



# RAISING COMMUNITY PROGRAM PERCEPTION/AWARENESS

January 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

As a part of their holistic effort to improve school climate and culture district-wide, a Hanover Research (Hanover) partner is looking to increase family and community engagement. The partner hopes that increasing community engagement will inspire trusting, collaborative relationships with current families, as well as increase new student enrollment. In the past two years, 1.2 million students have left public schools. Decreasing public school enrollment is partially due to declining birth rates. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the has increased student mobility and motivated some parents to homeschool their children. Charter schools have also negatively impacted public school enrollment as charter school enrollment has increased over the past six years.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that enhancing family engagement and community awareness improves school climate and student enrollment.<sup>2</sup>

To support these efforts, Hanover created this Best Practices report outlining how districts can assess and raise community awareness and perceptions of their neighborhood schools. This report also illustrates how districts can support individual school branding and communication strategies and effectively measure increases in community awareness and perceptions. This report contains the following sections:

- **Section I: Assess Community Awareness** outlines how districts can survey parent communication preferences, as well as plan and assess district outreach.
- **Section II: Improve School Perception** describes how districts can create a brand for their school, participate in digital communication, and implement creative community engagement strategies.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests that district leaders consider the following recommendations:



**Conduct research to understand the “persona” of each school community.** Doing so will help the district to develop a brand that ensures parents understand the value of their district school. Branding is the process through which school districts establish their identity in the community, promote their mission, connect with their community, and shed positive light on their schools. To create a brand, districts should define and showcase their mission, highlight unique programming to differentiate themselves from other schools, and ensure messaging is consistent in content and visual layout. As part of this process, districts should create and maintain an inviting website or social media sites to ensure parents can easily access and digest important school information.



**Form a community engagement team that uses a continuous improvement model to ensure sustainable and effective personalized engagement with families.** School outreach and communication is most effective when it is consistent and personalized to family needs. The community engagement team should create goals for family engagement and outreach at the beginning of the school year. Districts should plan events and activities that fill specific outreach gaps, and regularly assess outreach strategy efficacy. Events and activities should focus on relationship building and could include events such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) nights, culture nights, or home visits. The community engagement team can also use feedback from parent surveys to streamline and improve systems of parent outreach.

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<sup>1</sup> [1] Hubler, S. “With Plunging Enrollment, a ‘Seismic Hit’ to Public Schools.” *The New York Times*, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/17/us/public-schools-falling-enrollment.html> [2] Bamberger, C. “NYC Projects Enrollment Loss of Another 30,000 Students in Fall.” *New York Post*, 2022. <https://nypost.com/2022/07/15/nyc-projects-enrollment-loss-of-another-30000-students-in-fall/>

<sup>2</sup> [1] “One Size Does Not Fit All.” Center for American Progress, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/one-size-not-fit/> [2] “Making Your Mark: How to Build Your District Brand.” *Frontline Education*. [https://frontlineed.wpenginepowered.com/uploads/2018/01/Making\\_Your\\_Mark\\_How\\_to\\_Build\\_Your\\_District\\_Brand.pdf](https://frontlineed.wpenginepowered.com/uploads/2018/01/Making_Your_Mark_How_to_Build_Your_District_Brand.pdf)



**Review and, when appropriate, improve existing programming and course offerings.** Districts should prioritize the improvement of existing programs over the creation of new programming, to entice parents and students to attend district schools. New programming can be costly to the district and can lead to instability at the school level, which can harm relationships with parents and students. Improving current programming can be more cost effective, while also revitalizing parent and student interest in a school.

## KEY FINDINGS



**Research shows that home visits are a successful strategy for connecting with hard-to-reach families.** After disseminating communication preference surveys or holding parent feedback sessions, districts may notice that they are not hearing from specific families or a specific population of families. Home visits allow districts to connect with families they are not hearing from, in order to consider ensure all voices in the district. In cases where trust is lacking between parents and the school, a home visit can signal that the school cares about the student and is invested in hearing and implementing parent feedback.



**Recent research by the Center for American Progress shows that parents care more that school communication is personalized over how they receive communication.** The national Parent Involvement Engagement Survey shows that in the 2015-2016 school year, 42 percent of parents never received a phone call from their child's school with personalized information and 62 percent of parents never received an email from their child's school with personalized information. Schools that communicate with parents regularly about student academic achievement and school initiatives see an increase in parent engagement.



**Schools are successful at differentiating themselves from their competitors when they focus on improving existing programs rather than on creating programs.** One reason parents pull their children from public education is because they feel other schools' programming is better suited to meet the unique needs of their child. Some public schools try to attract parents by creating new, enticing programs. However, program creation can be expensive, can lead to administrative instability, and can quickly become obsolete when the next education trend comes along. Instead of investing resources in newer education initiatives, schools can strengthen existing programs and highlight for parents how those programs provide high-quality, rigorous, and personalized education for students.



**Social media is a compelling and useful platform for parent engagement and communication.** The average adult explores social media for approximately two hours a day, and looks at their phone 80 times per day, making social media an accessible and useful platform for community engagement. Both school leaders and teachers can use social media to personalize communication for parents. Research shows that if districts post videos, clips should not be more than two and a half minutes long. Districts should ensure student information remains private when using social media for parent engagement.

