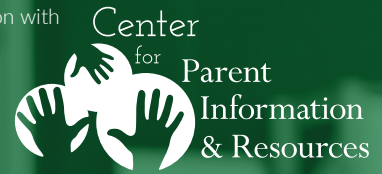




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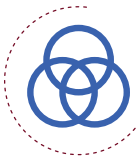
In collaboration with



LEVERAGING THE PBIS FRAMEWORK TO PROMOTE EQUITABLE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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Leveraging the PBIS Framework to Promote Equitable Family Engagement

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Purpose

This practice brief describes how PBIS teams can leverage their established team structures to strengthen family engagement and partnership. Using the PBIS elements of data, systems, and practices, this brief provides specific, actionable steps that promote equitable family engagement.

Family engagement is the commitment of resources (time, energy, money) to school and home-based activities with an emphasis on purposeful, bidirectional, and cooperative interactions between individuals in a child’s home and school settings to promote optimal learning environments (e.g., Garbacz et al., 2018). In this brief, we describe how PBIS teams can promote family engagement by leaning further into their PBIS framework.

Benefits of Family Engagement

The positive effects of family engagement on children’s social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes are well established (Barger et al., 2019; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Smith & Sheridan, 2019) and include improved outcomes for children and youth, benefits to parents, and positive outcomes for teachers (see Figure 1). Family engagement may be particularly important for children with disabilities, as research indicates (a) *improved* academic outcomes and engagement in school groups and extra-curricular activities and (b) *decreases* in negative social, emotional, behavioral experiences (see Figure 2). As a result, family engagement may provide a protective factor against the increased risks that students with disabilities face (McMillan & Jarvis, 2013; Vincent et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2018).




Despite the importance of systematically engaging families in

Key Takeaways

- PBIS teams are well-suited to strengthen equitable family partnerships by leveraging existing routines.
- Partnership with local organizations, including Parent Centers, can facilitate equitable implementation.
- To get started, we recommend teams establish family engagement as a priority and complete a fidelity tool to drive action planning.

their children’s education, schools frequently struggle to implement inclusive, dynamic, and meaningful family engagement practices that involve family members as partners. When schools rely on approaches to family engagement that focus solely on active participation in school events, this can alienate families and exacerbate educational disparities (Baquedando-Lopez et al., 2013; Dyrness, 2009).

Family-School Partnerships Improve Outcomes

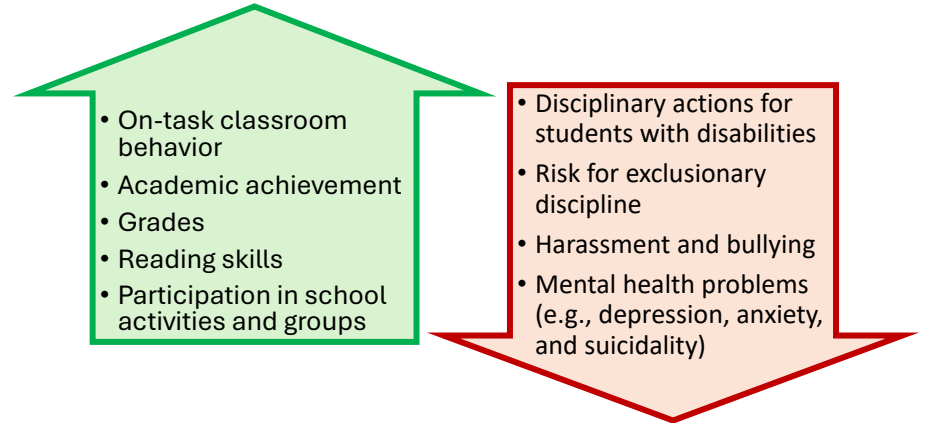
 Students	 Parents	 Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement • Reduced absences • Improved GPA • Improved social-behavioral competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of schools • Better communication with child about school • Increased involvement in educational activities at home • Increased parenting efficacy • Improved relationship with teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved job satisfaction • Decreased transfer requests • Improved teacher performance indicators • Improved relationships, communication, and trust with parents

(Christenson, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Izzo et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2020; Swap, 1990)

Figure 1. Impacts of Family-School Partnerships on Students, Parents, and Teachers

Instead, schools can create authentic family engagement and true partnership through purposeful, bidirectional, and cooperative interactions between the people in a child's home and school settings to promote optimal growth and development (Garbacz et al., 2018).

