

BACKGROUND

The Spectrum of Family Engagement for Educational Equity is based on the Community Engagement to Ownership Spectrum, which was created by Facilitating Power & Movement Strategy Center to chart a pathway towards racial equity and environmental justice through the shift from community engagement to community ownership, referencing Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, the International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation, and the work of grassroots organizing & advocacy groups working to hold local systems accountable to communities impacted by racial and environmental injustices. Social movements have been forging this pathway for generations. This tool simply offers guideposts along the way to support communities to make coordinated shifts towards educational equity.

Padres Unidos, a parent organizing group that was founded in 2016 to ensure parents on the eastside of Salinas, CA (as well as across other school districts), have a voice in their students' educational success, collaborated with Rosa González of Facilitating Power, to adapt the tool for use with school districts. This toolset is grounded in research on best practices in family/community involvement.



SPECTRUM OF FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



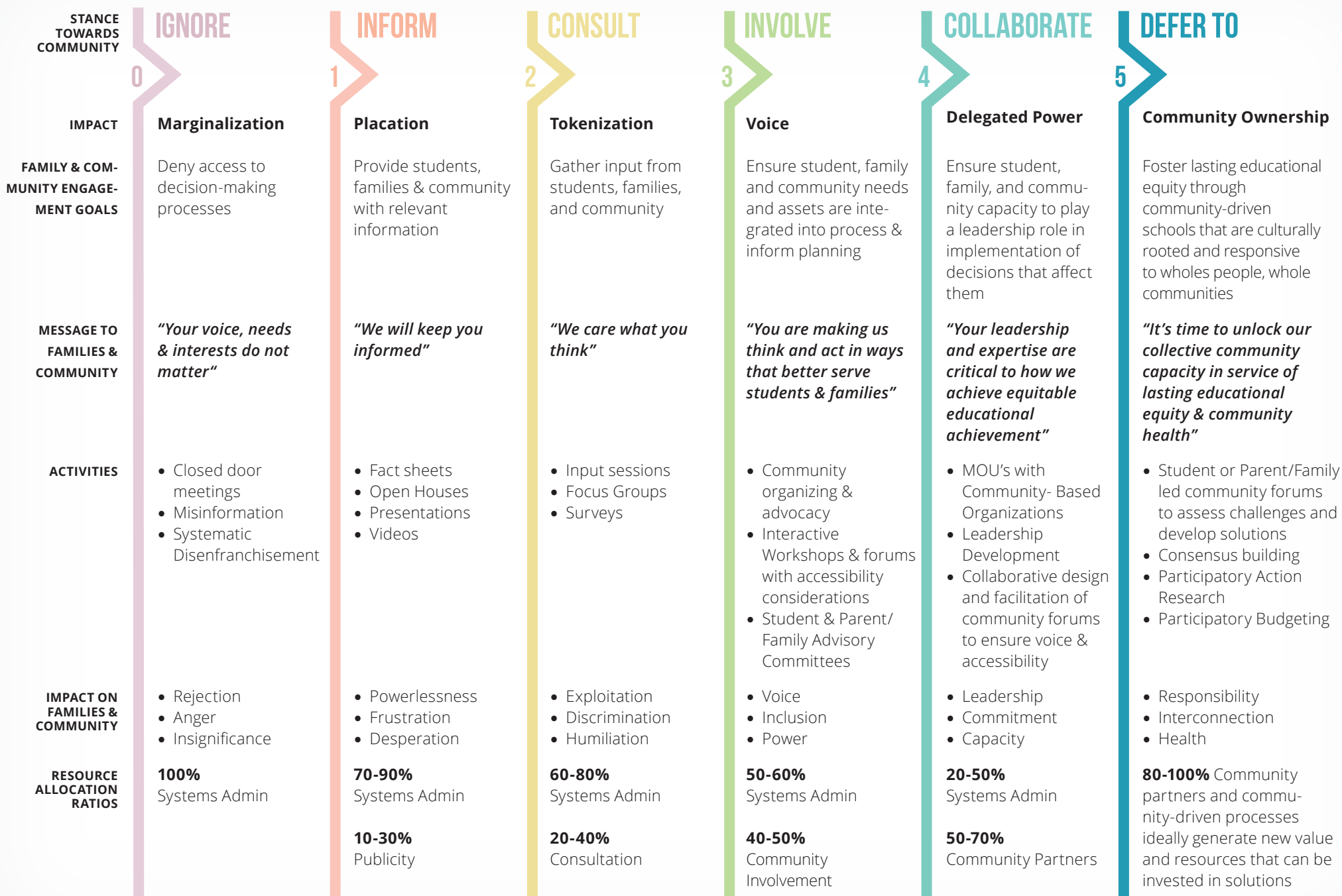
Photo by Monserrat Soto

PURPOSE & USAGES

The purpose of this toolset is to provide school districts and community/family organizing groups with shared language for being explicit about the level of family engagement in school planning & decision-making and the impact that level of engagement has on families and communities, as well on student outcomes. The spectrum is designed to:

1. **Acknowledge marginalization** as the status quo practice of current systems that have been historically designed to exclude certain populations, namely low-income communities, communities of color, women, youth, previously incarcerated people, and queer or gender non-conforming community members. These patterns of marginalization can negatively impact special education students, English Learners, LGBTQ Students, at-risk youth and their families. This understanding is important because if concerted efforts are not made to break-down existing barriers to participation, then by default marginalization occurs.
2. **Assert a vision** for reimagining and rebuilding our public schools through culturally relevant family participation for educational equity through community ownership of schooling.
3. **Articulate a developmental process** for moving from marginalization to community ownership that requires investment in community capacity to participate as well as the capacity to break-down systemic barriers to community participation.
4. **Assess community/family engagement efforts** and progress toward deeper participation goals.

▶▶▶▶▶ INCREASED EFFICIENCY IN DECISION-MAKING AND SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTATION ▶▶▶▶▶ EQUITY






COMMUNITY ORGANIZING (WITH AN INSIDE/OUTSIDE STRATEGY) IS THE KEY TO ADVANCING ALONG THE SPECTRUM

It took Padres Unidos four years of organizing other parents, attending board meetings, as well as meeting with district administration and members of the Board of Trustees to get the school district to implement more inclusive parent engagement practices. The goal is for parents to inform the decisions that impact students and families' health & well-being, such as budgetary priorities, approaches to school climate, and pedagogy. They had to build enough power on the outside to push the administration to make changes in their budget prioritization process that would allow parent voice and power to affect concrete changes – in this case an LCAP budget that reflects their priorities for their students. Changes in the way the system operates can help unlock channels within systems for community voice and power to translate into concrete changes.