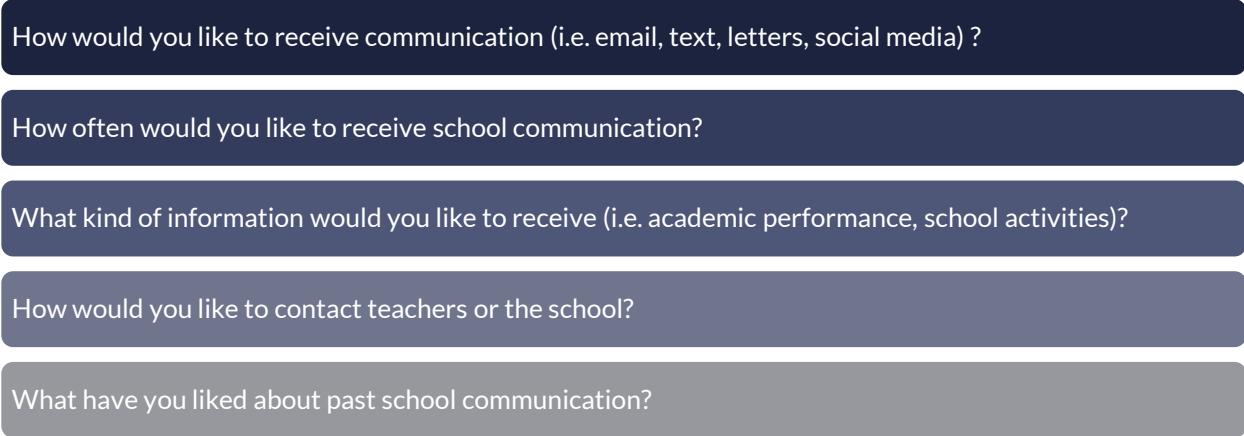
# SECTION I: ASSESS COMMUNITY AWARENESS

With the growing popularity of charter schools and the trend of parents comparing public school systems, and then changing districts so their children can attend their preferred schools, districts' ability to engage and retain parents and students has become essential to sustained school success.<sup>3</sup> The following section outlines how schools can survey parent communication needs, as well as assess their outreach strategy.

## SURVEY PARENT COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

Districts should survey parents to efficiently collect feedback on school communication methods and educational programing. Districts that seek parent communication preferences can tailor outreach to parent needs, increasing the likelihood that school messaging will be received and reciprocated.<sup>4</sup> Surveys can also elicit feedback on the degree to which parents feel welcome in school, parent confidence in helping their children learn at home, the degree to which parents feel included in school decision making, and how parents feel about school programming.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1.1 provides a sample communication preferences survey that districts, schools, or teachers can share with parents at the outset of the school year.

Figure 1.1: Communication Preferences Survey Sample



Source: Education Endowment Foundation<sup>6</sup>

In addition to formal surveys, districts can set up informal meetings that empower parents to share ideas and feedback.<sup>7</sup> Informal meetings serve the dual purpose of validating parents' concerns and giving parents the opportunity to connect with one another. If districts think it would be helpful, they can facilitate guided activities for eliciting feedback. Districts can also invite teachers to join feedback meetings so that parents and teachers can form relationships and work together. If specific parents are difficult to engage, districts can shift outreach efforts to one-on-one communication.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [1] "One Size Does Not Fit All," Op. cit. [2] Adams, C. "What the Research Says about the Best Way to Engage Parents." The Hechinger Report, 2020. <http://hechingerreport.org/what-the-research-says-about-the-best-way-to-engage-parents/>

<sup>4</sup> "One Size Does Not Fit All," Op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> "Family Engagement Best Practices Rubric and Assessment." Albuquerque Public Schools. <https://www.aps.edu/family-engagement-collaborative/documents/family-engagement-best-practices-rubric-with-action-plan>

<sup>6</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from van Poortvliet, M., N. Axford, and J. Lloyd. *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning. Guidance Report. Education Endowment Foundation*, Education Endowment Foundation, 2018. [https://eric.ed.gov/?q=homework&ff1=audParents&ff2=dytSince\\_2013&id=ED612191](https://eric.ed.gov/?q=homework&ff1=audParents&ff2=dytSince_2013&id=ED612191)

<sup>7</sup> "CCSS Systems Implementation Guide - Common Core State Standards." California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/ccssguide.asp>

<sup>8</sup> "A School Leader's Guide to Effective Stakeholder Engagement." Bellwether Education, 2020. <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/school-leader%E2%80%99s-guide-effective-stakeholder-engagement>

Schools should ensure they are reaching parents of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds when collecting feedback, and if not, implement strategies to increase inclusive engagement.<sup>9</sup> Families who face barriers to school communication or who have had negative past experiences with public schools may be hesitant to provide feedback, including parents who do not speak English as their first language, parents of color who experience discrimination, and LGBTQ parents who may not feel accepted by the school community.<sup>10</sup> To help families feel comfortable giving feedback, districts should ensure communication is culturally competent and available in families' primary language.<sup>11</sup> Districts who struggle to reach parents can also schedule home visits. Research shows that home visits are a successful way to connect with hard-to-reach families. In cases where trust is lacking between parents and the school, a home visit can signal that the school cares about the student and is invested in hearing and implementing parent feedback.<sup>12</sup>

## PLAN AND ASSESS - DISTRICT OUTREACH STRATEGY

Districts should engage parents by ensuring school communication is clear, consistent, and individualized. Schools that communicate with parents regularly surrounding student academic achievement and school initiatives see an increase in parent engagement. However, research shows that most U.S. public schools do not regularly communicate with families. The National Parent Involvement Engagement Survey from the Center for American Progress (CAP) showed that in the 2015-2016 school year, 42 percent of parents never received a phone call from their child's school with personalized information and 62 percent of parents never received an email from their child's school with personalized information. Recent research by CAP shows that parents care more that school communication is personalized over how they receive school communication.<sup>13</sup> Figure 1.2 provides reflection questions for districts when personalizing communication to parents to help design an approach that is thoughtful, deliberate, and appropriately timed.

Figure 1.2 Personalized Communication Reflection Questions

<b>What <u>existing dynamics</u> should inform your approach?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of outreach and relationship-building with parents</li> <li>• Power dynamics to be mindful of</li> </ul>
<b>What is the <u>purpose</u> of engaging parents?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To seek input to strengthen and refine the emerging plan?</li> <li>• To inform or provide updates on process?</li> </ul>
<b>How <u>frequently</u> will you engage parents?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly (e.g., weekly, daily)?</li> <li>• At the beginning, middle, and end of the planning process?</li> <li>• At the end only?</li> </ul>
<b>How will you engage them?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly in-person updates?</li> <li>• Quarterly email updates?</li> </ul>

Source: Bellwether Education Partners<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Adams, Op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> "One Size Does Not Fit All," Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> "Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners and Their Families." Learning for Justice, 2021.