Family Engagement Supports Students with Disabilities



(Blackorby et al., 2007; Fefer et al., 2020 Goldman & Burke, 2017; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Musendo et al., 2023; Newman, 2005)

Figure 2. Impacts of Family Engagement on Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Leveraging PBIS to Strengthen Engagement

PBIS teams are particularly well suited to strengthen and monitor family engagement as many of the necessary key components are already in place. Partnership and co-development of foundational PBIS practices with families is highlighted within fidelity tools such as the [Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(TFI\) 3.0](#)¹ (Center on PBIS, 2025), with family engagement already being prioritized by many teams. Teams can leverage many of their existing actions and routines to strengthen family engagement. For example, existing operating procedures, such as meeting regularly and using data to inform and shape practices, can easily be leveraged to support family engagement efforts.

Further, PBIS provides a responsive framework in which the use of systems, practices, and data supports application to the local context (see the [PBIS Implementation Blueprint](#)² (Center on PBIS, 2023) for more detailed guidance). When applied to family engagement, *systems* support the educators in effectively implementing the practices and promote

sustainability, or the continued effective delivery of the practices. When applied to family engagement, *practices* are the school-initiated actions that promote engagement and foster partnership. The use of *data* allows teams to monitor the degree to which practices are used (fidelity) and progress towards *outcomes*. Together, these elements promote engagement that is *equitable* and *representative* of the school community.

Systems

Expanding the Leadership Team

One initial, yet essential step for teams is expansion of the Tier 1 leadership team to include family members who are representative of the school community and liaisons from family-educator service organizations (e.g., Parent Centers, education non-profits, parent advisory groups). For specific ways to partner with local Parent Centers, see [An Opportunity for Partnership: Collaboration with Local Parent Centers](#)³ (Autin et al., 2026).

We recommend teams examine their student demographics and recruit family members representative of those demographics. Ensuring equitable team membership may include recruiting parents of students with disabilities and families who are members of historically underserved populations at their school. Recruitment to leadership teams can be challenging. Teams may find the following suggestions helpful:

- Use a direct ask through an existing relationship (e.g., a special educator who has a history of working with a family, an existing parent volunteer with strong community ties or cultural liaison).
- Be clear and explicit about the purpose and predicted time commitment during initial conversations and about your strong interest in including family voices, experiences, and perspectives on your team.
- Extend recruitment to include grandparents, older siblings or cousins, other relatives, as well as family-educator service organization members (e.g., Parent Centers, education non-profits, parent advisory groups), not just parents.
- If logistics (time, transportation) are a barrier, consider a virtual meeting option or condensing the agenda items that rely most on family participation to shorten the time commitment.
- If family members are joining an existing team, be thoughtful about onboarding. Clearly define the family member's role on the team, orient to teaming process and procedures, and revisit team norms and mission statement. (Resources that support teaming and recruitment include [Serving on Groups](#)⁴ [SPAN Parent Advocacy, n.d.] and [Leading by Convening](#)⁵ [National Center for Systemic Improvement, n.d.]).

Making Family Engagement an Established Priority

In addition to teaming, the value of a systems approach to support and sustain implementation is essential when strengthening family engagement. Long-term adoption of practices (including the collection and use of data) will require that teams lead schools in identifying family engagement as an established priority with a shared level of importance. Some ways that a school can do this include:

- Deliver professional development conveying the benefits, barriers, and practices that lead to equitable engagement;
- Create or revise a mission statement highlighting families as partners;
- Link equitable engagement to existing school or district goals (e.g., improving attendance); and/or
- Include messaging of strengthening partnership in all school communications and initiatives.

To ensure that increasing family engagement remains a priority, teams may find it valuable to identify 1-2 family engagement facilitators within the team that are appointed to lead this charge. The role of facilitators is to keep family engagement top-of-mind and lead data collection and analysis efforts. To leverage existing systems, teams can include family engagement as a standing item in action plans and meeting agendas and incorporate the topic into professional development schedules. Lastly, integrate data actions into existing data collection calendars. For example, incorporate family engagement questions as part of

regularly collected climate data or complete a family engagement fidelity tool alongside the [Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(TFI\)](#)⁶ each year.

Ensuring Confidentiality

Concerns about confidentiality and privacy can materialize into a barrier preventing family involvement in governance activities (e.g., participating on school teams). Personnel may worry that families will receive information that violates laws, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), or break the circle of trust. As with all school meetings, care should be taken to prevent identifiable, individual student, family, or educator information being shared at meetings. Using operating procedures that pre-correct routines to preserve confidentiality strengthens the team process and maintains trust with partners. Preventing disclosure of information begins with having an agreed upon confidentiality norm. That norm then guides all aspects of the meeting process. For example, only including topics that meet the confidentiality norm prevents inadvertent disclosure of sensitive information. Discussion of topics that risk the disclosure of sensitive information should occur in a separate meeting and only involve the essential personnel needed for the discussion.

