



January 2023

BUILDING AUTHENTIC SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INNOVATIONS SERIES

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INNOVATIONS SERIES OVERVIEW

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is committed to supporting and advancing the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) to ensure that schools honor, challenge, and inspire the academic, social, and emotional growth and development of all students. SEL has emerged as a central feature of education and is even more important at a time in which our nation, local communities, adults, and young people are compelled to navigate heightened social tensions and traumas. While initial research studies have established the general benefits of SEL, the next phase of work should address the need for improvements and innovations to SEL policy, approaches, programming, and practices to increase the likelihood of maximum contributions to the well-being of each and every young person and adult. This series aims to help the field imagine new, more expansive and equitable approaches to SEL and wellness to ensure that all children, adolescents, and adults feel safe, supported, and seen so that they can thrive.

Throughout this series, we will share innovative conceptions, methods, and practices that embody SEL principles, along with aligned strategies that maximize learning and well-being for students at each setting level of CASEL's systemic SEL framework. CASEL takes a systemic approach to SEL implementation that emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across key settings of classrooms, schools, families, and communities to enhance all students' social, emotional, and academic learning. A systemic approach integrates SEL throughout the school's academic curricula and culture, across the broader contexts of schoolwide practices and policies, and through ongoing collaboration with families and community organizations. Each report in this series will highlight a key setting from [CASEL's framework](#), beginning with authentic partnership with families and caregivers. Subsequent reports will focus on classrooms, schools, and communities.

Within the CASEL framework, we will pay particular attention to research and understanding that is consistent with transformative SEL (tSEL), an approach that embodies an equitable, systemic orientation to SEL. We will share both current learnings about these practices and strategies and why they matter from a research and practice perspective. We will also provide case studies to help illustrate what these practices and strategies can look like in schools, families, and communities. We hope that the series will spark discussion around strategies, curriculum, and action research agendas that lead to changes in mindsets, practices, and policies, with a focus on the centering of the voices and choices of students and their families.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Raikes Foundation. We are deeply grateful for their support and collaboration.

This report was prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we thank them for their generous support. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

We'd like to thank our co-authors and collaborators for their partnership in highlighting case studies from the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been increased acknowledgement of the central role social and emotional learning (SEL) plays in the growth and development of young people. The importance and complexities of SEL have become more evident in the past three years as the society continues to grapple with the role of schools and PreK-12 education in ongoing public health and civic challenges.

Parent engagement in schooling has emerged as one of the more prominent considerations of this time. For example, parents have become increasingly organized and vocal at school board meetings, and there has been an uptick in education organizations surveying parents in terms of their perceptions, priorities, and preferred roles in their children's education. Earlier this year, K. Mapp and E. Bergman offered a call to action in their 2021 paper towards a more liberatory approach to family partnership, inviting the "PreK-12 sector to walk through the door opened by COVID-19 and the antiracist movement and address the often-ignored and unspoken dynamics that prevent the cultivation of effective partnerships between families and educators" (Mapp & Bergman, 2021, p. 6).

The SEL field has long recognized that families are critical to the ultimate impact SEL can have on students' outcomes because parents are their children's first teachers and SEL begins at home. Accordingly, parents and other family members are vitally important in helping their children develop social and emotional skills (Miller, 2019), such as self-management, coping, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2015). Parents and family members can both serve as models in social and emotional skills and intentionally teach them through parenting practices (Elias et al., 1999). Substantial research demonstrates the positive impact of parent engagement on children's academic achievement and social and emotional development (Fan & Chen, 2001; Fan, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2019), such as an increase in prosocial behaviors (McWayne et al., 2004), improvement in peer relationships (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009; Mishna & Muskat, 2004), and increased social skills (Mendez, 2010) alongside reductions in disruptive behaviors (Brotman et al., 2011) and internalizing problems/concerns (Reid et al., 2007).

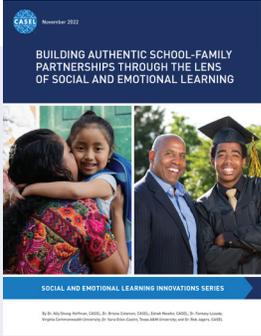
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The research has also established that when schools regularly engage parents in their children’s schooling, it can help produce positive outcomes for children, such as improved academic performance, improved mental health, increased student engagement, and reduced school dropout (e.g., Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Garbacz et al., 2015; Sheridan et al., 2019; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). As a result, effective teacher-parent communication and strong school-family partnerships are crucial (Epstein, 2011; Garbacz et al., 2015; Patrikakou et al., 2005). Relatedly, numerous program evaluations suggest that evidence-based SEL programs are more effective when they extend into the home (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Duchesneau, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011).

The CASEL model of systemic SEL features authentic family and caregiver partnerships as an essential ingredient in a comprehensive approach to promoting young people’s academic, social, and emotional competence development. In this inaugural SEL Innovations report, we seek to surface some of the conceptual considerations and research findings that help to advance the understanding and point to fertile directions for applied research on family-school partnerships. We first offer CASEL’s definition of SEL before presenting a heuristic for organizing our critical examination of the literature on family-school engagement. This is followed by addressing the conditions for authentic school-family partnership, along with four guiding actions for schools and families partnering together. Lastly, we share a set of case studies illustrating what these guiding actions look like in practice.

