



Family Engagement Month

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

History

Every November, schools across the country celebrate National Family Engagement Month. This special month highlights the powerful teamwork between schools, families, and communities, which helps students do their very best. Decades of research prove a simple fact: When families get involved in education, students get better grades, feel happier, and are much more likely to graduate from high school.

Over the years, the way schools work with families has changed. In the past, "family involvement" usually meant passive tasks, like baking cookies for a fundraiser or chaperoning a field trip. Today, schools focus on true "family engagement." This means families are treated as equal partners who help make important decisions about their child's learning journey.

This special month became official thanks to groups like the National PTA and the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE). Way back in November 1994, the U.S. Department of Education launched a major partnership to connect families and schools. Ever since, governors and national leaders have officially named November as the time to celebrate this teamwork. It gives schools a perfect opportunity right before winter to check in with families, build stronger relationships, and honor the hard work families do every day.

Core Principles of Engagement

Core Rules of Family Engagement

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework

Created by education expert Karen Mapp, this framework is a guide that schools use to help both teachers and families work together. It focuses on building the skills, knowledge, and confidence of school staff and family members so they can form a strong team.

Shift from "Involvement" to "Engagement"

- Involvement: The school makes all the rules. They simply ask families to show up for set events, and the school acts as the only expert on education.
- Engagement: The school actually listens to families. They create two-way conversations and treat families as valuable partners who know their own children best.

Asset-Based Mindset

This means schools focus on the strengths of every family. Teachers recognize that no matter how much money a family makes, what race they are, or what language they speak at home, every family brings something valuable to the table and wants their child to succeed.





Family Engagement Month

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Barriers To Belonging

Invisible Barriers

Bad School Memories from the Past

Many families and caretakers had a tough time when they were students. They might have faced discrimination, struggled with bad grades, or gotten into trouble a lot. Because of those memories, just walking into a school building today can make them feel anxious or defensive. This often causes them to skip school events altogether.

Confusing Language and Rules

School letters and meetings are often packed with confusing language, legal terms, and abbreviations like IEP, 504, or ELL. When schools use this complicated insider talk, it creates an immediate divide. It leaves families feeling confused, intimidated, and left out when they try to speak up for their child.

Strict School Calendars

Schools often schedule open houses, family-teacher conferences, and volunteer slots strictly during standard business hours. This creates an invisible wall for working-class families, single families, or anyone working night and weekend shifts. It makes it nearly impossible for them to attend.

Common Misconceptions

"If they don't show up, they don't care" – When a family member misses a school play, a meeting, or a conference, teachers often assume that the family just doesn't care about education. This guess ignores real-life struggles. Many times, families want to be there but can't because they don't have a ride, can't find a babysitter, or have strict jobs that won't let them take time off.

"Every family looks the same" – Schools often send out notes meant only for a traditional "Mother and Father" home. This leaves out the reality of many modern families. Lots of students live with grand-families, foster families, aunts and uncles, LGBTQ+ families, or in big households with multiple generations. Use of the word(s) "family/families" is more inclusive. When schools use the wrong wording, it makes these families feel left out and ignored.

"Sending flyers counts as communication" – Sending out endless automatic newsletters, mass emails, or paper flyers is just one-way information. It isn't real communication. True engagement requires a two-way street where families can actually ask questions, share their ideas, and help make decisions.

Common Microaggressions

"Why didn't you help your child with this homework?": When teachers ask this, they assume the family has the free time, knows the school subject, or speaks English well enough to do the assignment. This question accidentally shames the family for things they might not be able to control.

"He does so well despite his home life": This sounds like a compliment, but it is actually hurtful. It treats a student's family or neighborhood like a problem to overcome, instead of a source of strength. It ignores the good things the family brings to the student's life.

Only calling home when a student gets in trouble: If a school only calls a family to deliver bad news about behavior, it breaks down trust. They learn to dread seeing the school's phone number on their screen, which makes them want to avoid talking to teachers altogether.





Family Engagement Month

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Education Connections

Alignment with FCPS Portrait of a Graduate

- Critical Thinker: When schools involve families in analyzing school-wide data or co-designing school improvement plans, it models collaborative critical thinking, challenging families and staff to evaluate complex root causes together.
- Effective Communicator: Establishing multi-tiered, multi-lingual, and reciprocal communication structures teaches students, staff, and families how to articulate needs clearly, navigate conflict, and build mutual respect across diverse lived experiences.
- Empowered Learner: When family engagement practices are standard, families are equipped with the specific learning targets and tools needed to support autonomous, self-directed learning at home, bridging the gap between school and life.
- Creative Problem Solver: Bringing families, community leaders, and educators together to tackle complex community issues—such as chronic absenteeism, digital divides, or food insecurity—fosters innovative, collective problem-solving.
- Collaborative Team Member: Treating the family as an essential component of the student's educational team cultivates deep collective accountability, preparing students to navigate complex collaborative dynamics in the real world.

KY Standards Alignment

- Universal Social Studies Inquiry Standards
 - Using Evidence: Gathering relevant evidence from credible sources; in Grades 6-12, determining accuracy, context, bias, and intended use.
 - Communicating Conclusions: Constructing explanations and/or arguments using reasoning and information; in Grades 6-12, using claims and evidence from multiple sources while acknowledging counterclaims, strengths, and limitations of the arguments.
 - K.C.RR.1: Identify roles and responsibilities of self and others at home, school and the community.
 - HS.C.CP.3: Evaluate the civil responsibilities of individuals within a society
 - HS.C.PR.2: Explain how active citizens can affect the lawmaking process locally, nationally and internationally.
- 



Family Engagement Month

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



Fayette County
Public Schools

Resources

Primary (K-5)

- Focus: Welcoming Environments, Identity Affirmation, & Early Literacy Partnerships.
- Resources: Interactive home-reading toolkits (like Reading Is Fundamental frameworks) and children's books celebrating diverse family structures, such as *The Family Book* by Todd Parr or *Stella Brings the Family* by Miriam B. Schiffer.
- Curriculum Idea: Host student-led exhibitions or family literacy nights where primary students read their own writing directly to their families, turning academic reporting into a community celebration.
- Inclusion Tip: Proactively audit classroom forms, newsletters, and intake sheets to replace outdated labels like "Mother/Father" with inclusive terms like "Parent/Guardian/Caretaker."

Secondary (6-12)

- Focus: Academic Co-Planning, Shared Decision-Making, & Transitional Advocacy.
 - Resources: Planning frameworks from the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) and toolkits from The Flamboyant Foundation (such as their research on high-impact home visits).
 - Curriculum Idea: Transition traditional parent-teacher conferences into "Student-Led Conferences," where middle and high school students take ownership of their data, presenting their strengths, growth areas, and future goals directly to their guardians and teachers.
 - Inclusion Tip: Proactively ensure that all crucial school communications, digital grading portals, and secondary transition planning resources are available in the native languages of your community, utilizing professional translation services rather than relying on students to translate complex academic or legal terms for their parents.
 - National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE): nafsce.org
 - The Global Family Research Project: globalfrp.org
- 