

Student Engagement and Attendance Center

Planning Tool for Family Engagement

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Disclaimer

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Planning Tool for Family Engagement

Family engagement can be a key strategy to reduce chronic absenteeism. When families are meaningfully and continuously engaged, they can positively affect their student’s development, academic achievement, and health and well-being and can support students in making attendance a priority.¹ Families can also work with schools, education agencies, and community agencies to identify barriers to attendance and work together to make changes.² This tool is designed to help state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and other educators work as a team to move toward practices with high authenticity for family engagement—practices that leverage relationships with families and seek to engage meaningfully with them. By using a continuous improvement process, teams at local, district, and state levels will collaboratively assess current family engagement practices, identify gaps, determine improvement practices that align with the components of authentic engagement, and prioritize practices to implement. Teams will then create an actionable plan to monitor and adjust practices for continuous improvement with the goal of effectively engaging a diverse range of families and leveraging their lived experiences to improve school engagement and attendance supports and outcomes. Family engagement is a process, and this tool represents steps for teams to take throughout this process (see figure 1). We hope that teams will see this as a living, iterative document and return to it repeatedly.

¹ Mapp, K.L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/embracing-new-normal-toward-more-liberatory-approach-family-engagement/>; Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Family Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/family-engagement>.

² Attendance Works. (2018). *Bringing Attendance Home: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence*. Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/bringing-attendance-home/>.

Planning for Family Engagement

Moving toward authentic engagement ensures families are treated as partners in supporting students and the school community. Educators and family members share the responsibility in this partnership. This approach to family engagement becomes part of the sustainable core practices of the attendance policies and supports currently in place. Throughout this process, the team will examine current family engagement practices to determine where they fall on the continuum of authentic engagement, ranging from low to high authenticity. Authenticity in this context means moving from simply having families participate to engaging them as leaders and partners. Rather than plan *for* families in the school community, teams will plan *with* them, using families’ strengths and perspectives and building relationships with them that are asset based, collaborative, interactive, and built on mutual trust. Table 1 illustrates differences between low- and high-authenticity family engagement components. Teams can use this table to help with self-reflection on current youth engagement practices.

Authentic Engagement Practices³

Table 1. Family engagement components with low and high authenticity

Low authenticity	High authenticity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Designed with a deficit-based lens ■ Nondominant families (families that are not present for every opportunity) treated at best as spectators ■ Event-driven or add-on programs ■ Families’ expertise and cultural capital overlooked or devalued ■ Individual responsibility ■ Adversarial ■ Compliance focused ■ Random acts ■ One-time project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Families involved in day-to-day work of education ■ Co-designed models with families ■ Shared responsibility in partnership ■ Strengths based, valuing family expertise and culture ■ Core practices rather than add-on programs ■ Learning and outcome driven ■ Ongoing opportunities for feedback that is heard and valued to help drive decision making ■ Built on mutual trust ■ Linked to learning and development ■ Culturally responsive and respectful ■ Collaborative and interactive

³ Mapp, K.L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/embracing-new-normal-toward-more-liberatory-approach-family-engagement/>; Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Family Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/family-engagement>; Attendance Works. (2018). *Bringing Attendance Home: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence*. Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/bringing-attendance-home/>.

Figure 1. Family engagement planning process



To make sustained systematic improvements to family engagement practices, there must be infrastructure support that removes barriers to progress. The dual-capacity framework,⁴ represented in the column “Organizational conditions” in table 2, identifies three organizational conditions that can help foster changes in practices. Before teams start the planning process, consider these key conditions and whether they are in place in your organization in support of your engagement efforts. Highlight where an aligned infrastructure is in place and where additional supports might be needed. In addition to organizational conditions, key goals and outcomes must also drive family engagement activities.