Practices

Planning for Family Engagement

Often, schools come up with a list of ideas on ways to engage families. Although this is a good starting point, it can be helpful to organize the strategies into different types of opportunities to partner with families. One way to conceptualize *equitable*

Strategies to Preserve Confidentiality and Trust During Tier 1 Meetings

- Embed a review of the confidentiality norm within communications
- Begin and end meetings with a review of the norm
- Only present aggregate schoolwide data
- Reframe discussions that veer into sensitive information

For more strategies on addressing this topic, see [Addressing Confidentiality While Supporting the Social-Emotional-Behavioral Needs of Students within Schools](#)⁸ (Perales et al., 2022).

engagement is to use an approach adapted from Barger et al. (2019) and the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement Family Engagement Core Competencies (NAFSCE, 2021). In this approach, school teams provide equitable opportunities for families to:

1. participate in school-based decision making (*governance*),
2. engage with school-based information (*access to information*),
3. contribute to school-based functions (*active participation*), and
4. transfer school-based practices outside of the school setting (*home-based application*).

By using this approach, schools can select practices that address many areas that they might not consider.

Here, the initial steps are school-based actions that provide opportunities for engagement and connection with families to build trust and understand what families need and want. Such partnerships are necessary for schools to see the positive outcomes for students, educators, and families identified above. Specific, school-initiated actions are further detailed in the family engagement fidelity tools, discussed in the sections that follow.

Differentiating Through MTSS

The availability of differentiated supports and resources is the bridge that makes family engagement and partnership a reality and conveys commitment to partnership in concrete and impactful ways. Using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach, like PBIS, guides the differentiation of school-based actions to reflect the strengths and expressed needs of the school community (see Figure 3 for guiding questions). For example, to engage in an upcoming school-based event, *all families* need information about the event (Tier 1), *some families* may need translation services to participate (Tier 2), and a *few families* may require assistance with transportation (Tier 3). An MTSS approach can also help identify opportunities for *all*, *some*, and a *few* families can contribute to school-based initiatives and outcomes. For more ideas on engaging all families, see Enhancing Family-School

Collaboration with Diverse Families (Witte et al., 2021). Methods to determine these needs are further discussed in the data section below.

Data

PBIS teams are accustomed to using data to monitor progress towards identified outcomes and measuring fidelity, or the degree to which practices are implemented as intended. PBIS teams that prioritize family engagement include and monitor data that reflect progress toward measurable outcomes. Action planning for robust and equitable family engagement benefits from three types of information to inform continuous improvement efforts:

- **Fidelity:** the degree to which family engagement practices are implemented as intended;
- **Perception of Strengths and Needs:** information about opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of community partners including families and about what resources are needed to further engage or carry out an activity; and
- **Impact:** the responsiveness of families to the school's engagement efforts.

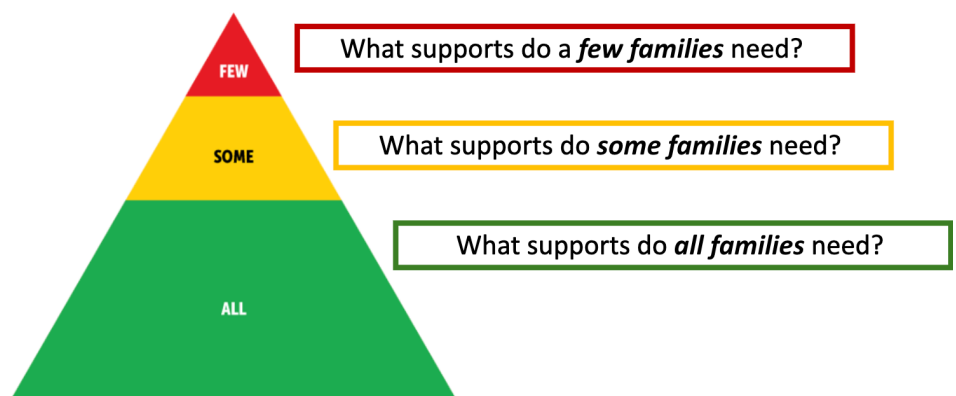


Figure 3. A Multi-tiered Approach to Family Partnership

Anchoring Family Engagement in Fidelity Considerations

It is recommended that teams anchor their actions using a fidelity tool (specifically designed with family engagement in mind) to monitor use of family engagement practices. Use of a fidelity tool may also increase teams' understanding of equitable family

engagement practices, including how to differentiate supports for families across tiers, and how to promote representative decision-making. Further, fidelity tools can help teams identify priority items to focus their attention and establish goals. Figure 4 describes several resources for measuring family engagement, including fidelity.