Throughout this report, we keep in mind the ways in which schooling contexts have traditionally and historically marginalized families from a variety of ethnic-racial backgrounds. As such, we often refer to some children, students, and families as being historically marginalized or as belonging to historically marginalized groups. This terminology is meant to recognize the marginalization that these groups (e.g., African American/Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian) have experienced but does not mean to erase the vastly different socio-historical experiences of these groups that shape their marginalization.



IN THIS REPORT

- > CASEL’s definition of SEL
- > In-depth view of CASEL’s framework key setting: “Authentic Partnerships With Families and Caregivers”
- > Critical examination of the literature
- > The conditions to authentic school-family partnership
- > Guiding actions for partnering together
- > Case studies for SEL in practice

FRAMING SEL AND FAMILY-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

CASEL defines SEL as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL has the potential to advance educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower children, adolescents, and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities (CASEL, 2020).

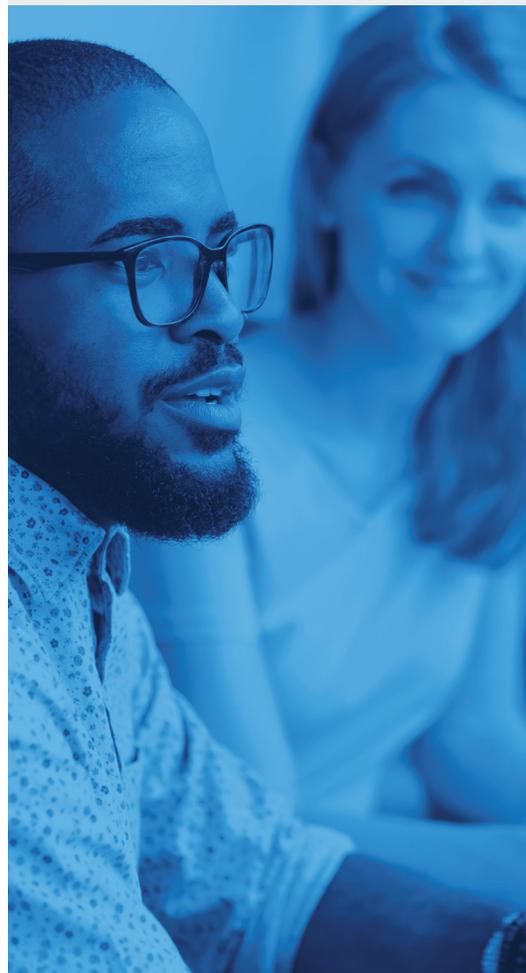
In the CASEL framework (as seen to the right), “authentic partnerships” with families and caregivers is recognized as a key setting dynamic in systemic SEL implementation efforts. For any partnership to reflect the definition of authenticity (defined as true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character), all partners need to be recognized, considering their identity and lived experiences; only then can authentic partnership grow. Historically, marginalized youth and their families have not had the privilege of bringing and centering their identities and experiences to the proverbial table when interacting with schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Mutual understanding, shared goals, and reciprocity of power, privilege, and influence help to ensure that the positive impacts associated with SEL and academic achievement are attained by all students, regardless of background and identity.



CASEL encourages schools, families, and communities to work together to identify how best to implement SEL in alignment with local priorities. One such priority includes how SEL can contribute to the long-term outcomes of informed, engaged citizenship. CASEL's framework incorporates various ways that SEL can contribute to this goal. While CASEL does not prescribe any specific approach, we have defined forms of SEL implementation to help communities make informed decisions about how they are implementing SEL and what outcomes they hope to achieve. These include personally responsible, participatory, and transformative forms of SEL (Jagers et al., 2021). The field has focused primarily on the intrapersonal skills represented in personally responsible SEL, in which exemplifying prosocial attitudes and behaviors that promote the common good is representative of good citizenship. Participatory SEL supports minimally engaged citizenship (i.e., voting) that promotes the social hierarchy (Jagers et al., 2019). Less is known about how SEL might support equity and excellence, which implies links between intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional considerations. Toward this end, CASEL is developing and refining its understanding of how adults' SEL practices can help facilitate the transformation of inequitable settings and systems and promote justice-oriented civic engagement among young people and adults. This transformative form of SEL is aimed at sharing power among students and adults to promote social justice through increased engagement in school and civic life. It intentionally points to competencies and highlights relational and contextual factors that help promote equitable learning environments and foster desirable personal and collective outcomes. Transformative SEL (tSEL) is a process whereby young people and adults build strong and respectful relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, communal, and societal well-being (Jagers et al., 2021). This form of SEL is a response to the growing political, economic, and health challenges we face in the United States and around the world.