Table 2. Dual-capacity framework to foster changes in family engagement

Organizational conditions	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Systemic: embraced by leadership ■ Integrated: embedded in all structures and systems ■ Sustained: supported with resources and policies⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Process conditions, organizational conditions, goals, and outcomes, as identified in Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement from Carnegie Corporation of New York ➤ Low-, medium-, and high-impact practices, as outlined in MiFamily: Michigan’s Family Engagement Framework from Michigan Department of Education



⁴ Mapp, K.L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/embracing-new-normal-toward-more-liberatory-approach-family-engagement/>.

⁵ Ibid.

Step 1. Set your goals and build your team. This step helps determine the level (e.g., SEA, LEA, school) at which the family engagement practices will focus. Use the guiding questions to help facilitate this conversation with an internal team or existing committee that focuses on attendance. After identifying the focus level, build a broader team by selecting internal and external collaborators who are most affected by attendance issues and whose perspectives, lived experiences, and resources can support improvements to student attendance. Note these collaborators in table 3. After you determine key parties, engage them in co-designing this work, modeling the types of partnerships that contribute to more authentic practices for family engagement in steps 2–7.



Guiding Questions

While building the team, keep the following questions in mind:

- ★ What is the level of focus (e.g., SEA, LEA, school)?
- ★ What is the goal for engagement?
- ★ Who are the key partners to engage on attendance issues at this level?
- ★ Where are gaps in engagement?



Resource

- [Effective Communications for Stakeholder Engagement Checklist](#) from U.S. Department of Education

Big-Picture Goal

We would like to collaborate with families to _____ (goal/desired outcome).

Figure 2. Example of collaborators



Note: LEA = local education agencies

Step 2.a. Assess current practices. In this step, the team will document current engagement practices and their intended outcomes in table 4. Assess each practice by referring to the engagement components with low and high levels of authenticity in table 1. Be as specific as possible with current practices and intended outcomes to ensure the team can effectively evaluate the level of authenticity of each practice. Next, discuss and decide which practices to keep, improve, or eliminate. Use any available data to help inform the team’s decision, including team members’ diverse perspectives and feedback from families who are engaged through current practices.



As a team, consider these questions:

- ★ What are the current practices for engaging families?
- ★ Why are these current practices in place? What are the intended outcomes of each current practice on family engagement?
- ★ What are the target audience and engagement technique for each practice?
- ★ How would the team rate each practice in terms of its authenticity? How does the team know which practices have high authenticity and which have low authenticity?
- ★ Who else is the team partnering with? How does their authentic engagement differ from the current practices?
- ★ What action (keep, improve, eliminate) does the team recommend for each practice?
- ★ What is the priority for each practice?

Step 2.b. Assess gaps. Use table 5 to reflect on your current engagement practices. Describe the practice, identify any gaps in authentic engagement, and list any current collaborators within this practice. You can refer to table 1 on page 2 of this tool to reflect on how gaps might be closed through implementing engagement practices with high authenticity. Once table 5 is complete, the next steps will guide the team to address any identified gaps.



As a team, reflect on each question to identify gaps:

- ★ What attendance needs are addressed through current practices? What needs are not addressed?
- ★ Which families are engaged through current practices? Which are not engaged?
- ★ Where do we see highly authentic engagement in our practices? Where is engagement lower?
- ★ How do we know this information?

For each gap, ask the following questions:

- ★ What current practices could be improved or adapted to fill these gaps? What resources (e.g., organizational or policy supports, time, staffing materials) are needed to make these improvements?
- ★ What new practices are needed?
- ★ Which collaborators should be included?

Table 5. Gap analysis

Gap in practice	Gap in authentic engagement	Currently involved collaborators
<p><i>Example: We present our attendance policies and supports to families during back-to-school events without any two-way engagement. We do not share the data with families or engage families in problem solving.</i></p>	<p><i>Example: We want to create more opportunities for families to provide insight into student attendance needs, and we want to give families opportunities to help co-design supports that meet those needs.</i></p>	<p><i>Example: School staff, family liaison, families, community leaders</i></p>

Step 3. Choose practices to improve or gaps to fill. Select a set of practices to improve (see table 4) or identify gaps in existing engagement practices that your team will address with new practices (see table 5). Describe the factors that might affect the decision to prioritize a certain practice or gap.

