

Strengthening Parent and Family Engagement in Special Education

Building Meaningful Partnerships to Support Student Success

Purpose & Overview

This guide supports educators in building strong, collaborative relationships with parents and families of students with disabilities. Family engagement is a critical component of student success and plays a key role in ensuring that supports outlined in IEPs or 504 plans are meaningful, consistent, and effective.

The purpose of this guide is to help teachers develop clear communication practices, build trust with families, and create opportunities for ongoing collaboration that support student growth both at school and at home.

Instructional Outcomes

By applying the strategies in this guide, teachers will be able to:

- Communicate effectively with families using clear and respectful language
 - Encourage family participation in the IEP and decision-making process
 - Share student progress in meaningful and understandable ways
 - Build trust and maintain consistent communication with families
 - Create opportunities for collaboration that support student success
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Why Family Engagement Matters

When families are actively involved in their child's education, students are more likely to:

- Demonstrate improved academic performance
- Show increased motivation and engagement
- Develop stronger behavior and social skills
- Experience greater consistency between home and school

Family engagement helps ensure that support strategies are reinforced across environments, leading to better outcomes for students.

Key Components of Effective Family Engagement

<i>Component</i>	<i>What It Means</i>	<i>Classroom Example</i>
Clear Communication	Information is easy to understand and free of technical language	Teacher explains goals using simple terms instead of formal terminology
Consistency	Regular updates are provided	Weekly or biweekly progress emails
Two-Way Communication	Families can share input and concerns	Teacher invites parent feedback during conferences
Respect and Trust	Families feel valued and heard	Teacher acknowledges parent insights about the student
Accessibility	Communication is accessible to all families	Use of translated materials or flexible meeting times

Real Classroom Examples of Family Engagement

Example 1: Clear Communication

Instead of saying:

“Your child is demonstrating difficulty with reading comprehension.”

Say:

“Your child is working on understanding what they read. We are helping them by practicing how to find the main idea and important details.”

Example 2: Consistent Updates

A teacher sends a short weekly message such as:

“This week, your child showed improvement in staying on task during independent work. We are continuing to work on completing assignments with fewer reminders.”

Example 3: Inviting Family Input

During a meeting, a teacher asks:

“What strategies seem to work best for your child at home when they are working on assignments?”

Strategies for Building Strong Partnerships

Teachers can strengthen family engagement by:

- Providing regular updates on student progress
 - Using clear, understandable language when communicating
 - Encouraging families to ask questions and share concerns
 - Creating a welcoming and supportive communication environment
 - Recognizing and valuing family input
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Family Communication Planning Tool

Teachers can plan communication using the following structure:

<i>Communication Type</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Example</i>
Weekly update	Share progress	Email summary of student performance
Conference	Discuss goals	Review IEP goals and progress
Informal check-in	Build relationships	Quick phone call or message
Progress report	Monitor growth	Share data and skill development

Student-Family Connection Check-In

Teachers can also support student involvement by encouraging communication between students and families.

Students can reflect on:

- What did I learn this week?
- What am I proud of?

- What do I need help with?
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Student Reflection Example

Reflection Question	Student Response
What did I learn this week?	<i>I learned how to solve multi-step math problems</i>
What am I proud of?	<i>I finished my work without help</i>
What do I need help with?	<i>I need help understanding word problems</i>

Teacher Implementation Reflection

Teachers may consider:

- Is communication clear and easy for families to understand?
 - Are families receiving regular updates about progress?
 - Are families encouraged to share input and ask questions?
 - Do families feel valued and included in decision-making?
 - Are communication methods accessible to all families?
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Connection to IEP Goals and Student Success

Family engagement supports:

- consistency in strategies between home and school
- reinforcement of skills outside the classroom

- improved communication about student needs
 - stronger collaboration during IEP meetings
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Closing Reflection

Strong family partnerships are essential in supporting students with disabilities. When teachers communicate clearly, build trust, and create opportunities for collaboration, families become active partners in the educational process, leading to improved student outcomes, stronger relationships, and more effective support systems.