**Family Engagement Needs Assessment**

**- For Building Leadership Teams -**

## Overview

This needs assessment tool is designed to assist school leaders and leadership teams in measuring the quality of their current family engagement practices. Each item is an example of a high impact family engagement practice. This tool will help your team identify family engagement action steps to include in your school’s improvement plan.\*

The tool covers three areas: Communication (9 items), Learning at Home (7 items), and Community Partnerships (6 items).

This needs assessment tool will:

* Provide direction for your family engagement planning for this school year.
* Determine priority items (we recommend no more than 3 per year).

## Directions

1. Include teacher, support staff, family, and administrator perspectives when completing this tool. Including those perspectives will provide your school with the best results.
2. Review the items ahead of time. Determine if you will use the whole tool or only a portion.
3. Consider which discussion protocol (see Appendix A) you could use to help in gathering your team members’ perspectives.
4. Gather evidence to inform your assessment. For example, your current communication strategies for engaging with families, supports the school provides to families for learning at home across grade levels, and information about current partnerships.
5. With your school team, consider each item. Allow some time for discussion. As a team, come to a consensus for each item’s rating based on the scale below:

**The Needs Assessment Rating Scale**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Rating** |  | **Criteria** |
| Not Implemented | 0 | We do not do this yet. |
| Emergent | 1 | We have discussed this. We occasionally implement the practice with varying levels of success. |
| Rising | 2 | We implement this practice, but we have room for growth. |
| Exemplary | 3 | We are good at this! There is school-wide implementation of the practice with fidelity. |

6. Use the results of the needs assessment to guide the family engagement strategies your school will include in your improvement plan for this school year.

# **Family Engagement Area #1: Communication**

| **Item** | **Rating (0-3)** | **Evidence** | **Notes & Next Steps** | **Priority this year?** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. We inform all families about their student’s academic and social emotional progress in a regular and timely manner. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. School personnel communicate and model high, positive expectations for each student’s academics and social-emotional skills to all families. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Information sent to families from the school is understandable to all families (e.g., progress, standards, grade-level expectations). |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Information sent to families from the school is accessible to all families (e.g., progress, standards, grade-level expectations, methods of communication). |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Communication is two-way. We provide opportunities that are accessible to every family for input in school activities and their student’s learning. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Families who have home languages other than English are welcomed and encouraged to share their expectations and previous school experiences. They are provided with resources and supports for communicating with the school about their student’s development in their home language. Language diversity is valued within the school. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. We regularly examine patterns of inequity in our two-way communication processes with families and intentionally take action to eliminate those inequities. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. When any student needs a little extra help, families are provided with school-based intervention plans for their child and receive more frequent communication about the student’s progress (bi-weekly, monthly, etc.). Families have the opportunity to share feedback with the school and make decisions about their child’s plan. (Schools often call this “Tier II supports.”) |  |  |  |  |
| 1. When any student needs individualized learning or behavioral supports, families are provided with an individualized school-based intervention programs for their student and receive more frequent communication (bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) about the student’s progress. Families have the opportunity to share feedback with the school and make decisions about their student’s plan. (Schools often call this “Tier III supports.”) |  |  |  |  |

# **Family Engagement Area #2: Learning At-Home**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Rating (0-3)** | **Evidence** | **Notes & Next Steps** | **Priority this year?** |
| 1. Academic and social emotional practices are provided to families for use at home. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. In all grades, activities sent home are developmentally appropriate, brief, an extension of content already learned in the classroom, and fit into the daily lives of students and families. Especially in early grades activities sent home are fun for families to do together. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. The school works to ensure that each student has access to books, writing supplies, and other resources at home to support their practice and to encourage routine activities in everyday life. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. When any student needs a little extra help, families are provided with ideas for how to support academic and social emotional development at home in conjunction with the school’s plan for the student. Families take part in developing and providing feedback about the plan as they try new strategies at home. (Schools often call this “Tier II supports.”) |  |  |  |  |
| 1. When any student needs individualized learning or behavioral supports, families are provided with ideas for how to support academic and social emotional development at home in conjunction with the school’s plan for the student. Families take part in developing and providing feedback about the plan as they try new strategies at home. (Schools often call this “Tier III supports.”) |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Families learning English are encouraged to speak/read or participate in their home language. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. We regularly examine patterns of inequity in resources and activities that enable learning at home with families and intentionally take action to eliminate those inequities. |  |  |  |  |