With CASEL's framework of SEL, we separate families from communities as distinct contexts for SEL. This provides for a more focused and nuanced approach to our work in the family context. Families play an integral role in the social, emotional, and academic development of children and youth and are essential to creating, informing, and sustaining educational equity initiatives—including tSEL. Parents and other primary caregivers [value the development of these life skills](#) and view the home as the first place SEL occurs. Given the current and historical power structure of schools, our field is in great need to identify culturally sustaining practices that would

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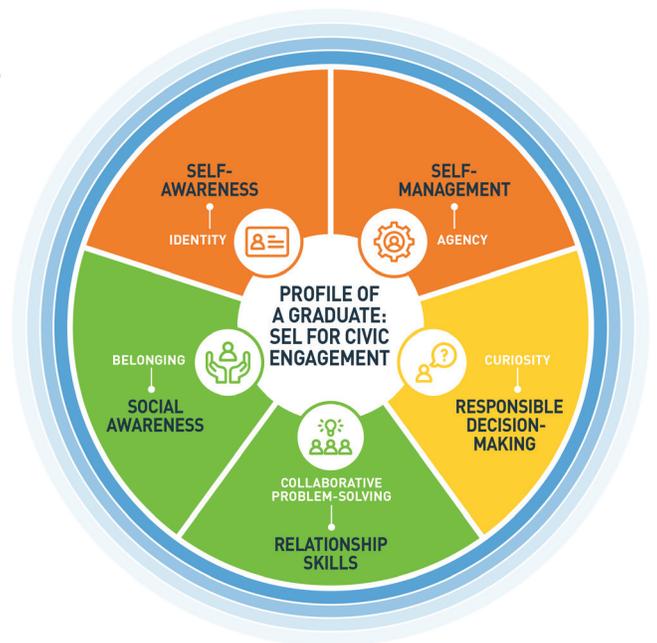


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With tSEL, parents are able to develop collaboration and co-construction skills to enhance student achievement and well-being. The focus is on empowering them as leaders to participate in meaningful decision-making that impacts educational policy and practices, and as advocates by increasing their social capital and expertise for “collective organizing and mobilization” for their children, regardless of background or community (Weiss et al., 2010, p. 6).

Schools, in turn, can build upon and learn from the strategies that families are already using to support SEL through authentic family partnerships. These partnerships, however, are not always easy to develop. It is important to remember that not all families have fond memories of and experiences with schools, especially if they identify with a historically marginalized subgroup in the United States (Delpit, 2006). In fact, these prior experiences can have a deep impact on how willing families are to pursue partnerships with their children’s schools.

Additionally, researchers have concluded that families are far more likely to form partnerships with schools when the school’s norms, values, and cultural representations reflect their own experiences (Atunéz, 2000). Onikama et al. (1998, p. 5) explain, “It is difficult for families to want to become involved with institutions that they perceive are ‘owned’ by a culture that discriminated against them in the past.” For families and education leaders seeking strategies for addressing these concerns, we offer tSEL as a justice-oriented approach to systemic SEL. This model (to the right) can lend itself to action research from the perspective of families, giving them opportunities to exercise their agency. Engagement with families through action research also allows all stakeholders, including families, to hold each other accountable for the success of their mutual youth.



The family context can function as a safe and open environment where children and youth can be themselves while practicing the social and emotional norms, cues, and skills needed to effectively navigate and contribute to a range of social interactions and settings (Mart et al., 2011). As such, the ways families socialize their children and youth about emotions (i.e., their messaging and modeling) often intersect with racial pride. In fact, one question CASEL is exploring is the heightened importance of civic activism socialization in fostering tSEL as young people develop (Lozada et al., 2017).

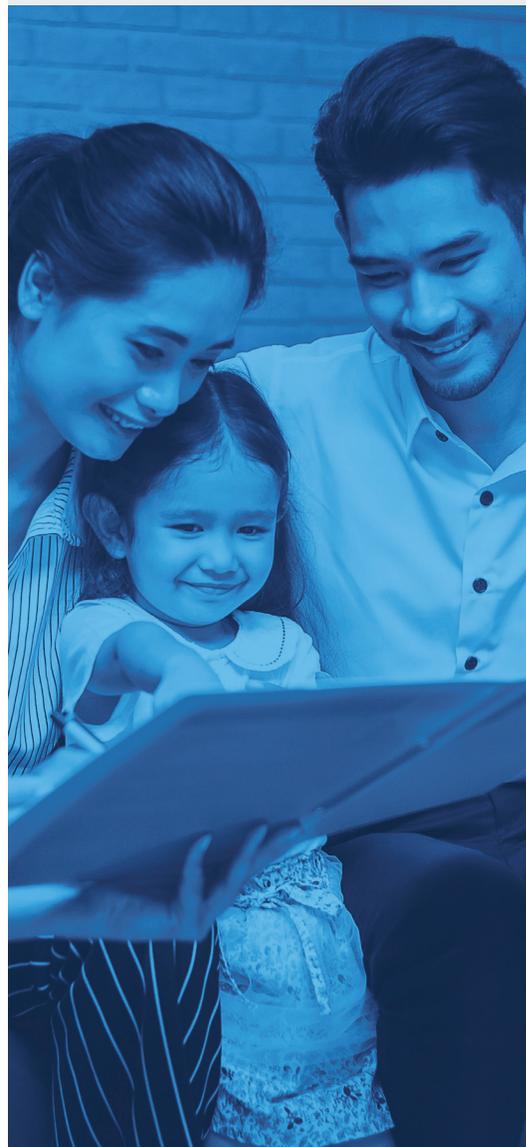
This paper, then, aims to lift current understandings of the role of families in the development of children and youth, in collaboration with schools. In providing a landscape of the literature, we create an understanding of how parents from historically marginalized backgrounds have traditionally been positioned in school-family relationships, where we currently are, and where we need to go. In doing so, we highlight the contributions of a number of frameworks but also the implications of these on encouraging practices that have included historically marginalized families. This is with particular attention to SEL—the role of SEL as process and outcome of strong and authentic school-family partnerships.