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/LFJ-2111-ELL-Best-Practices-Guide-November-2021-11172021.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Adams, Op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> "One Size Does Not Fit All," Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Figure content mostly verbatim from "A School Leader's Guide to Effective Stakeholder Engagement," Op. cit.

**Districts can form a community engagement team to ensure sustainable and effective communication with families long-term.** The community engagement team should create goals for family engagement at the beginning of the school year and report on growth at the end of the school year.<sup>15</sup> The community engagement team can also use feedback from parent surveys to streamline and improve systems of parent outreach.<sup>16</sup> The community engagement team should include district leaders, school leaders, staff, and parents, whose roles are outlined in Figure 1.3 to guide districts in forming their own engagement team.

**Figure 1.3: Community Engagement Team Roles and Responsibilities**

<b>BOARD OF TRUSTEES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifies district needs in family engagement</li> <li>▪ Provides examples of integration of family engagement objectives in district plans</li> <li>▪ Provides indicators of successful family engagement</li> </ul>
<b>SUPERINTENDENT AND DISTRICT LEADERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assembles resources needed for implementation of family engagement activities</li> <li>▪ Provides data on results of district and school family engagement activities</li> <li>▪ Identifies methods the district can use to build the capacity of educators to partner with families</li> </ul>
<b>SITE ADMINISTRATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oversees alignment of school family engagement plans and objectives with school and district student learning goals</li> <li>▪ Identifies staff available to support family engagement</li> <li>▪ Implements evaluation methods for family engagement</li> </ul>
<b>TEACHERS AND STAFF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implements strategies for linking family engagement to student learning objectives</li> <li>▪ Participates in professional learning opportunities to increase their skills in partnering with families</li> <li>▪ Implements strategies to foster two-way communication with families</li> </ul>
<b>ADVISORY COMMITTEE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides available resources for family engagement</li> <li>▪ Oversees district and school family engagement policy development and evaluation</li> <li>▪ Helps team increase their knowledge and skills related to decision-making</li> </ul>

Source: California Department of Education<sup>17</sup>

Parents on the committee, who would usually be on the board of trustees or the advisory committee, can help coordinate with and pass information along to other parent groups and community organizations. Parent committee members can also help post helpful information online for district families.<sup>18</sup> The community engagement team can coordinate with other teams, such as the curriculum team, to collaborate and streamline information.<sup>19</sup>

**The district communication team should use a continuous improvement model to regularly assess and improve community engagement.**<sup>20</sup> When engaging in continuous improvement, districts should consider parent needs and preferences when targeting areas for growth.<sup>21</sup> The stages of the continuous improvement cycle are plan, do, reflect, and adjust, as described in Figure 1.4.

<sup>15</sup> “Family Engagement Toolkit.” California Department of Education, 2017. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/family-engagement.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> “Family Engagement Best Practices Rubric and Assessment,” Op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Figure content mostly verbatim from “Family Engagement Toolkit,” Op. cit. pp. 29-30

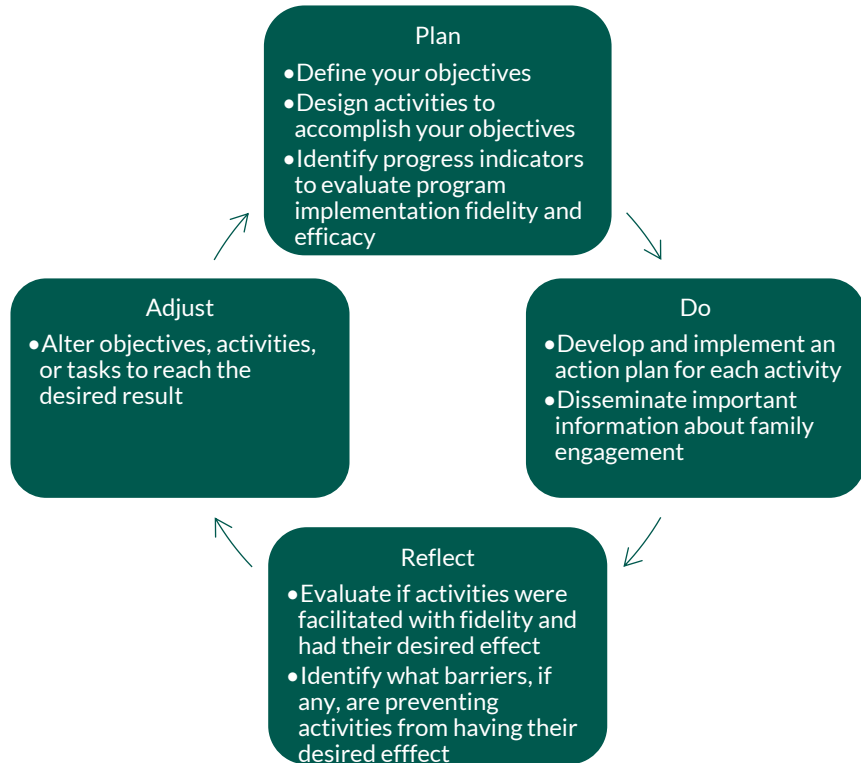
<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Family Engagement Best Practices Rubric and Assessment,” Op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> “Family Engagement Toolkit,” Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> “Family Engagement Best Practices Rubric and Assessment,” Op. cit.

**Figure 1.4 Continuous Improvement for Community Engagement**



Source: California Department of Education<sup>22</sup>

When engaging in continuous improvement, districts should ensure they are infusing equity considerations into every step of the implementation process to ensure school communication planning considers all populations in the school district. If districts do not plan communication initiatives with an equity mindset, districts may inadvertently center policies solely on mainstream American cultural values, making some parent populations feel excluded.<sup>23</sup> Figure 1.5 provides sample objectives and guiding equity questions.