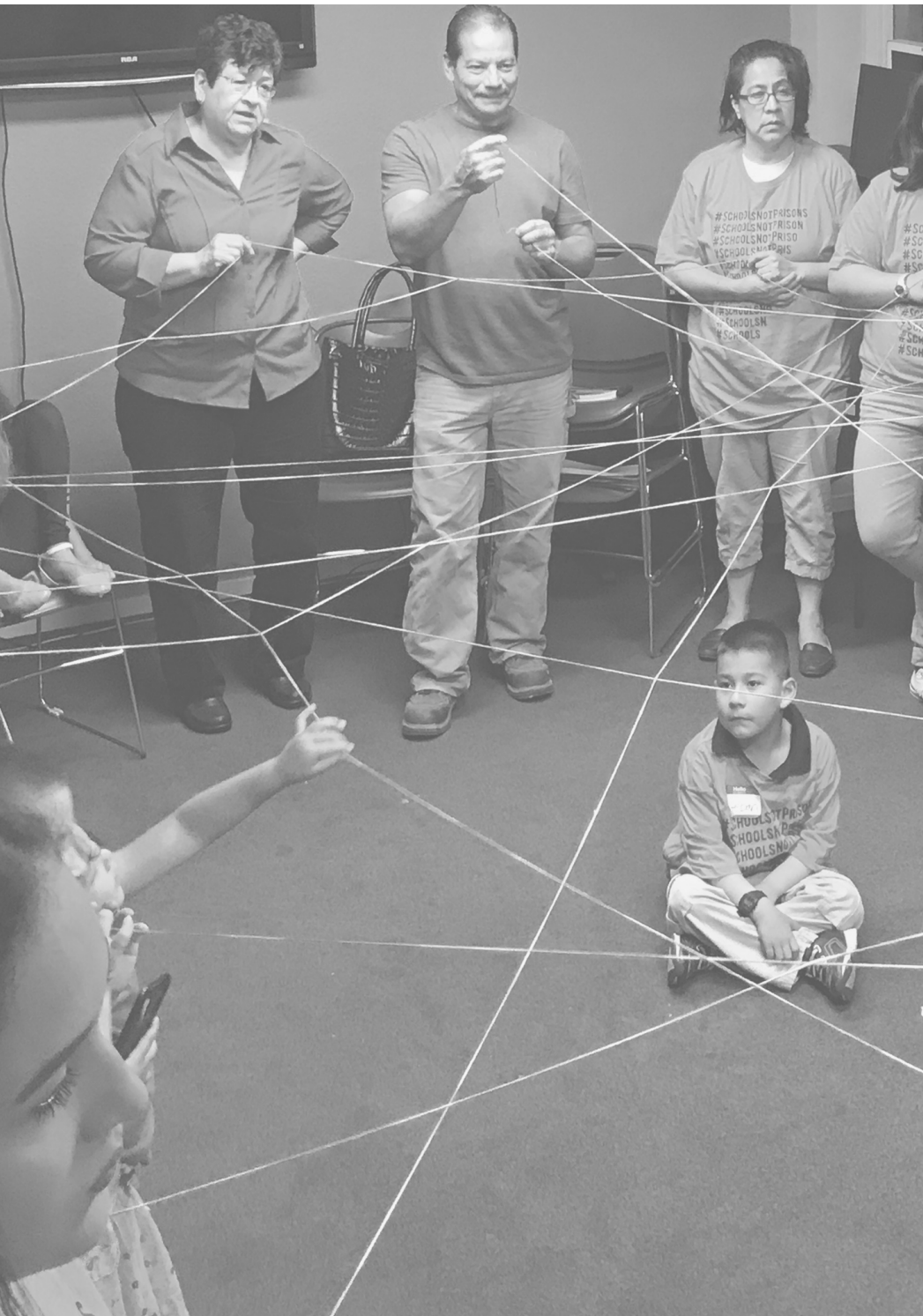
With more spaces for parents to voice what they experience, to align on shared priorities, and to build the skills to advocate for those priorities, Padres Unidos is able to chip away at the disillusionment that so many parents in the district feel and begin developing a real base of parents prepared to participate in improving educational outcomes for their students. It's difficult to convince parents to participate in processes where they have no real voice. This is why it has been so crucial for Padres Unidos to work with administrative staff to build a more responsive and transparent process for engaging parents in decisions around local control funding formula priorities. Padres Unidos has assumed the responsibility of documenting parent priorities and assessing the budget to make sure they are reflected. They then share their analysis with the Board of Trustees and mobilize parents & other community members to board meetings to advocate for the best possible budget for school success. They are working both inside and outside the system to ensure that parent voices matter.

“When I first started organizing around education equity, I thought that power lies in systems, but I quickly learned that real power is in communities.”

Alma Cervantes

Founder of Padres Unidos &
Educational Equity Organizer, Building
Healthy Communities



ACKNOWLEDGE & REPAIR THE HARM CAUSED BY MARGINALIZATION

Given the long history of academic marginalization of non-white students, participating within schools can be challenging for Black, Brown, Indigenous families. Unless district staff actively break-down barriers to participation, low-income families, migrant families, families of color, and non-traditional families can feel unwelcome and unprepared to play active roles in schools. Members of Padres Unidos report feeling unwanted and sometimes ignored when they try to meet with school staff. They also report that it is difficult to convince other parents to participate in school meetings and councils, as many doubt their voice even matters. In this way, the gifts they have to bring in the education of their children are left on the sidelines. For these reasons, Padres Unidos takes a healing-informed approach to family organizing. They focus on relationship-building, cultivating community voice & collective power, and activating the cultural wealth of East Salinas families. Through regular potlucks, arts and culture workshops, and La Cultura Cura curricula, they are acknowledging and repairing the harm caused by systems that previously made them question their own role in their students' academic success.