TSEL advocates for caregivers assuming the roles of co-creators and decision-makers with young people and other adults in a co-design or collaborative solutions-based strategy that redefines what constitutes local developmental imperatives, processes, and desired outcomes for young people and adults in the local school community (Jagers et al., 2021). This likely requires information and resource generation and sharing (curiosity), mindset shifts (identity and agency), and skill and relationship-building (belonging, collaborative problem-solving) among young people, caregivers, school personnel, and community partners.

Justice- and equity-minded parent engagement models are based in authentic family-school partnerships that address systemic and individual barriers. They take into consideration and tackle the socio-ecological components that shape parent involvement, reclaiming ownership of student learning and development from the grip of school culture and bureaucracy while redistributing power and responsibility back into the hands of parents and the community. The research field has long known that strong family engagement that prioritizes two-way communication and decision-making positively impacts academic, social, and emotional outcomes (McWayne et al., 2004; Sheridan et al., 2019). So tSEL, as a form of SEL that centers equity and justice, can shape the context and rationale for moving beyond prescriptive forms of parent engagement, elevating caregivers and families as collaborators.

One of the practices that schools committed to implementing tSEL should be prioritizing is “collaborative problem-solving.” Collaborative problem-solving is focal to the SEL competency of relationship skills and reflects a complex skill set. Distinct from collaborative learning and collaborative decision-making, collaborative problem-solving is defined as the capacity of an individual to effectively engage in a process whereby two or more people attempt to solve a problem by sharing the understanding and effort required to come to a solution and pooling their knowledge, skills, and efforts to reach that solution. We contend that relationship-building, via the focal construct of collaborative problem-solving, is an avenue by which to create SEL synergies in family and school contexts. We contend that through relationship-building and collaborative problem-solving, schools and families can come together to not only solve problems but co-create equitable learning environments for their youth.

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As a focal construct to relationship-building, collaborative problem-solving (CPS) necessitates a shared goal involving a problem of practice, stakeholder accountability, differentiation of roles, and interdependence (Graesser et al., 2018). Social interaction and group work is essential to any collaborative problem-solving model. It requires school leaders, educators and family partners to manage their relationships, their actions, and the effects that those actions produce. CPS requires that these elements are transparent to all members of the team and that team members are aware of the important elements. A transparent, visible, shared vision and series of updates are critical to the success of groups (Graesser et al., 2018).

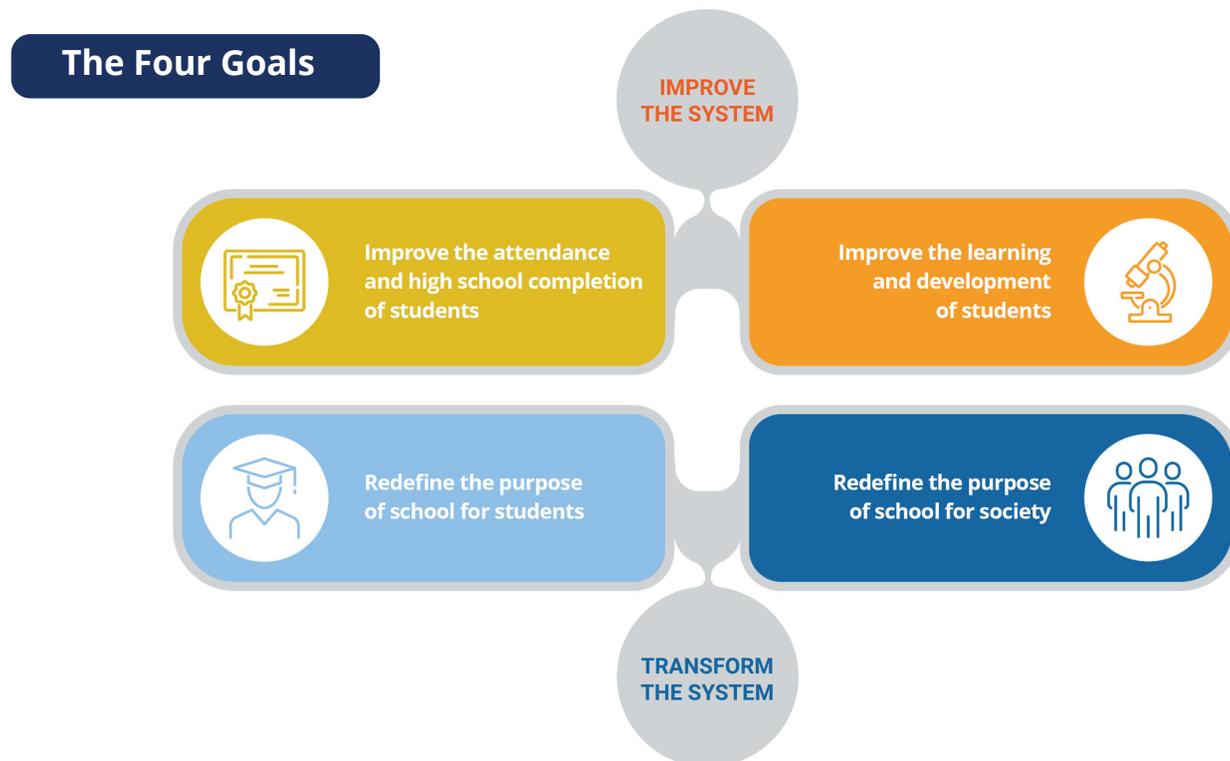
As with the five SEL competencies, the five focal constructs of tSEL are also interrelated. To engage in CPS, all partners (school and families) must be open to acknowledging and critically reflecting on how the identities of school leaders and family partners can serve as an asset to the collaboration, with the school partner developing a sense of trust and belonging with their families. It is important to note CPS requires the exercise of agency: all partners come together to improve the experiences of youth and their families in the school community, with a sense of curiosity and a learner-centered stance about how to create the most supportive environment for youth.