**Figure 1.5 Sample Objectives and Guiding Equity Questions**

SAMPLE OBJECTIVE AND ACTIVITIES	
OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES
The environment at all district schools is welcoming to all families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare family-friendly information materials in multiple languages.</li> <li>▪ Provide professional development to all staff in cultural responsiveness.</li> <li>▪ Hire, train, and supervise family liaisons to serve as point people to develop family engagement at all school sites.</li> <li>▪ Provide professional development to site administrators on the value and importance of engaging diverse families and on strategies to engage diverse families.</li> <li>▪ Provide guidance to school sites for days when family members are invited to observe classrooms.</li> </ul>
EQUITY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	

<sup>22</sup> “Family Engagement Toolkit,” Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> [1] “Language Counts: Supporting Early Math Development for Dual Language Learners.” Bellwether Education, 2020. <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/language-counts-supporting-early-math-development-dual-language-learners>  
 [2] “One Size Does Not Fit All,” Op. cit. [3] “Family Engagement Toolkit,” Op. cit.



PLAN	DO	REFLECT	ADJUST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are parent and community leaders from our diverse school communities involved in planning activities?</li> <li>▪ Are we planning targeted outreach to all our families?</li> <li>▪ How are we planning to engage parent and community leaders in reaching their communities?</li> <li>▪ Are we providing information that is easily understood?</li> <li>▪ Are we providing information translated into the home languages of our families?</li> <li>▪ Do families of English-only students have an opportunity to learn about the importance of programs for English Learners?</li> <li>▪ Are we providing opportunities for educators to listen to the experiences of all our families?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have we considered how diverse staff and families access information in the district?</li> <li>▪ Do we need to make our communication materials available in different languages?</li> <li>▪ Have we used easily understandable terminology and avoided education jargon?</li> <li>▪ Have we explained all acronyms?</li> <li>▪ Have we indicated where staff and families can get more information and who to talk to if they have questions or want to get more involved?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Which families are participating in the activities we planned?</li> <li>▪ How did feedback on activities vary between schools or between different communities?</li> <li>▪ What are some indicators that family engagement may be contributing to improved student outcomes at different schools or in different communities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do we need to change the objectives to better align with the district's goals?</li> <li>▪ Should we continue the same activities?</li> <li>▪ If we continue, how can we make activities more effective?</li> <li>▪ What other activities should we substitute or add?</li> </ul>

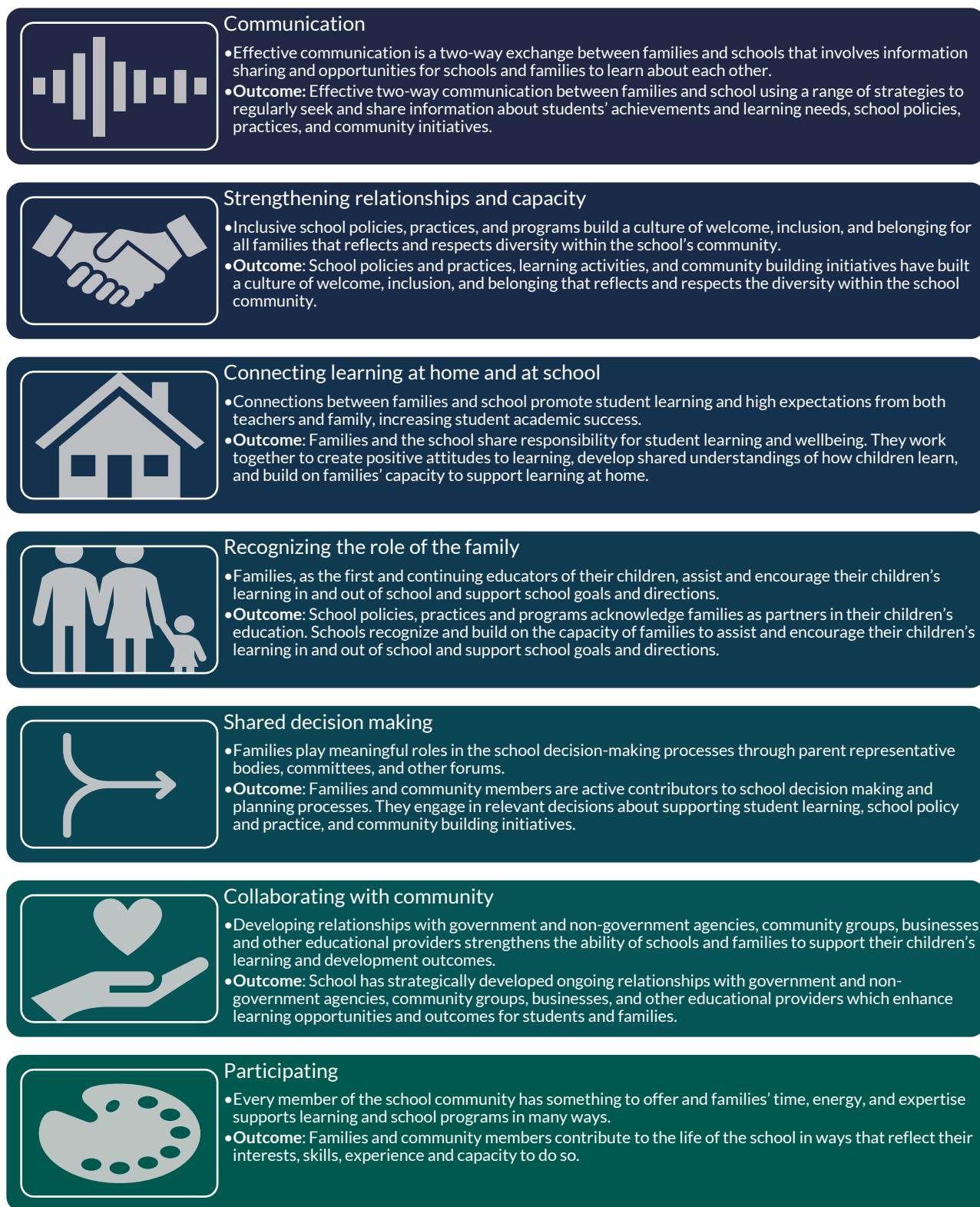
Source: California Department of Education<sup>24</sup>

**School districts can use a rubric to ensure community engagement is thorough and holistic.** Albuquerque Public Schools uses a rubric that measures family engagement in seven areas: Communication; Strengthening Relationships and Capacity; Connecting Learning at Home and at School; Recognizing the Role of the Family; Shared Decision Making; Collaborating with Community; and Participating. Figure 1.6 defines these areas. Districts can access Albuquerque's rubric [here](#).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from "Family Engagement Toolkit," Op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> "Family Engagement Best Practices Rubric and Assessment," Op. cit.