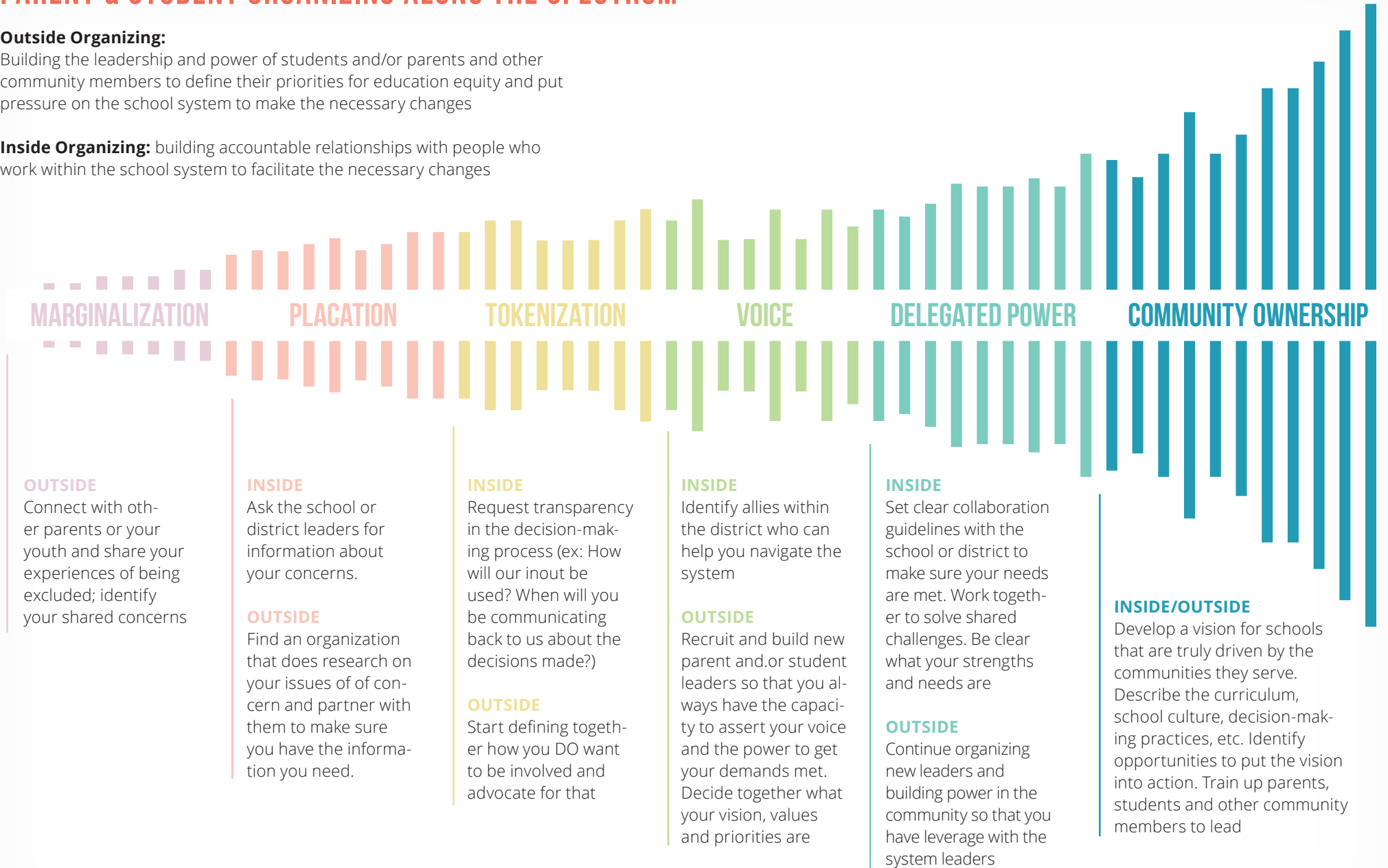


PARENT & STUDENT ORGANIZING ALONG THE SPECTRUM

Outside Organizing:

Building the leadership and power of students and/or parents and other community members to define their priorities for education equity and put pressure on the school system to make the necessary changes

Inside Organizing: building accountable relationships with people who work within the school system to facilitate the necessary changes



MARGINALIZATION

OUTSIDE
Connect with other parents or your youth and share your experiences of being excluded; identify your shared concerns

PLACATION

INSIDE
Ask the school or district leaders for information about your concerns.

OUTSIDE
Find an organization that does research on your issues of concern and partner with them to make sure you have the information you need.

TOKENIZATION

INSIDE
Request transparency in the decision-making process (ex: How will our input be used? When will you be communicating back to us about the decisions made?)