A PRIORITY FOR CASEL: SEL AS A FOUNDATION FOR SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

CASEL has been committed to a continuous process of learning, examining, and collaboratively refining the understanding of systemic SEL, using [the CASEL framework](#). Throughout this process, our goal has remained the same: to advance high-quality SEL in schools everywhere so that all adults and young people can thrive. In the spirit of alignment, CASEL has also probed how our framework translates to our understanding of high-quality, evidence-based SEL programming so as to continue to provide robust and consistent programming information to the field.



Winthrop et al. (2021)

The [current work of Winthrop et al. \(2021\)](#), from the nonpartisan nonprofit Brookings Institution, is useful in helping organize and detail the goals for family-school engagement that might be developed in the context of SEL efforts. The Brookings playbook on family-school collaboration “makes the case for why family engagement is essential for education systems transformation and why families and schools must have a shared understanding of what a good quality education looks like” (report page from the Brookings website).

The Brookings team (Winthrop et al., 2021) collaborated internally with government agencies and non-governmental, community, and parental organizations, educators, and academics across 15 countries on this playbook (below). It outlines two overarching objectives: 1) improving how systems serve students, and 2) transforming how systems envision success. Each objective has two associated strategies with important key goals of family-school engagement. The context will determine which goal should be prioritized for family-school collaborations. Strategies may, and often do, work toward multiple goals.

<p>Objective 1 Improving how systems serve students</p>	<p>Goal 1  Improve the attendance and high school completion of school</p>
<p>These strategies work within the existing sets of purposes and values that guide education systems to improve what students get out of those existing systems.</p>	<p>Important outcomes The improvement of student participation in school such as by increasing student enrollment, attendance, and completion of school.</p>
	<p>Goal 2  Improve the learning and development of students</p>
	<p>Important outcomes Include the improvement of student learning and development on such measures as academic skills and social and emotional competencies.</p>
<p>Objective 2 Transforming how systems envision success</p>	<p>Goal 3  Redefine the purpose of school for students</p>
<p>These strategies emerge from deep family-school engagement to redefine the purpose and values that guide education systems.</p>	<p>Important outcomes A shared family-school vision that adapts, reorients, or changes the focus of education systems in terms of student experiences and outcomes.</p>
	<p>Goal 4  Redefine the purpose of school for society</p> <p>Important outcomes A shared family-school vision that adapts, reorients, or changes the focus of education systems in terms of the school’s role in the community.</p>

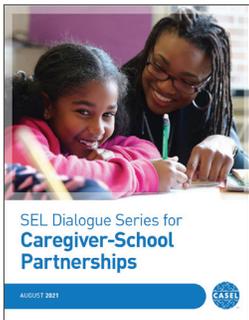
We contend that personally responsible and participatory forms of SEL place an emphasis on improving how the existing education system serves students. TSEL places an emphasis on transforming how the educational system envisions and pursues success. Winthrop et al. (2022) further offer that strategies can be understood in terms of 1) the place where they occur, 2) the lever of change the strategy uses, and 3) the role of the family in the strategies enactment.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO ENGAGING FAMILIES IN SEL PROGRAMS

While there are relatively few universal SEL-focused family programs (Garbacz et al., 2015), there has been considerable work on family-focused prevention programs (see Van Ryzin et al., 2016). Notions of cultural relevance, cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, cultural tailoring, and cultural appropriateness are advanced as strategies to improve engagement, uptake, and outcomes of prevention and promotion programs serving members of culturally distinct groups (Kreuter et al., 2003; Kumpfer et al., 2016).

Kreuter et al. (2003) specify a number of cultural integration strategies that program developers, implementers, and researchers can employ. These include linguistic and peripheral strategies that reflect the use of symbol systems, such as dominant language forms and preferred colors, images, fonts, pictures, or images, to appeal to participants. A sociocultural strategy integrates the dominant cultural norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors of the group into program activities and/or materials. An evidential strategy provides data on a relevant problem, while a constituent-involving strategy seeks to benefit from the experience and knowledge of the group's members in the development, delivery, and evaluation of the intervention.