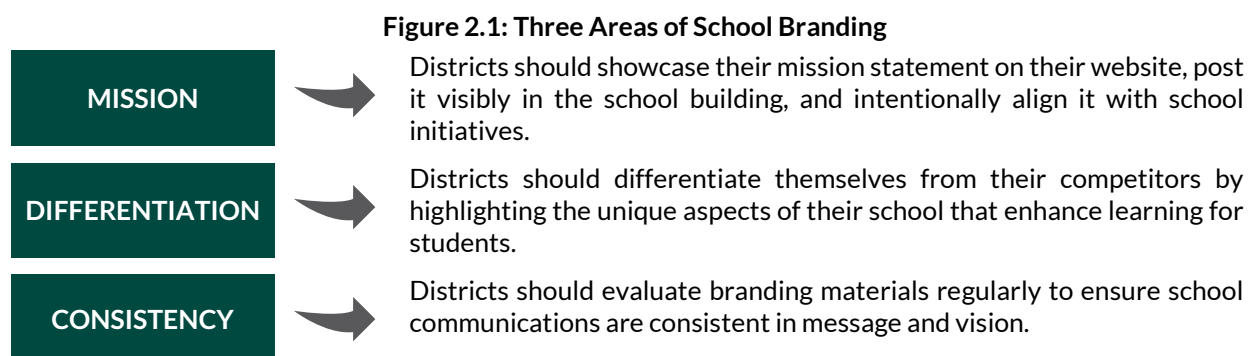
Figure 1.6: Albuquerque Public Schools Family Engagement Rubric



Source: Albuquerque Public Schools<sup>26</sup>

## SECTION II: IMPROVE SCHOOL PERCEPTION THROUGH BRANDING

Districts should develop a school brand to ensure parents understand the value of their district school. Branding is the process through which school districts establish their identity in the community, promote their mission, connect with the community, and shed positive light on their schools.<sup>27</sup> Districts can generate a brand by developing a mission, differentiation, and consistency, as defined in Figure 2.1.



Source: Skyward<sup>28</sup>

**Schools are successful at differentiating themselves from their competitors when they focus on improving existing programs over creating new programs.** One reason parents pull their children from public education is because they feel other schools' programming is better suited to meet the unique needs of their child. Some public schools try to attract parents by creating new, enticing programs. However, new program creation can be expensive, can lead to administrative instability, and can quickly become obsolete when the next education trend comes along. Furthermore, when districts quickly add programs, parents can get confused about what the focus of the school is. Parents who pull their children out of public education tend to choose schools that highlight a particular specialty, such as a language program.<sup>29</sup>

**Instead of investing resources in newer education initiatives, schools can strengthen existing programs and highlight for parents how those programs provide high quality, rigorous, and personalized education for students. Districts can explore what existing programs they can strengthen and then decide how to invest time and resources into highlighting those programs for parents.<sup>30</sup>**

Figure 2.2 outlines what education writer Arun Ramanathan terms "The Three S's" of public school program development to guide schools as they review their schools programs.

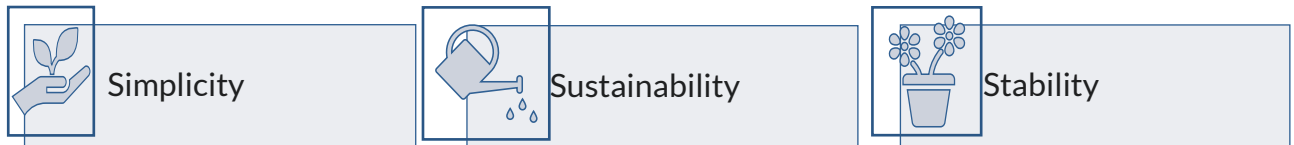
<sup>27</sup> Najjar, Y. "Is Marketing Your School District a Thing? Part 1: Branding." 2018. <https://www.edelements.com/blog/marketing-your-school-district-part-1-branding>

<sup>28</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Ackerlund, R. "How to Market Your Schools." Skyward. <https://www.skyward.com/discover/insider/january-2019/the-school-marketing-plan>

<sup>29</sup> Ramanathan, A. "To Compete with Charter Schools, Take a Closer Look at the What the Competition Is Doing." Education Next, 2017. <https://www.educationnext.org/compete-charter-schools-take-closer-look-competition/>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Figure 2.2: The Three S's of Program Development



Source: Education Next<sup>31</sup>

The following section outlines how districts can spread their brand throughout the community through digital media and engagement events so that families are familiar with and excited about their district school.

## DIGITAL MEDIA

The following two sub-sections outline how districts and teachers can use digital media to increase family engagement and school awareness.