OUTSIDE
Start defining together how you DO want to be involved and advocate for that

VOICE

INSIDE
Identify allies within the district who can help you navigate the system

OUTSIDE
Recruit and build new parent and/or student leaders so that you always have the capacity to assert your voice and the power to get your demands met. Decide together what your vision, values and priorities are

DELEGATED POWER

INSIDE
Set clear collaboration guidelines with the school or district to make sure your needs are met. Work together to solve shared challenges. Be clear what your strengths and needs are

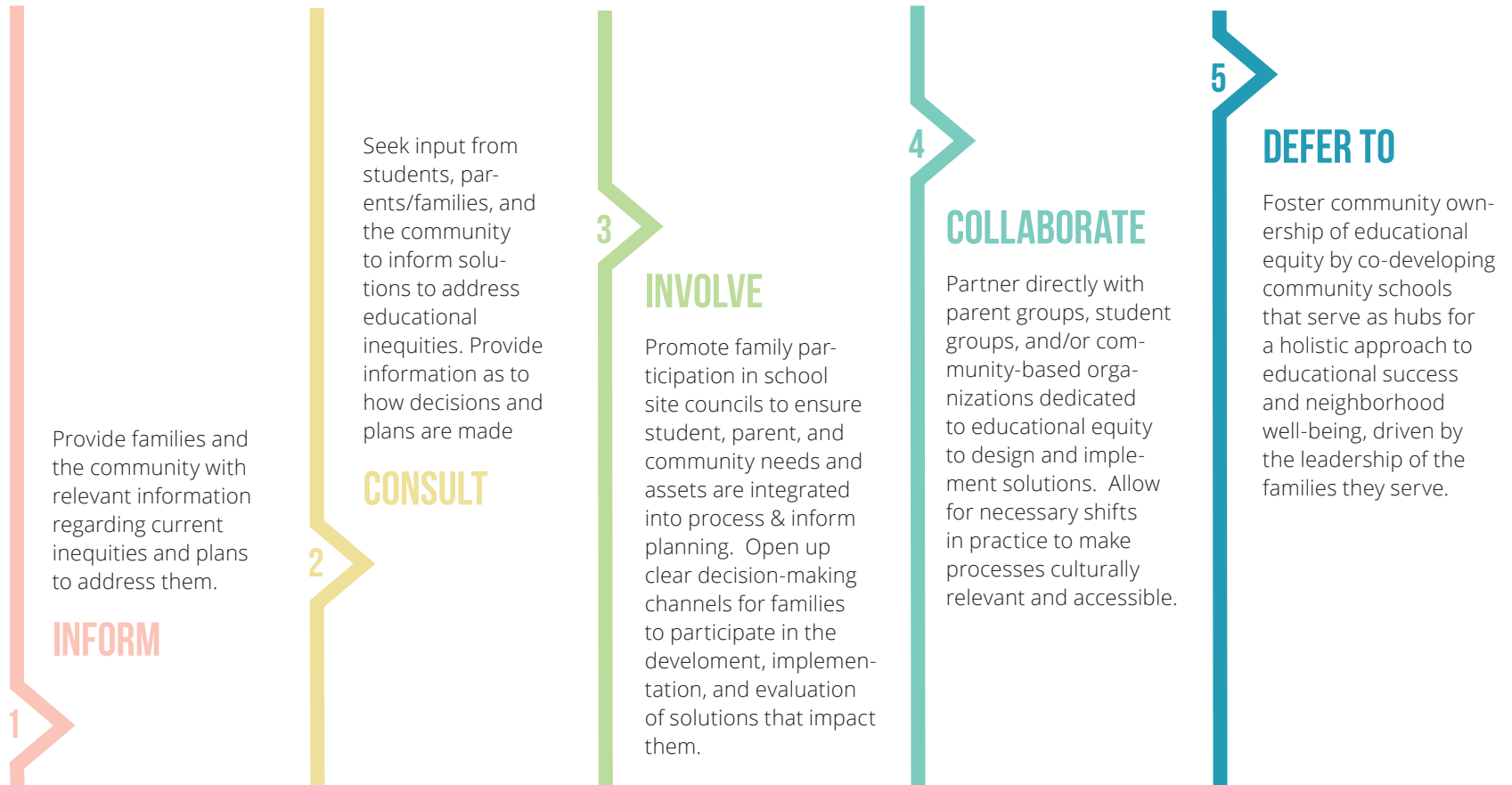
OUTSIDE
Continue organizing new leaders and building power in the community so that you have leverage with the system leaders

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

INSIDE/OUTSIDE
Develop a vision for schools that are truly driven by the communities they serve. Describe the curriculum, school culture, decision-making practices, etc. Identify opportunities to put the vision into action. Train up parents, students and other community members to lead

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Educators and school district administrators have a significant role to play in breaking down barriers to family education. The following steps articulate activities and actions educational leadership can take, in partnership with family organizing groups, to advance along each phase of the spectrum.