The literature reveals the significant promise of constituent-involving strategies to improve the content, delivery, engagement, and outcomes of prevention and promotion programs. Such approaches improved outcomes by increasing the voice and choice of diverse adult stakeholders in all aspects of the effort. As Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) point out, programs can vary with regard to the influence or power researchers and constituents actually exercise in their partnership.



The Caregiver Discussion Guide, developed by CASEL practitioners (Martinez-Black & Salazar, n.d.), offers co-constructed content to support caregivers' efforts to be informed partners in school-based SEL initiatives. The 10 discussion sessions take place among parents and other concerned community members to illuminate the ways caregivers might be actively engaged in systemic SEL. Early results from an initial pilot study with a community organization serving Latino families indicated that caregivers found the discussion series informative and catalyzing. For example, several caregivers sought to use their new insights to fill slots and become active participants on school-based SEL parent advisory committees.

Fuentes (2012) described a three-year study of Parents of Children of African Ancestry (POCAA) in which family members exercised considerable autonomy. POCAA is a grassroots community organization that formed to address the disproportionate underachievement of Black students in the local public schools. After reviewing school district data on academic performance of ninth graders, the group devised an intensive two-semester intervention that included four newly hired teachers to construct a small learning community. Core courses were augmented by weekly motivational assemblies and courses on study skills and stress management. After 10 weeks, the vast majority of participating students were getting passing grades in their classes and attending school regularly. Nearly all the students were still on track when they entered the tenth grade. The program served as a catalyst for parent and community organizing in support of student school achievement and prompted the school district to form a districtwide equity task force made up of multiracial coalitions.

LEARNING FROM CASEL'S GUIDE TO EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMMING AND THE COLLABORATING DISTRICTS INITIATIVE

In reviewing the evidence-based programs included in the CASEL Guide to SEL Programs (“Program Guide”), we found that 83 percent of programs offer support to families and caregivers, particularly by providing information about the SEL program and supplementary activities that can be done at home. For example, Conscious Discipline focuses their family support on parent-youth relationship-building and offers a virtual (via website) home environment demonstrating practical, room-by-room examples of what practices within the Conscious Discipline approach can be [implemented in the home](https://consciousdiscipline.com) (consciousdiscipline.com).

While 10 percent of the programs in the Program Guide do not explicitly include additional family or home-based SEL support, 4 percent of the programs center around co-creation and collaboration as a family engagement strategy, giving families tools for voice and agency to inform their children’s experience in SEL programming at home and/or school. For example, Building Assets, Reducing Risks shares ways that families can form or be a part of a parent advisory council representing their children’s best interests, prioritizing social and emotional development (barrcenter.org). This type of program support aligns to that of transformative school-family engagement and partnership by giving families tools to collaboratively problem-solve and build relationships as an authentic means of two-way communication. By aligning to how CASEL defines “authentic family partnerships” in our SEL framework, SEL programs offer the opportunity to center and innovate their own programming models to not only engage but empower families as partners and advocates for their children’s well-being in and out of school.

CASEL has also been learning with district members of CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). These districts have been implementing strategies that take into account the local context and the ways that they engage with families, as Winthrop et al. (2022) have noted. Districts have found that authentic and equitable partnerships mean that students and families are actively and fully engaged from the beginning and throughout SEL implementation. In this way, districts are planning to begin situating SEL within the larger cultural and historical contexts of their communities (Schlund

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et al., 2020). In the effort to engage families in collaboratively guiding SEL work in the district, Chicago Public Schools implemented the SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers as a 10-week series of discussions about strategies to promote SEL in the home, led by parents for parents. Additionally, in the efforts to support family advocacy and empowerment, Austin Independent School District created the Families as Partners initiative to build trusting relationships and equal partnerships between school staff and families. In this work, parents collaborate with staff and administrators on school priorities and strategies including SEL and equity.



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THE RESEARCH: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT AS A FORM OF SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT IN EDUCATION

The relationship between schools and families in the United States has a long, deeply entrenched historical and political tie with a constraining, deficit-based, prescriptive form of parent involvement. This relationship has been informed by “center[ing] on the school’s agenda” (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 150) with involvement defined by the school and educational institutions’ perceptions of parents’ backgrounds and their expected role, without consideration from the parent’s perspective.

