

# NONTRADITIONAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES



**CPLAN**  
Collaborative Parent  
Leadership Action Network

## THE CHALLENGE:

Low-income parents often are not involved in their child's education in ways that schools expect and may have difficulty accessing traditional school and community resources intended to benefit children (Bolivar and Chrispeels, 2011). To support families in engaging in their child's education, schools should think outside the box when it comes to when, where, and how to engage families in education. Non-traditional engagement strategies create opportunities to engage family and community partners by identifying and drawing on their strengths, resources, and knowledge of the immediate environment to inform school programming, policies, events, and activities.

## STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS:

- ✓ **Create Events that Promote Family Participation from Multiple Schools or Districts:** Invite regional or geographically diverse families and staff to one event to enable community building, best practice strategizing, and resource sharing between existing school communities.
- ✓ **Amplify Youth Voice to Engage Families:** Prepare students to lead meetings or conferences, and create incentives for students that will increase family participation at events. Create events focused on students sharing their projects, achievements, and opinions, and ask students to promote events and disseminate information.
- ✓ **Host Events and Meetings in the Community:** Plan intentionally fun events for families and students, such as family days at bowling alleys or skating rinks. Families are more likely to attend an event that will be fun for their children.
- ✓ **Create and Support the Expectation that School Staff Engage with Families in the Community:** Encourage teachers and other members of staff to meet and interact with local residents and neighborhood businesses. Stepping outside of the school walls provides greater insight into the community environment.
- ✓ **Designate "Foster Families" for Teachers and School Staff:** Find school families who would be willing to take a teacher in, show them the neighborhood, and get them acquainted with the community. Include all school staff in these efforts.
- ✓ **Combine Fun and Meaningful Activities:** Pair a family fun day with informational sessions about resources from the school or outside agencies, updates on school policies, or opportunities for support with social-emotional learning.
- ✓ **Invest in Parent Councils:** Ensure that Parent Councils have the tools and resources they need from the school to grow and involve more families. Build space for Parent Council meetings into other school events to maximize participation.
- ✓ **Vary the Size of Events:** Host small, classroom-focused events as well as larger school- or district-focused events to support families in multiple environments. Some families may enjoy the bustling nature of full-school events, and others will prefer a more intimate setting with their child's class.
- ✓ **Build Partnerships with the Local Community:** Offer free use of school space to encourage community organizations to bring their services into the school.
- ✓ **Collaborate Across Schools or Districts to Provide Adult Education Opportunities** that tap into the wealth of knowledge of community members such as public librarians, fire officials, and nonprofit agency representatives, who can share information with families.





## Part 1: Identify Your Family Engagement Challenge.

Non-traditional engagement strategies create opportunities to engage family and community partners by identifying and drawing on their strengths, resources and knowledge of the immediate environment to inform school programming, policies, events and activities.



Culturally responsive family engagement helps schools move beyond traditional methods of involvement by honoring the diverse resources that families bring to the table through the development of partnerships that improve families' ability to navigate the educational system and teachers' ability to navigate the communities in which their students live and learn.



## Part 2: Craft a Non-Traditional Engagement Strategy.

**How can you engage families as partners throughout the process in non-traditional ways?**

**How can you engage non-traditional community partners and stakeholders?**

**How can you build on existing school programming?**



**How can you make your solution culturally responsive?**