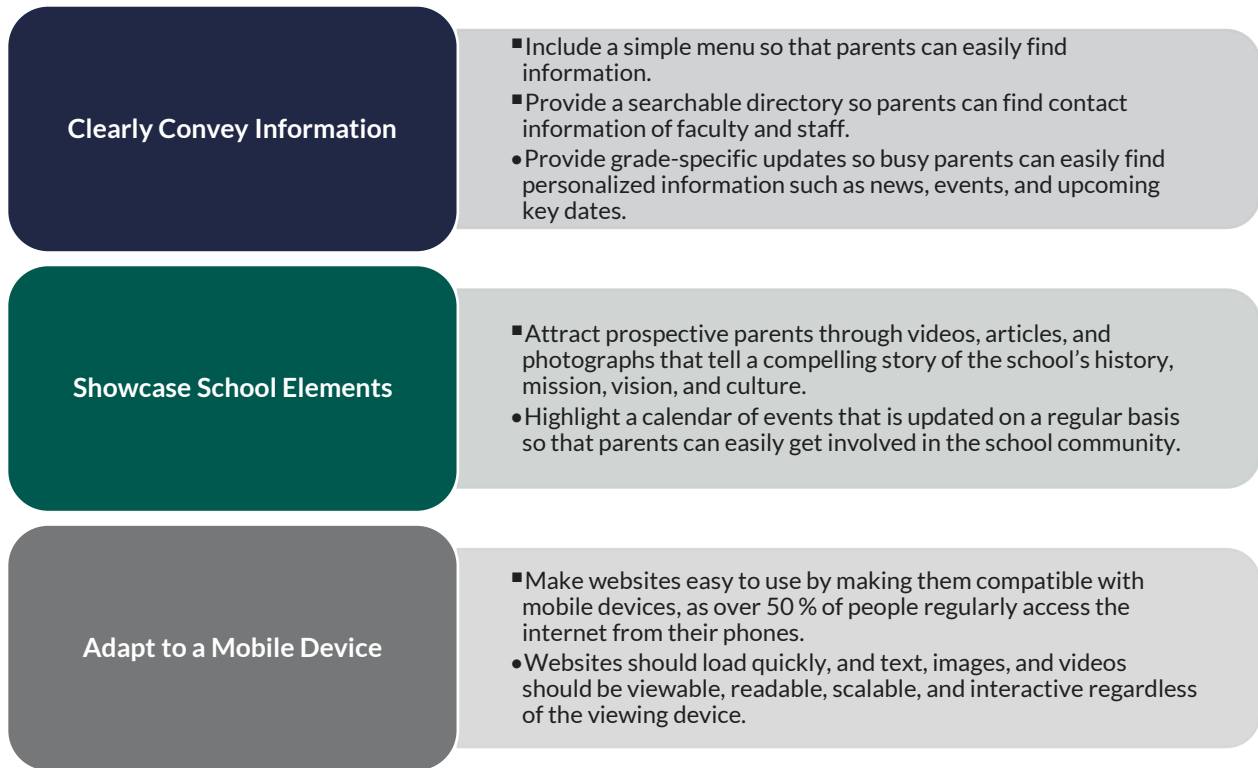
### DISTRICT-WIDE MESSAGING

Districts should ensure parents can easily access and digest important school information by creating and maintaining an inviting website. Parents' ideas about their neighborhood school can be swayed by their school's website. In order to increase school visibility and desirability, schools should create an enticing webpage.<sup>32</sup> Suggested elements of a strong webpage are listed in Figure 2.3.

<sup>31</sup> Figure content verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Moore, S. "8 Ways to Improve Your School or District Website." ESchool News, 2019.  
<https://www.eschoolnews.com/2019/06/17/8-ways-to-improve-your-school-or-district-website/>

Figure 2.3 District Website Guidelines



Source: eSchool News<sup>33</sup>

School districts should create a style guide to ensure district websites and communication materials are consistent in color and formatting. While holistic branding goes beyond choosing a color palette and consistent images, those aspects of brand management are important starting places when developing compelling and visually pleasing communication. In addition to color palettes, schools should create templates for all written and presentational communication, and plan how language on those materials will be translated. Districts can reference Saint Paul Public School's [marketing toolkit](#) to learn how to build a brand.<sup>34</sup> Figure 2.4 provides links to exemplary school websites.

Figure 2.4 Exemplary School Websites with Clickable Links



Source: eSchool News<sup>35</sup>

Social media is a compelling and useful platform for parent engagement and communication.<sup>36</sup> The average person explores social media for approximately two hours a day and looks at their phone 80 times per day, making social media a useful platform for district communication. Research shows that if districts post videos,

<sup>33</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> [1] "School Marketing Toolkit." Saint Paul Public Schools.

<https://www.spps.org/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.spps.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FDomainID%3D6547> [2] Najjar, Op. cit.



<sup>35</sup> School websites sourced from Werra, E. "10 Districts with Awesome Brands." ESchool News, 2018.

<https://www.eschoolnews.com/2018/07/27/10-districts-with-awesome-brands/>

<sup>36</sup> "Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework." New York State Education Department.

<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>

clips should not exceed two and a half minutes.<sup>37</sup> Districts interested in using social media for parent communication can use the recommendations in [this article](#)<sup>38</sup> to learn how to set up and navigate different social media sites, and can use the recommendations in [this article](#)<sup>39</sup> to ensure that student information remains private.

 <b>Spotlight: Brockport School District</b> Checkout Brockport School District's <a href="#">Facebook page</a> , where they post clips from meetings, lectures, events, and guest speakers. They also have 3.5 thousand followers. <sup>40</sup>	 <b>Spotlight:</b> Scroll to the bottom of Ellington Public Schools' <a href="#">website</a> to view their engaging, creative, and informative Twitter posts. <sup>41</sup>
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## TEACHER COMMUNICATIONS

One challenge schools and districts face when striving to implement consistent and personalized parent communication is that the burden of communication often falls on teachers. Placing the burden of parent communication on teachers can be problematic, as teachers already face a demanding workload. To mitigate teacher responsibilities, new technological platforms can make teacher-parent communication simple, easy, and even enjoyable for both parties. Figure 2.5 provides recommended technological platforms for teacher-parent communication.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 2.5: Technological Platforms for Teacher-Parent Communication**

<b><u>REMIN</u></b>	Messenger app that allows teachers to text parents on their phone—individually and as a group—without giving out their personal phone number to parents.
<b><u>SEESAW</u></b>	Portfolio tool with a social feed that allows teachers to upload student work for parents to see.
<b><u>THINKWAVE</u></b>	Online gradebook that allows parents to view and understand student learning progress.
<b><u>EDUBLOGS</u></b>	Easy to use blog that allows teachers to post student work or start conversations about learning.
<b><u>WEEBLY</u></b>	Free website platform where teachers can post student work, class information, and helpful links.

