

ESSA Quick Reference Brief: Family Engagement under Title I, Part A

Families are their children’s first and most important teachers, and engaging families in partnership is a critical component to student success. **Family engagement** is any way that a child’s adult caretaker (biological parents, guardians, foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.) effectively supports student learning and healthy development. As described by Dr. Karen Mapp, Senior Lecturer at the Harvard School of Education and author of the [Dual Capacity Framework](#), family engagement is “a **full, equal, and equitable partnership** among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development from birth through college and career.”

*8 Conditions for Meaningful Family Engagement © 2019
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What the Law Says

Title I, Part A requires substantive family engagement. In order to receive funds, **districts** must conduct outreach with families and develop policies and procedures for the involvement of family members in the implementation of programs.¹ **Each Title I-A funded school within the district** must collaborate with families to develop and implement:

- a plan to engage families;²
- structures for families to provide input and feedback on school plan and processes;³ and
- compacts of shared responsibility for student achievement between students, families and teachers.⁴

Additionally, schools must have an annual meeting to share the requirements of the Title I-A program, including family rights, and must build family capacity as partners with the school in their child’s education.⁵

What it Means

ESEA requires that districts and schools who receive Title I-A funds **communicate, collaborate and work as partners with families**, with the goal of improving student achievement and promoting academic success. These provisions reflect good practice in engaging families to enhance student success.

Benefits of Family Engagement

When schools engage with families as partners who bring their knowledge to share in decision-making:

- Ideas and energy emerge from family needs and priorities;
- Families are leaders integral to identifying a vision and goals; and
- Schools develop relationships with families to improve their school.

¹ ESEA Section 1116(a)(1); During ESEA Monitoring, districts submit evidence of engagement practices through the [Family Engagement Monitoring Response Form](#)

² ESEA Section 1116(b)

³ ESEA Section 1116(c)

⁴ ESEA Section 1116(d)

⁵ ESEA Section 1116(e)

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Requirements

There are several requirements within the family engagement provision of ESEA, designed to ensure all families feel welcome and able to participate as partners. These requirements apply in both Targeted Assistance and Schoolwide Title I-A programs.

1. *Engage families in decision-making* – Families must be engaged in the development and annual review of the school-level Family Engagement and Title I-A plans, as well as have opportunities to share suggestions and feedback. The district must establish policies that ensure all interested families are prepared to participate in planning, decision-making and oversight groups such as boards, councils, committees or working groups.
2. *Include family voice* – Schools must have an [annual meeting](#) to share details of the school's program and build family capacity as partners with the school in their child's education. Family voice can be gathered through input and review of the school plan, participation in surveys, as well as other opportunities for feedback.
3. *Remove barriers to communication* – In order to assure that families are able to participate; information must be shared in a language and format accessible to **all** families. This includes information shared as part of the annual meeting, as well as information specific to their child.
4. *Promote shared partnership for student learning* – Each school that receives Title I-A funds must develop, with their families, a compact that outlines how families, students and school staff will build and develop a partnership to ensure student success. This includes describing the school's efforts to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction as well as the activities and actions that families can take to support their child's learning.
5. *Build family capacity* – Each school must provide opportunities for families to be engaged in their child's learning. This includes supporting families with understanding the school's program. Consider modeling strategies for families to support the academic achievement of their students.

Recommendations for Practice

- **Create a family friendly environment.** Consider visual and written materials (e.g., bulletin boards, posters, newsletters, invitations to events, among others) that are representative of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the families in the school.
- **Engage in meaningful communication.** Utilize a variety of communication methods to facilitate conversations and information sharing between families and the school. Invite families to share their expertise, including cultural assets, in conversations about their children, and draw on their experiences to help families best support their children's progress.
- **Clearly link activities to learning.** Share information with families on how their child is performing, including their child's strengths, as well as strategies for how families can promote student progress.

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Questions for Reflection

1. What is our system for ongoing engagement and communication with families?
2. What opportunities exist for elevating the voice of families?
3. What barriers to engagement are families experiencing and what steps are being taken to remove them?

Resources

- [Family Engagement: From the Early Years to the Early Grades](#)
- [Dual Capacity Building Framework](#)
- [National Standards for Family/School Partnerships](#)
- [National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement](#)
- [Community Engagement Toolkit](#) (ODE)
- [Sample Annual Meeting PowerPoint](#) (ODE)
- [Compact Checklist](#) (ODE)