Use the data you created in step 2 as your team collaborates on the following:

- ▶ Select practices your team labeled “improve” in table 4 or gaps your team captured in table 5. List these practices or gaps in table 6.
- ▶ Rank these practices or gaps in order of priority and potential impact on improving attendance policies, supports, and outcomes.
- ▶ Determine which practices align best with the area of focus and target audience for your authentic engagement and which are most likely to lead to highly authentic engagement practices.
- ▶ Based on the teams’ diverse experiences, consider which practices seem most likely to be effective in improving family engagement in student attendance policies, supports, and outcomes.



Consider these questions when deciding which practices or gap to prioritize:

- ★ Which practices are most aligned with the team’s goals?
- ★ Which practices are most likely to engage a diverse range of families?
- ★ Which practices are most likely to address the attendance needs of a diverse range of youth?
- ★ Which practices would be best supported by existing organizational conditions?
- ★ Which practices would require different organizational conditions?

Table 6. Priority practices

Practice/gap	Key factors to consider for prioritization
<i>Example: Back-to-School Night</i>	<i>Example: We think improving our Back-to-School Night engagement is important because it's at the beginning of the year when more parents attend and there's more time to offer authentic engagement activities.</i>

Step 4. Brainstorm possibilities. Work together as a team to think of possibilities and new ideas to engage families in improving student attendance policies, supports, and outcomes. Reflect on the extent to which each idea incorporates highly authentic engagement practices and harnesses existing strengths in organizational conditions (see table 2). After developing a list of ideas in the brainstorming space, assess the fit and feasibility to implement each practice.

***Fit** is defined as how well the program or practice aligns with the implementing site and target populations' perceptions of strengths and needs, values, culture, and history, other initiatives and priorities, and internal capacity resources available for implementation.*

***Feasibility** is defined as how well the program or practice can be integrated into the implementing site based on how operationalized the program or practice is, the supports available at the site to support implementation, and the strength and availability of research data.⁶*

Take the following actions during this step:

- ▶ Focus on how you can improve the current practices or add new practices to fill gaps, depending on what you prioritized in step 3.
- ▶ Encourage an open exchange of ideas—even if an idea is not the right fit, it could inspire further ideas in other members of the team.
- ▶ Get creative and use the diverse perspectives of the team to expand beyond current efforts.



Resource

- ➔ [Hexagon discussion and analysis tool](#) from National Implementation Research Network

