



Overcoming Challenges to Family Engagement

Use this tool to explore common family engagement challenges, possible underlying causes, and potential solutions. The first few have been filled in, the others are blank to generate staff discussion.

Challenges	Possible underlying causes	Potential solutions
Forms sent home to be signed are never returned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth misplaces the form. - Youth forgets to show it to family. - Families don't understand the form. - Family members work in the afternoon and evening and don't see youth until they are asleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a folder for important forms. - Choose one day a week for important forms to go home so families know when to look for them. - Translate the form into the appropriate languages and go over the form with youth so they can explain them to their family members. - Send forms electronically or through the mail.
Only a few families attend open houses or other meetings related to the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Families don't have easy access to transportation to the program site. - Family members can't get time off from their jobs. - Family members don't have people to look after their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating around bus schedules, providing transportation and having your event at a more central location are all ways to increase attendance. - Plan events on weekends or repeat the event on different days and at different times to allow more families to attend.
Families never answer our phone calls and don't return them when we leave messages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Families phone numbers may have changed or been disconnected. - Families may not be able to reach you during the day because of work or family obligations. - Families may not speak English well enough to carry on a phone conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get updated contact information throughout the course of year and use other communication methods (email, regular mail, etc.). - At the beginning of the year, let families know when you can be reached. - Use an interpreter to talk for you or learn enough of their home language to ask them to come in for a visit.
Family members don't come into the building when they pick up their children.		
Families don't take the program seriously. They just view us as babysitters.		





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Families have had bad past experiences in schools and are reluctant to get involved.		
Families don't know how to help their children with homework.		
Other:		





Reaching Out to Families

- **Good news cards:** Send home postcards or short, handwritten notes about something you really appreciate about a child in your program or something you noticed them doing well this week.
- **Do at home projects:** Create a project kit related to a theme you are covering in your program. Include all materials necessary and encourage children to share the project with an adult. Don't require that the project be brought back, this is just a way to share some of what you do in afterschool. Include information about what academic skills youth are practicing when they do the project.
- **School mascot:** Send a stuffed animal or small toy to "visit" a different family each week. Include a disposal camera so the family can take pictures of the toy in their home. Display the pictures at your program.
- **Family book reviews:** Send home a book that youth really enjoy. On the inside cover, tape a business envelope and fill it with blank cards. Ask youth to share the book and write down what the family thinks about the book and put the card in the envelope. The next family will get to read what others think and add their own comments.
- **Disposable cameras:** Send cameras home with "reporter" assignments. Ask youth to take pictures of their families enjoying meals, sharing customs, or doing a favorite activity. Display the photos in your program.
- **Family stories:** Ask adults to record stories about their families in their home language. Youth can interpret the stories for classmates.
- **Parent newsletter:** Send regular newsletters home highlighting program accomplishments.
- **Family collage:** Make a collage or sculpture with items that families contribute. Consider themes like "food we eat" or "what we see from our window."
- **Staff introductions:** Send home photos and short biographies to introduce staff members.
- **Take home menus:** Keep a stack of take-out or delivery menus by the phone in your program. Invite parents to call for take-out and play or talk with youth while they are waiting for the food to be ready.
- **Breakfast on the go:** Hand out granola bars or muffins and coffee in paper cups with lids one morning to families as they drop off youth.
- **Other:** _____





Creating a Family Guidebook

Your Family Guidebook should clearly explain program policies and procedures and help families understand how to be involved in the program. Key components of a Family Guidebook include:

- An introduction to your program
 - Program history
 - Goals and objectives
 - A welcome from the director
- Directory of staff members
 - Include pictures
 - Have short bios
 - History in the program and working with youth
- Calendar of events
 - Special events
 - Holidays
 - Early or late days
- Program rules and expectations
 - Rules for different program locations (outside, bus, classrooms, etc.)
 - Responsibilities of youth in the program
 - Consequences for not following rules and procedures
 - Rewards for positive behavior
- Policies and procedures
 - Guidelines for food served and allowed in the program
 - Arrival and dismissal
 - Medication policies
 - Telephone use by children
 - Bringing items from home into the program
- Academic expectations
 - Amount of homework done in the program
 - Sharing of grades and state test information
 - How families can help
- Involvement opportunities and policies
 - Family involvement philosophy
 - Existing and potential opportunities for involvement
 - Ways to share concerns and ideas

Other Ideas:

- Leave areas such as “Responsibilities of youth” and “Potential opportunities for involvement” blank to allow youth and families to fill them in once they are decided.
- Include a table of contents or quick reference guide that helps families get to specific pages fast.
- Include a history of past family involvement in the program
- Include your guidebook or parts of it. on your program website
- Leave blank sections where families can fill in updated information such as youth grades and progress reports and family volunteer hours or points.