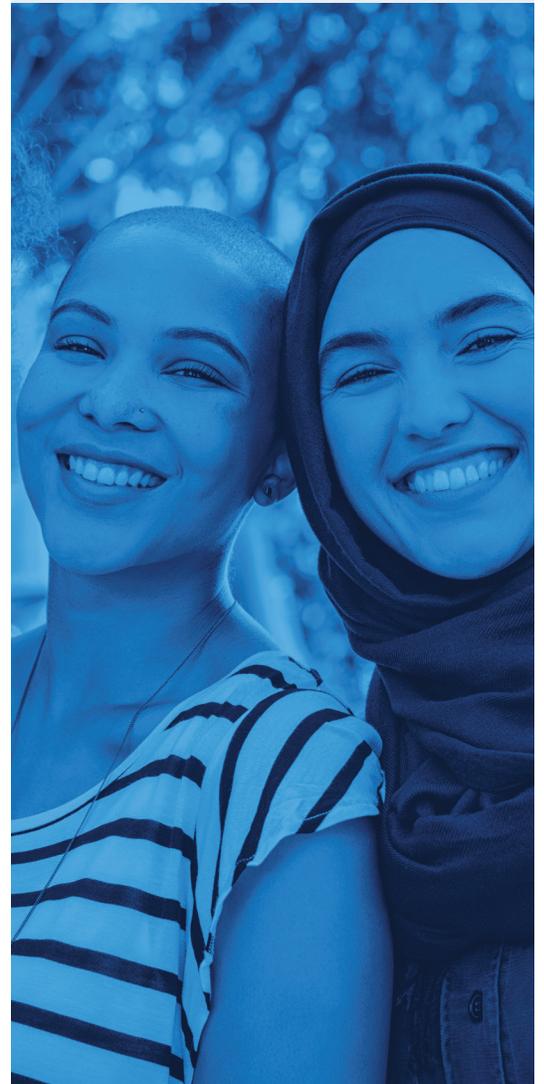
When considering who contributes to the development of learning goals and influences programming decisions, the barriers are shaped predominantly by the quantity and quality of agency afforded to families by educational institutions, which are then further defined by families’ personal circumstances. Learning goals made in the absence of historically marginalized families are detrimental to schools and families for two main reasons. First, learning goals become reactionary responses to the prevailing political and power-yielding entities. Second, learning goals remain limited in general or lacking in long-term scope (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Mapp, 2012). There may also be an unintended negative impact on family engagement, since a school-centric agenda places real agency in the hands of schools while placing pseudo-agency into the hands of historically marginalized families, who are not ignorant to the dynamic and naturally become disengaged. Disengagement in many cases reflects parents not seeing their child’s needs or personal goals reflected in the school’s determined system.

At first glance, studies show that white, high socioeconomic status (SES, by income, education attainment), and/or English-speaking parents engage in higher school involvement when compared to their counterparts (McQuiggan & Grady, 2017; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Families of privileged identities and socioeconomic status are able to use their positions and social capital to influence decision-making (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). This often adversely affects students and families of traditionally marginalized identities, potentially exacerbating the considerable differences in parent involvement that exist by race and SES (Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2016; Hill et al., 2004; Hodges & Yu, 2015; Khalifa, 2012;)

A more in-depth look at family engagement practices and perspectives reveals that what appears as a lack of engagement from low SES and historically marginalized families is actually the consequence of barriers to access such as discomfort/lack of trust with school leaders and staff, inflexible work hours, reliance on public transportation, the language meetings are facilitated in, unreliable childcare, and other weak social supports, rather than insufficient care about education and learning (Child Trends, 2013; Jeynes, 2007). The bureaucratic nature (i.e., hierarchy and standardization) of many educational systems actually works against an intuitive and/or organic connection between educators and families, creating conditions where specialized or privileged knowledge and resources are required for navigation and eventual success (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011). Additionally, because most school practices and policies tend to center on white, middle-class culture, it makes accessibility for non-white families increasingly difficult (Ishimaru et al., 2016), especially for families with at least one parent who has moved to the United States from another country (Han & Love, 2015; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015).

The result of this gatekeeping is the school's subtractive interpretation of these families—a deficit-based outlook from which the values, expectations, resources, and knowledge of marginalized families are underappreciated, misunderstood, and/or dismissed (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Olivos, 2006). Family disengagement becomes the unintended but natural result as families continually experience incongruence between their cultural/historical background and school interactions in addition to unaddressed barriers to involvement (Dyrness, 2011 as cited by Ishimaru et al., 2016). Despite substantial evidence that academic parent engagement is associated with a family's knowledge, values, and aspirations, most parent involvement efforts by schools invalidate or undervalue the cultural wealth of marginalized families. These culturally informed engagement practices are often unrecognized or misinterpreted by educators who do not share or are unfamiliar with their source, thereby ignoring or dismissing valid and meaningful attempts by families to engage in their child's learning (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Authentic and reciprocal connections between school and home for educators serve as a way to mitigate erasure of students and their families and, as a result, serve as strong contenders for mitigating racial, ethnic, and economic inequities in education.

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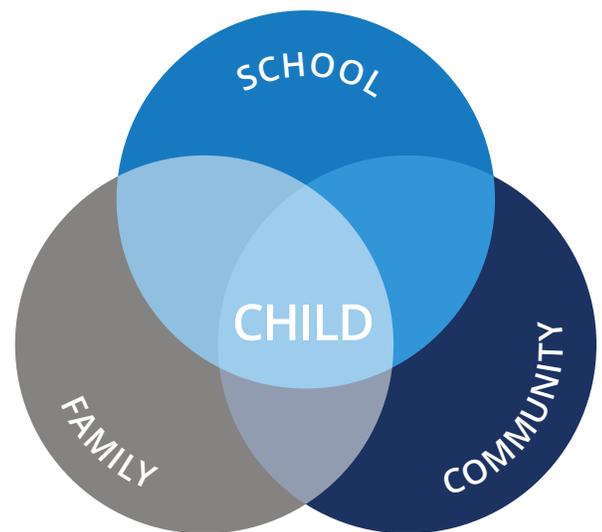
Over time, research in the areas of parent and family involvement has evolved towards models that incorporate authentically engaging practices between schools and families. Traditional forms of parent and family involvement have been critiqued for serving as a mechanism for unidirectional communication and decision-making (Casper et al., 2019). These parent involvement models are often explained as existing for schools to provide information (based on school leadership and educator decision-making) to families, and families engaging their children towards the acculturation of school-centered goals, expectations, and norms (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Conversely, emergent models of parent and family engagement emphasizes reciprocal communication towards shared decision-making regarding students' education (Bryan, et. al, 2020; Vickers & Minke, 1995).