# **Family Engagement Area #3: Community Partnerships**

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| **Item** | **Rating** | **Evidence** | **Notes & Next Steps** | **Priority this year?** |
| 1. The school has partnerships with public, non-public, and early childhood education programs, and other education programs to promote effective transitions to and from our school. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. The school is a hub for student and family supports and establishes partnerships that provide community resources to support shared academic and social emotional expectations between home, school, and the community (e.g., afterschool programs, mentoring programs, English Language classes for families, summer programs, library, YMCA, churches, etc.). |  |  |  |  |
| 1. We plan in-person events to be accessible and engaging for all families and have a plan to follow up with those who cannot attend. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Community partners build awareness and support for academic and social emotional expectations in the community. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. We offer families and community members a range of options for contributing their cultural perspectives and expertise to benefit the school community to support student development. |  |  |  |  |
| 1. We regularly examine patterns of inequity that impact access to our partners and their services and intentionally take action to eliminate those inequities. |  |  |  |  |

# **Appendix A: Protocols for Team Discussion**

Why use a protocol to complete the Needs Assessment with your team? Protocols encourage equitable participation by providing structures that give each team member a meaningful role and an opportunity to share ideas and feedback.

Type 1: Opening/brainstorming: Use these protocols for warming up for the Needs Assessment Process.

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| --- | --- |
| [Future protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/future.pdf) | Look into the future to imagine the best outcome for your school. Then, brainstorm steps to get there. |
| [Realms of Concern and Influence](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/realms_concern_influence_0.pdf) | Share concerns and consider which ones your team has influence over. |
| [Ping Pong Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ping_pong.pdf) | Brainstorm about an issue or problem your team members are facing. |
| [Multiple Perspectives Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/multiple_perspectives_0.pdf) | Think about an issue from different points of view. Adapt for “What is family engagement, actually?” |
| [Barriers and Bridges](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/barriers_bridges.pdf) | Brainstorm what barriers your team faces and how those can be turned into bridges. |

Type 2: Looking at survey data: Use these protocols to look at data objectively and methodically.

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| [Success Analysis](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/success_ana_admin_teams_0.pdf) | Examine successful practices and reflect on what makes them so. |
| [Data Driven Dialogue](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/data_driven_dialogue_0.pdf) | Make shared meaning from data while encouraging equal voices. |
| [Data Mining Protocol](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/data-mining-protocol/) | For use with two complementary data sets (such as family survey data and staff survey data). |
| [Looking at Data Sets](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/looking-at-data-sets-a-collaborative-inquiry-and-problem-solving-protocol/) | Allows for sharing of initial reactions, closer examination, feedback, multiple perspectives, and synthesis. |

Type 3: Revising and asking for feedback:

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| [Tuning a Plan](https://nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/tuning_plan_0.pdf) | Get feedback about a set of goals and associated activities. |
| [Feedback Carousel](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/feed_back_carousel.pdf) | Get different kinds of feedback in a relatively short amount of time. |
| [Equity Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/equity_protocol.pdf) | Examine how your plan promotes equity. (Adapt by substituting “families” for “students” in the protocol prompts.) |
| [Consultancy Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/consultancy_0.pdf) | Present a dilemma in your plan and brainstorm solutions. |
| [Charette](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/charrette_0.pdf) | A protocol in architecture, used to “kick up” the level of performance. |

Type 4: Reflecting on the process:

