding communication strategies to enhance family and community engagement	Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific staff developed this activity and compiled information from several sources to develop the associated tools.	<p>Goodwin, L., & King, S., (2002). <i>Culturally responsive parental involvement: Concrete understanding & basic strategies.</i> Washington DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Publications.</p> <p>Graham-Clay, S. (2005). Communicating with parents: strategies for teachers. <i>The School Community Journal, 16</i>(1), 117–130. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf.</p> <p>Ferguson, C., Ramos, M., Rudo, Z., & Wood, L. (2008). <i>The school–family connection: Looking at the larger picture.</i> Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools at SEDL. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/sfclitrev.pdf.</p> <p>Trumbull, E. (2011). <i>FINE commentary: The challenge of cross-cultural family-school communication.</i> Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved February 10, 2014, from http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/fine-commentary-the-challenge-of-cross-cultural-family-school-communication.</p>
3.2	Planning for two-way communication at parent–teacher conferences	Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific staff developed this activity and the note-taking template for recording past and future cross-cultural practices during parent–teacher conferences. Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific compiled information from several sources to develop the information sheet for this activity.	<p>Goodwin, L., & King, S. (2002). <i>Culturally responsive parental involvement: Concrete understanding & basic strategies.</i> Washington DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Publications.</p> <p>Graham-Clay, S. (2005). Communicating with parents: Strategies for teachers. <i>The School Community Journal, 16</i>(1), 117–130. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://www.adi.org/journal/ss05/Graham-Clay.pdf.</p> <p>Trumbull, E. (2011). <i>FINE commentary: The challenge of cross-cultural family-school communication.</i> Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved February 10, 2014, from http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/fine-commentary-the-challenge-of-cross-cultural-family-school-communication.</p>

Source: Developed by Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific.

Notes

1. Alliance members include administrators and teachers from Guam Department of Education schools and faculty from Guam Community College and the University of Guam who work with K–12 schools.
2. A prior version of the toolkit was published and distributed to Guam alliance members for use within the REL Pacific Region; this version of the toolkit has been revised and expanded for a broader audience.

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