Source: Edutopia<sup>48</sup>

**Social media sites can be an effective platform for teacher-parent communication when teachers are careful about using the correct privacy settings.** Teachers increasingly use social media to stay in touch with

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Gribble, A. "Social Media Best Practices for Schools." #SocialSchool4EDU, 2020. <https://socialschool4edu.com/social-media-best-practices-for-schools/>

<sup>39</sup> "Protecting Student Privacy on Social Media." Edutopia, 2017. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/protecting-student-privacy-social-media>

<sup>40</sup> "Brockport Central School District." <https://www.facebook.com/brockportcsd>

<sup>41</sup> "Home - Ellington Public Schools." <https://www.ellingtonpublicschools.org/>

<sup>42</sup> "Improving Your Parent-Outreach Strategy." Edutopia, 2017. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/improving-your-parent-outreach-strategy>

<sup>43</sup> "Remind Is the Best Education Communication Platform." Remind. <https://www.remind.com/>

<sup>44</sup> "Elevate Learning in Elementary." Seesaw. <https://web.seesaw.me>

<sup>45</sup> "School Management Software & Free Online Gradebook." ThinkWave. <https://www.thinkwave.com/>

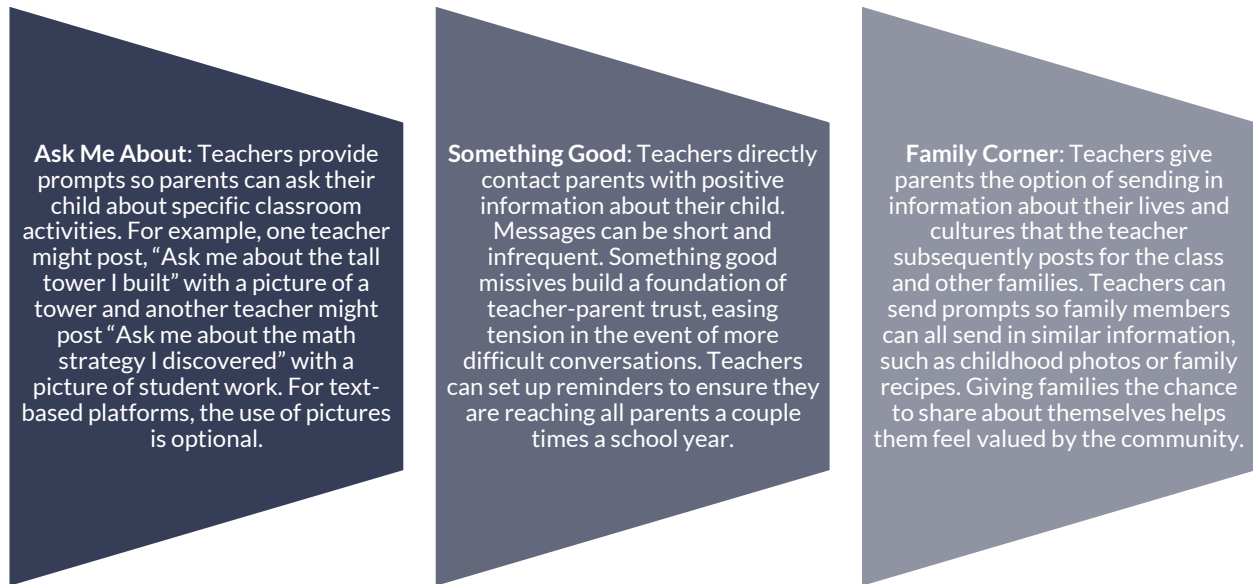
<sup>46</sup> "Free Blogs for Education." Edublogs. <https://edublogs.org/>

<sup>47</sup> "Create a Website, Store or Blog." Weebly. <https://www.weebly.com>

<sup>48</sup> Sources and content from "Improving Your Parent-Outreach Strategy," Op. cit.

parents.<sup>49</sup> To provide brief updates, teachers can try using [Twitter](#);<sup>50</sup> to provide more in-depth information, they can use [Facebook](#);<sup>51</sup> and to show parents what is occurring in the classroom (ensuring student faces are left out or blurred), some teachers set up [Instagram](#)<sup>52</sup> accounts. Social media platforms can be especially effective modes of teacher-parent communication since site use is free and parents and teachers usually know how to navigate them easily.<sup>53</sup> No matter what platform for communication teachers choose, Figure 2.6 describes fun ways teachers can engage parents online.

**Figure 2.6: Fun Ways to Engage Parents Online**

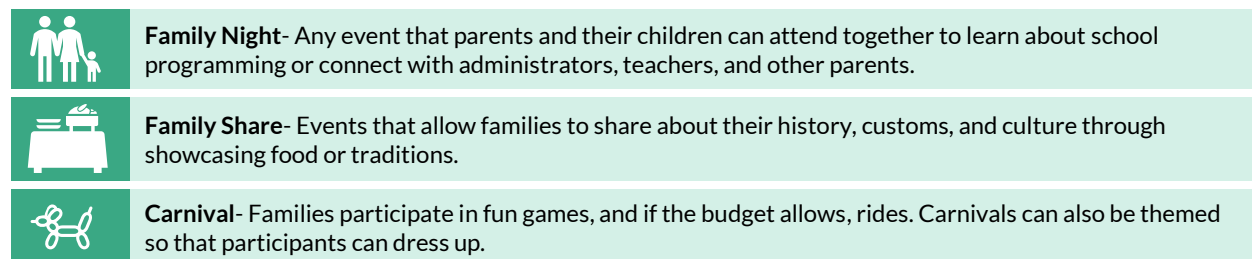


Source: Edutopia<sup>54</sup>

## OTHER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

**Districts can engage the community by creating school events focused on relationship building.** School districts that create regularly occurring events dedicated to building community see an increase in parent engagement.<sup>55</sup> Figure 2.7 provides suggested family engagement ideas.