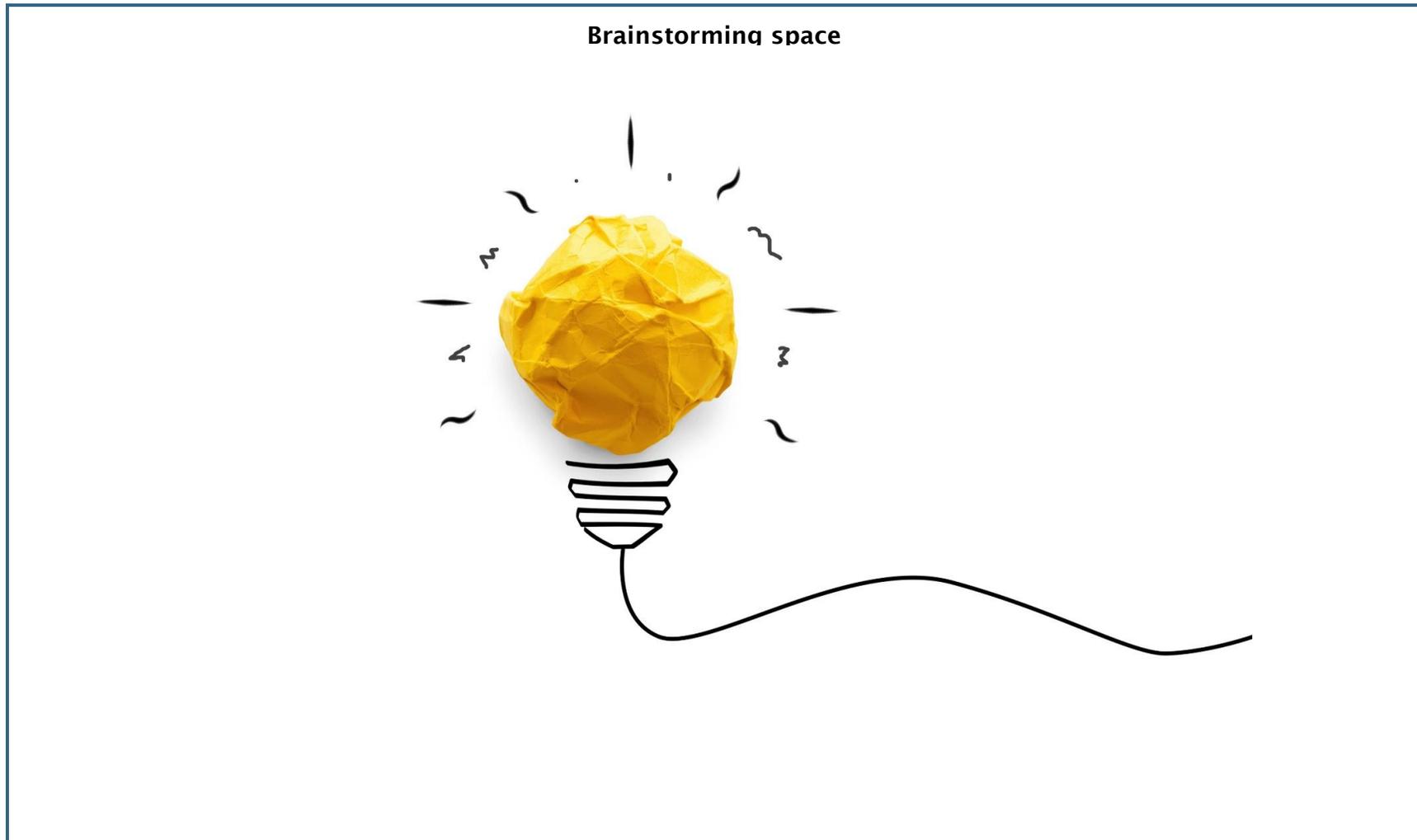


Brainstorm the following questions:

- ★ What practices have other organizations or SEAs, LEAs, or schools used to generate authentic engagement? How could the team adopt or adapt those practices?
- ★ What strategies have engaged families in other areas of education, outside of attendance? What would the team need to adapt those strategies for attendance?
- ★ What resources and evidence-based practices exist for authentically engaging families? How could the team adopt or adapt those practices for the context?

⁶ Metz, A., & Louison, L. (2018). *The Hexagon Tool: Exploring Context*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, National Implementation Research Network, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved from <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/resources/hexagon-exploration-tool>.

Other options for taking detailed notes from your team discussion include brain mapping, flowcharts, web-based brainstorming platforms, or any brainstorming technique that works best for your team.



Step 5. Identify practices. Work as a team to consider each new or adapted practice brainstormed in step 4. Using table 7, list the practices and your intended outcomes, compare the practices with the authentic engagement practices in table 1, and note specific engagement components. Next, identify the current organizational conditions that might support or hinder the practices, and describe the practices' fit and feasibility. While many types of goals and outcomes are possible, it is common for goals to focus on building capabilities (e.g., skills and knowledge), improving connections between partners, creating networks, facilitating a shift in beliefs or values, and, finally, boosting the confidence of those involved.⁷



Ask the following questions for each practice:

- ★ What are the intended outcomes of the new practice?
- ★ What potential unintended outcomes from implementing the new practice should the team keep in mind? How can the team protect against these unintended outcomes?
- ★ How does the new practice improve on current practices with low authenticity? What components of the new practice build high authenticity?
- ★ How will the team ensure these practices with high authenticity are realistic and sustainable?
- ★ What current organizational conditions (e.g., leadership, systems and structures, resources) could facilitate implementing the new practice? What organizational conditions might act as barriers?
- ★ How well does the new practice align with the population's strengths, needs, values, culture, and history?¹
- ★ How well does the new practice align with other existing initiatives and priorities?
- ★ How well defined is the practice? What elements would still need to be defined before implementing?
- ★ What supports are available for implementation?
- ★ What is the evidence base for this practice?

⁷ Mapp, K.L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/embracing-new-normal-toward-more-liberatory-approach-family-engagement/>.

Table 7. New practice exploration

New practice	Intended outcome	Authentic engagement components	Organizational conditions	Fit and feasibility

Step 6.a. Create goals. In this step, your team will develop goals for each practice described in step 5, identify the important collaborators, and determine any additional resources needed. In table 8, focus on writing goals that are SMARTIE: strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.⁸ For each practice, your team could create a single, comprehensive SMARTIE goal or several goals, depending on the complexity of implementing the practice.



Resource

- ➔ [SMARTIE goal overview](#) from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- ➔ [SMARTIE goal planning template](#) from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Table 8. Goals for new practices

New practice to implement	SMARTIE goal (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable)
<i>Example: Back-to-School Nights with two-way engagement</i>	<i>Example: By the beginning of the school year, we will share three sample draft agendas for Back-to-School Nights that include activities to promote two-way engagement for families with diverse lived experiences and different preexisting relationships with the school.</i>

⁸ The Management Center. (2021). *SMARTIE Goals Worksheet*. Retrieved from <https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/smartie-goals-worksheet/>.

Step 6.b. Create an action plan. After documenting the new practices and developing SMARTIE goals, begin creating an action plan in table 9 for each new practice the team has decided to implement. Outline an action step, the responsible parties, and the resources needed to accomplish the goal. Finally, set a timeframe and due date for the action step.

As your team creates the action plan, consider the following:

- ▶ Make sure each step is actionable, necessary, and realistic based on your team’s capacity.
- ▶ Assign teams or specific individuals for each task, keeping their availability in mind to ensure the goal stays on track.
- ▶ Determine a timeframe for your implementation that includes review dates, key milestones, and the final completion date. Build in extra time in case setbacks occur or if the team adds tasks (e.g., gather perspectives from more collaborators).

Table 9. Action plan

Action step	People responsible	Resources needed	Timeframe	Due date

Step 7. Implement and monitor; revise as needed. The key to implementing new practices is planning for success. Teams can achieve success by consciously collecting data, monitoring implementation and impacts, and revising as needed. When done correctly, this process can become a continuous improvement loop. Use table 10 to record the practices monitored, data collected to measure progress, any impacts observed, and the data collection date.

Figure 3. Continuous improvement process



Ask the following question during implementation:

- ★ What data sources can the team use to monitor implementation?
- ★ What data can the team collect to determine each new practice’s effectiveness, authentic engagement level, and impact?
- ★ What are the intended outcomes of each practice your team identified in table 7?
- ★ What unintended outcomes are possible? What data might the team collect to monitor for unintended outcomes?
- ★ When will each practice be implemented? When will the data become available?
- ★ How often will the team collect and review data?

Table 10. Implementation monitoring plan

Practice	Data	Impact	Date

Employing a continuous improvement process to collaboratively assess, design, and implement practices that align with the components of authentic engagement, teams will be able to use this tool at local, district, and state levels to help assess and identify current family engagement practices. Effectively engaging a diverse range of families and leveraging their lived experiences, collaborators will be able to improve school engagement and attendance supports and outcomes. Family engagement is a process, and this tool represents steps that teams can take throughout this process. We hope that teams will see this as a living, iterative document and return to it repeatedly.