Figure 4. Measuring Family Engagement

Measuring Fidelity

Classroom Family Engagement Rubric:⁹ A rubric from the Flamboyant Foundation describing specific actions and competencies related to Classroom Family Engagement (Flamboyant Foundation, n.d.).

Equitable Family Engagement Fidelity Tool (EFE-FT):¹⁰ A 15-item measure designed to help school teams self-assess the extent to which they are using effective family engagement practices and action plan to strengthen their implementation (Peterson et al., 2025).

Tiered Fidelity Inventory: Family-School Collaboration (TFI: FSC):¹¹ A tool for school teams to identify and action plan core features of family-school collaboration within PBIS (Garbacz et al., 2022).

Measuring Perception and Need

Family-School Relationships Survey:¹² A survey that provides schools with a picture of family attitudes about several key topics (e.g., school fit, barriers to engagement, and roles and responsibilities) (Panorama Education, 2015).

Feedback and Input Survey Suite:¹³ A set of four surveys for school teams to learn about

how students, school personnel, and family members are experiencing the school's behavior support systems to obtain detailed feedback to increase the effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and sustainability of those systems (Center on PBIS, 2022).

School Climate Survey Suite:¹⁴ A set of four multidimensional surveys to measure student, teacher, administrator, faculty, and family perceptions of school climate (Center on PBIS, January 2022).

Measuring Impact

Attendance at events and membership on leadership teams: collect, disaggregate, and monitor to measure impact, reach, and representation.

Survey response rate: collect and disaggregate response rate to perception and need surveys to monitor (and action plan to increase) representation and voice.

Exit tickets after school-based events: use a brief survey to get feedback from attendees to guide future event planning.

Relying on a Data System that Considers Families

A strong data system will allow collection across all three areas to inform data-based decision-making. For example, climate data (perception) may suggest that families who have limited English proficiency do not feel inclined to attend school-based events because of the language barrier. The school team could respond to this need by adding interpretation services (e.g., using cultural liaisons at school-based events) and translated speaker notes. The school would advertise these resources and monitor the impact of this effort by disaggregating attendance data following events.

School teams who have strong systems may already be collecting data to ask and answer questions related to perception, need, and impact. However, we encourage a review of these systems to ensure that teams are (a) asking questions directly related to family engagement and (b) able to disaggregate data to monitor the degree to which results are representative of subgroups within the school community. Figure 4 describes several resources teams may use to measure family engagement.

Data Sharing

Beyond decision-making, data access may enhance commitment and buy-in among partners. Data sharing acknowledges implementation accountability by providing staff, students, and families with information about efforts, progress, and outcomes. PBIS teams that include family engagement measures in data sharing routines create opportunities for feedback loops by raising implementation needs and engaging in capacity building activities.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This brief has outlined how the elements of data, systems, and practices that many PBIS teams already have in place can be used to promote equitable family engagement. Teams can take purposeful next steps towards increasing family engagement and partnership by following precise action steps. These steps may include:

1. Establish equitable family engagement as a systems priority. This includes taking steps to expand the leadership team to include multiple family members representative of community demographics.
2. Connect with existing resources, including your local Parent Center to enrich practices. This will help identify resources and assist in action planning. You can [find the Parent Center in your state or community by visiting the Center for Parent Information & Resources \(CPIR\) website.](#)⁷
3. Complete a fidelity tool to enhance data and identify strengths and opportunities for growth, guide action planning, and monitor progress over time.
4. Identify priority items and establish goals across data, practices, and systems. This step requires review of baseline data (including fidelity scores) and may include planning for new data collection routines.

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Embedded Hyperlinks

1. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tfi-3>
2. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-implementation-blueprint>
3. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/an-opportunity-for-partnership-collaboration-with-local-parent-centers>
4. <https://spanadvocacy.org/serving-on-groups/>
5. <https://ncsi.wested.org/collection/leading-by-convening/>
6. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tfi-3>
7. <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>
8. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/addressing-confidentiality-while-supporting-the-social-emotional-behavioral-needs-of-students-within-schools>

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10. <https://nepbis.org/equitable-family-engagement/>
11. <https://www.midwestpbis2.org/home/about-us/project-epic>
12. <https://www.panoramaed.com/products/surveys/family-school-relationships-survey>
13. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/feedback-input-surveys-fis-manual>
14. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/school-climate-survey-suite>

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