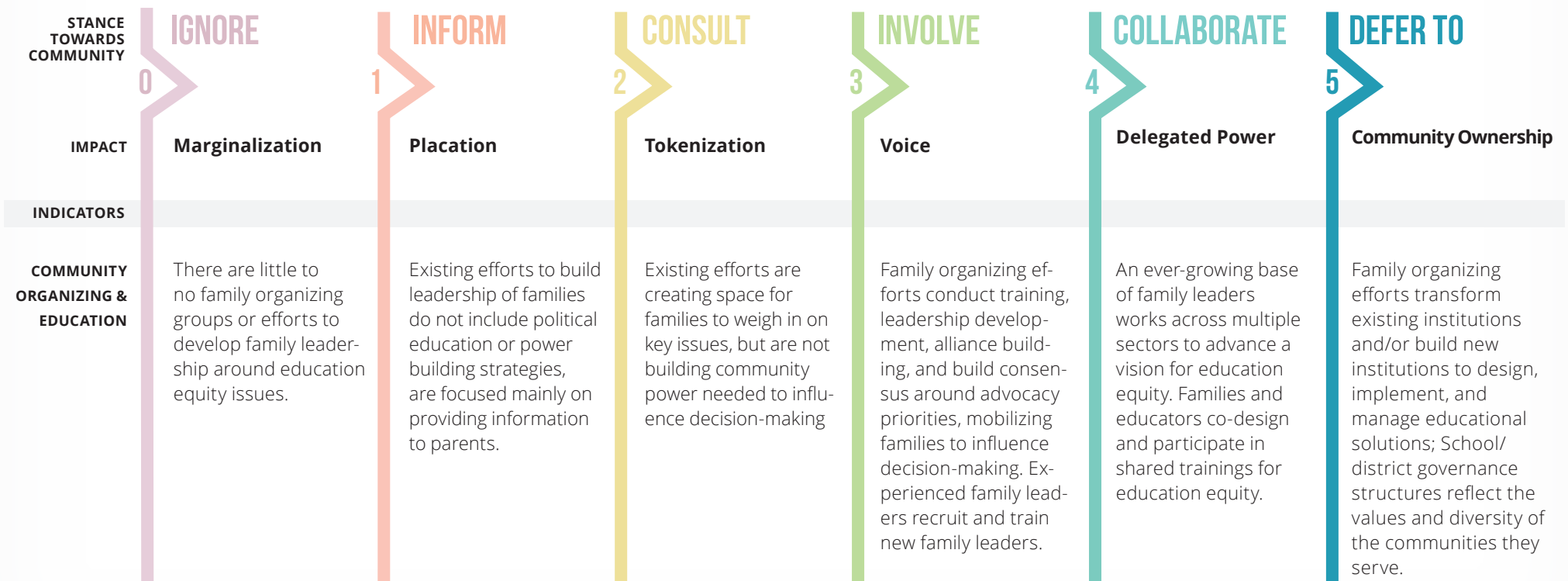


RUBRIC TO ASSESS AUTHENTIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL PLANNING FOR EDUCATION EQUITY*

This rubric can be used to facilitate reflections and collaborative evaluations of a school district's family engagement practices. It is important that parents and school district staff participate in the reflection or evaluation together and allow the tool to serve as shared language and metrics for evolving family engagement practices. Ideally, families and community members have a chance to go through the evaluation or reflection process before entering into conversations with district staff, giving them a chance to make sense of the rubric on their own terms before engaging in negotiations with district staff as to improvements that are needed. We also recommend focusing on progress made as well as improvements needed. Finally, an outside facilitator trusted by the community is also helpful in ensuring the reflection or evaluation is done equitably and resulted in tangible next steps for improving family engagement.

An agenda could follow this basic flow:

- 1. Set the context:** Why is family involvement so important to our goals for student success?
- 2. Review the rubric:** Why these indicators?
- 3. Use the rubric:** to assess current practice (individually and then in small groups of parents and school district staff)
- 4. Identify areas of improvement:** needed and action steps to achieve those improvements (big and small).



* Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs