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| [Process of Developing Understanding](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/understanding_analysis_0.pdf) | Analyze how a new understanding has developed. |
| [Talking Stick Ceremony](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/talking-stick-ceremony/) | Debrief your team’s process by using a talking stick to ensure equal voices. |
| [I used to…but now I…](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/I%20Used%20to%20Think%20-%20Now%20I%20Think_1.pdf) | Each participant shares their reflections using the prompt. |
| Revisit Barriers and Bridges (link above) | After working with your team, what barriers are now bridges? |

# **Appendix B: Examples of Strategies and Action Steps**

There are so many family engagement strategies and activities that schools can use! Here are just a few ideas for each type of family engagement. For more ideas and best practices, visit <https://ohiofamiliesengage.osu.edu/>.

## Communication

* Teachers unpack and communicate to students and families a progression of developmentally appropriate learning targets.
* Teachers meet with students and families individually at least once per term.
* Teachers use a variety of structures to collect student progress (e.g. assessments, student-led conferences, portfolios).
* Faculty and staff reflect the high expectations of students in their own behavior and decisions.
* Faculty and staff reference the established-high expectations often when praising, redirecting, or discussing behaviors with students and families.
* Faculty and staff treat all academic and social emotional challenges as opportunities for learning. Some call this process, growth mindset.
* Information is available in the home language of families.
* Information is free of jargon and necessary technical terms are explained in understandable language.
* Visuals accompanying written materials.
* There are multiple ways for families to access information about their student’s progress, not just online.
* Training and/or support for families regarding web-based student progress portals is available.
* Parent-to-parent phone trees and family phone directory.
* System to regularly update contact information.
* We solicit feedback from families in a variety of ways (e.g. surveys, family feedback phone lines, parent-teacher conferences).
* We systematically monitor family participation and adjust to increase that participation.
* Governance and advisory bodies representative of the diversity of the school.
* We know which families in our district speak languages other than English at home.
* Family-to-family networks exist that empower families to share their experiences and ideas with each other and the school.
* Languages other than English are reflected in school decorations and material and are celebrated.
* Reviewing disaggregated data to identify gaps.
* Executing a root cause analysis to strategize around gaps in participation.
* Publish and address results of stakeholder surveys.

## Learning at Home

* Homework folders.
* Guiding questions to ask students when reading.
* Parent-teacher conferences used to suggest and model specific learning support strategies.
* Mini-lessons of how subjects are being taught in class in person or via YouTube.
* Interactive homework assignments.
* Family-supported learning centers.
* Homework hotline.
* Weekly classroom communication about upcoming homework and topics being taught.
* Helping families network and/or get resources to contribute to school improvement.
* Surveys, focus groups, and other methods to solicit families’ ideas about challenges and solutions.
* We seek insight into each family’s unique traditions, cultures, and experiences and building on that during the school day and work sent home.
* We send guided reading prompts home in the home language of a family and have books in their home language are available.

## Community Partnerships

* We work with schools from which our students matriculate to provide opportunities for students and families to visit our building.
* We work with schools to which our student will matriculate to provide opportunities for students and families to visit their building.
* We work with other educational partners in the area to maintain cohesive educational service plans for students.
* Signs in families’ native language(s) Clear and consistent visitor policy.
* We have partners that address the needs of our students and families.
* School-based activities are student or family led.
* Transportation options available.
* School-based meetings are scheduled outside of normal work hours.
* Childcare is available so families can fully participate.
* Translation services provided.
* Take home packets with information and activities for those who could not attend.
* Community partners reflect our shared high expectations by reflecting our shared language in their material and when speaking to stakeholders.
* Our community partners and we have shared goals.
* Members of our faculty and staff attend leadership meetings of our community partners by invitation.
* Principal-led community walkthroughs.
* Opportunities for families to act in leadership roles (e.g., Board member)
* Participate in the delivery of our school plan (e.g., contributing to leadership teams, input in planning for implementation, opportunities for feedback)
* Opportunities to volunteer for school activities and events
* Opportunities to provide unique learning experiences for students (e.g., fieldwork, experts, service learning).

# **Sources**

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