**Figure 2.7: Family Engagement Event Ideas**



<sup>49</sup> “Seven Ways Your District Can Engage Parents.” New York State School Boards Association, 2018. <https://www.nyssba.org/news/2018/04/20/on-board-online-april-23-2018/seven-ways-your-district-can-engage-parents/>

<sup>50</sup> “Twitter. It’s What’s Happening.” Twitter. <https://twitter.com/>







<sup>51</sup> “Facebook - Log in or Sign Up.” Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/>

<sup>52</sup> “Instagram.” Instagram. <https://instagram.com/>

<sup>53</sup> “Improving Your Parent-Outreach Strategy,” Op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from Fullerton, K. “6 Ways to Involve Families in Elementary School Classrooms.” Edutopia, 2017. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-ways-involve-families-elementary-school-classrooms>

<sup>55</sup> [1] “Seven Ways Your District Can Engage Parents,” Op. cit. [2] Adams, Op. cit.

	<b>Sporting Events-</b> All parents and students attend sporting events for free so that everyone can come together to support the school community.
	<b>Movie Night-</b> Movie night can be a fun way to invite families to school. The movie <i>Screenagers</i> is especially popular for school movie nights as families with children of all ages find it helpful and informative.
	<b>Brown Bag Forums-</b> Parents are invited to bring their own food to feedback sessions to lower costs while increasing camaraderie through a “shared” meal.
	<b>Loyalty Cards-</b> Families get a punch on their loyalty card whenever they attend a school event. Parents can hand in completed loyalty cards for a fun prize or perk.
	<b>Parent University-</b> The school provides informational sessions and workshops on topics that interest parents.
	<b>Resource Hunt-</b> Parents receive a list of school supports and work in teams to find the correct office or location to seek that support, such as homework help.

Source: Hechinger Report, Edutopia, New York State School Boards Association, Oregon Goes to College<sup>56</sup>

**School districts can creatively connect with families in the school community to increase school visibility and enrollment.** While digital and engagement strategies are helpful for retaining students in the community, districts increase new enrollments by raising awareness about neighborhood schools through local advertisements and outreach campaigns. For example, schools can advertise in local radio, newspapers, magazines, and television programs so that people in the community regularly learn about their neighborhood school. Districts can also fund targeted ads on online websites like Spotify. Another strategy districts can engage in is early outreach, or the practice of reaching out to parents with newborn children. When engaging in early outreach, districts can send gift baskets to families with newborn children with items, such as a personalized note from the superintendent, a tote bag and onesie, a coupon for a free baby book, or community preschool brochures and course catalogs. Early engagement is especially effective if districts follow up with yearly birthday cards with neighborhood school information through children's fifth birthdays. Lastly, schools can increase public visibility by posting promotional banners along busy roads with images of students or by leaving mailers and ads at community centers like movie theaters that highlight district programs.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Figure content adapted and verbatim from [1] Adams, Op. cit. [2] “Seven Ways Your District Can Engage Parents,” Op. cit. [3] “College Support Services Scavenger Hunt.” Oregon Goes To College, 2015. <https://oregongoestocollege.org/resources/college-support-services-scavenger-hunt>

<sup>57</sup> [1] “4 Examples of School District Marketing Done Right.” Frontline Education. <https://www.frontlineeducation.com/pages/insights/district-marketing-done-right/> [2] D. Hobbs, T. “Public Schools Turn to Marketing to Win Back Students From Charters.” Wall Street Journal. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/public-schools-turn-to-marketing-to-win-back-students-from-charters-1477647005>



## SECTION III: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

The following section provides a spotlight of a district that used creative engagement strategies to increase family participation at school. The end of the section also provides a helpful Hanover toolkit that members can reference for next steps.



### Spotlight: Laurene Edmonson Elementary School (Edmonson)

The following spotlight showcases creative ways Edmonson increased family engagement.

#### Feedback

Edmonson wanted to increase parent feedback, but parents were not showing up to the weekly feedback meetings school leaders were hosting the hour before PTA meetings. School leaders shifted focus and planned an evening feedback event where they offered parents pizza and dessert. School leaders provided teachers with coverage so teachers could personally call parents and invite them during working hours. 100 people showed up to the first such event in 2016 and attendance has remained consistent ever since. Parent meeting feedback has led to other successful engagement initiatives and shifts in programming for students. For example, concerns about afterschool pick up led to an intentional increase in afterschool programs. All feedback sessions end with parents filling out surveys on tablets, so Edmonson is left with clear data on school successes and where there is room for improvement.

#### Events

Edmonson holds two family events a year focused on highlighting school initiatives for parents. The events are called “Guaranteed Education Teams (GET) or GET Togethers.” GET Togethers build community, help parents learn what is happening in school, and teach parents strategies for supporting their kids at home. Additionally, GET Togethers teach parents about current programs in creative ways that transcend basic teacher information dissemination. For example, at one such event, students explained new homework policies. At a different event, teachers taught parents math games they could play at home with their kids.

Some GET Togethers use a “show don’t tell” approach to showcasing school pedagogy. For example, at one event, the school psychologist greeted parents and their kids upon entering the school, prompting them to choose what “Zone” they were in using green, yellow, red, and blue cards—an activity students complete as they come to school every day. If parents were confused, students helped explain how to use the zones to identify their feelings. Once parents were seated in the auditorium, equipped with pizza, the school SEL paraprofessional said “waterfall, waterfall” into the microphone and all the student automatically responded with a resounding “shhhhhh.” In the first ten minutes of the event, parents witnessed how the school addresses and supports their students’ Social Emotional Learning (SEL) growth.

Edmonson also plans events around parent voice and preferences. For example, at one event Edmonson surveyed parents on topics they would like to learn more about. The school subsequently offered two 30-minute parent workshops on how to set limits and on understanding trauma.

#### Personalized Communication

Edmonson sends parents personalized event invitations in multiple languages, seeks parent feedback, provides parents with emergency resources, and completes home visits. In addition, Edmonson’s school principal gives teachers time to write families personalized postcards at the end of professional developments and school meetings.

Source: Hechinger Report<sup>58</sup>



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- For more information on engaging parents, consult Hanover’s [Family Engagement Toolkit](#).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Spotlight content verbatim and adapted from Adams, Op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> “Family Engagement Toolkit,” Op. cit.

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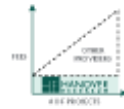
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