Vocabulary Parade (Grades K-6)

In this sample lesson, students create and present simple costumes that visually represent vocabulary words appropriate for their grade level. This is a good example of how to promote interaction with new vocabulary words in an engaging and creative way.

Duration: 45 minutes (can be extended)

Learning Goals

- Understand the meaning of a vocabulary word
- Create a costume that visually represents the vocabulary word
- Present the meaning and teach usage of the vocabulary word to others

Materials Needed

- Vocabulary word list appropriate to grade level of students (See attached lists for high frequency words that students are likely to encounter in their academic learning this year; students K-2 may use the Grade 2 list.)
- Colored paper
- Paper plates
- Yarn or string
- Scissors
- Colored pencils, crayons and/or markers
- Tape
- Dictionaries (print or online)

Preparation

- Invite family and community members to attend students' vocabulary parade
- Print enough copies of the Tier 2 Vocabulary list that students in small groups (3-4 individuals) can share one list.
- Write each vocabulary word from the word list on slip of paper to allow students to pick one at random for the parade
- Make an example of a vocabulary headpiece and paper plate necklace to show students
- Set up room for small group work
- Collect art materials and distribute so that each student will get a few sheets of colored paper, a paper plate, and enough yarn to hang the plate around their neck. Small groups can share scissors, tape, and colored pencils and or markers.
- Have print dictionaries available or open online dictionary, e.g. www.merriam-webster.com, on smart devices for student use

What to Do

- Engage students by asking them why it is important to learn new vocabulary words. Guide conversation around specific areas of study or careers, e.g. engineers, musicians, scientists, doctors, teachers, lawyers, librarians, accountants, etc., that will require knowledge of domain-





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specific vocabulary, words typically used by people in that field. Ask them for some examples of domain-specific words they have learned recently.

- Explore the vocabulary list for the students' grade level. Ask students what words they know or have heard before and where they might see this word being used, e.g. a basketball coach would use the word "bounce" (from 2nd grade list) as s/he teaches the players the game. Show students your vocabulary headpiece and paper plate necklace, sharing your word, its meaning, a sentence to demonstrate its meaning and an example of its usage in real life.
- Explain that students will be creating their own vocabulary word costume and presenting their word in a vocabulary parade. Organize students into small groups and have each student choose one of the prepared slips of paper—this will be their vocabulary word for the parade. Each student will design a headpiece using colored paper featuring his/her word. While some students are working on their headpieces, other students can write the definition of their word on the back of their plates. Help students use the yarn or string to turn their plate into a necklace.
- Encourage students to decorate their headpiece and plate necklace with paper cutouts, pictures and/or symbols that will help them remember what their word means. They may also create wristlets or other costume pieces if they wish.
- As they work on their costumes, have students come up with a sentence that demonstrates the meaning of their vocabulary word and an example of where this word would be used. Have them practice this explanation in their small group and get feedback from their peers on their sentence and example. If they wish, students can write their sentence and example on the back of their plate, along with the definition.
- Present students' costumes in a vocabulary parade! Have students parade around and display their costumes to family and community members. Give each student an opportunity to share their word, its meaning, their sentence and their example. Ask each student to also identify the meaning of one to two other vocabulary words they learned as a result of the parade.
- Extend learning if time allows: Read *Miss Alaineus* by Debra Fraiser. Use ideas and activities from *Host A Vocabulary Parade: A How-To Kit with Classroom Extensions* (<http://www.debrafrasier.com/docs/miss-alaineus/vocab-parade-full.pdf>)

Evaluate (Outcomes to Look For)

- Students work together to gain a better understanding of new vocabulary words
- Students identify the meanings of two to three new vocabulary words
- Students make connections between new vocabulary words and their usage in real life

(Tier 2 Vocabulary lists for grades 2-6 can be adapted from the Word Up Project's vocabulary lists: <http://flocabulary.s3.amazonaws.com/pdfs/flat/word-up-word-lists.pdf>)





Goals for Family Engagement

Clarify goals for family engagement. Work with staff to develop short and longer-term goals, and ensure that all work as a team to achieve them. For each goal, list the steps involved, person or people responsible, and the resources or materials needed.

Goals	Steps Involved	Who is Responsible	Resources Needed
Create a program space where all families feel welcome			
Ensure the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families and students are met			
Help families gain access to the organizations, people, and resources they need to support their children and themselves			
Find innovative and differentiated ways to involve families that utilize their skills and address their concerns			
Help families find additional ways to be involved in their children’s lives and support their healthy development			
Support better student behavior and academic performance in school and the program			
Other:			