Albright et. al (2011) suggests that three types of activities can help define the nature of school-family partnerships: 1) two-way home-school communication, 2) family involvement at home, and 3) family involvement at school. Strategies for educators to foster two-way communication include 1) assess different preferences, perceptions, and practices of children and families, 2) involve or highlight children in information shared with families, 3) be positive and communicate respect, support, and appreciation, 4) share information about classroom policies and practices, and 5) create a home-school journal or back-and-forth folder for educators and caregivers. Strategies for family involvement at home and school include 1) create a skill chart to record how SEL skills are being incorporated in the home, 2) share strategies, tools, and resources that match children's learning styles and skills, 3) use interactive materials to engage children and families, 4) distribute regular newsletters to families, 5) share specific strategies and practical tips to promote SEL, 6) invite families for classroom visits, 7) hold SEL parenting workshops or group meetings, 8) include SEL as part of progress reports, parent-teacher conferences and report cards, and 9) provide diverse and ongoing involvement opportunities for families.

These strategies have been shown to improve student achievement (Durlak et al., 2011), but they are school-centric and require families to have a great deal of social capital, access, and resources for partnership. To provide true access to and with families, for example, workshops and meetings would be conducted by diverse facilitators in different languages or with translation support for families. Additionally, training parents as trainers can serve as a model that could be implemented to ensure a true partnership in facilitation efforts, allowing parents to serve as facilitators for workshops and other school- or community-based opportunities.

Epstein's model (Epstein et al., 2009), Six Types of Parent Involvement (to the right), is often referenced for its fundamental contributions regarding the inclusion of parents in their children's educational development. The framework illustrates six types of involvement, including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community toward a goal of demonstrating care for students and their families. The outlined activities within the realm of decision-making begin to provide opportunity for parental input regarding their aspirations for students' education. Epstein (2011) highlights three overlapping spheres in which children are influenced as grounds for the inclusion of parents in students' educational development. These overlapping spheres include the school, family, and the community spaces where 'family-like' schools recognize the individuality of the child, and school-like families recognize children as also students. Similar to additional arguments for the existence of school-family partnerships, Epstein's framework suggests that if parents and schools are acting

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence



toward shared goals and expectations, then students are able to attain improved outcomes where parent involvement provides a model for creating mutual understanding. Frameworks such as Epstein's, that acknowledge the need for decision-making and collaboration, lay the empirical groundwork for centering relationships and CPS that tSEL calls for.

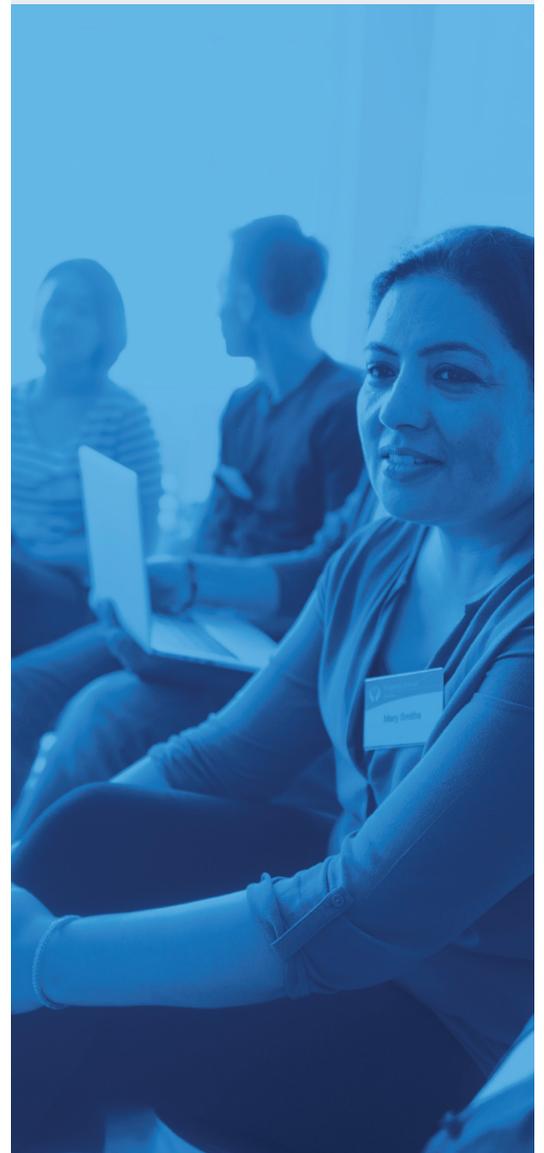
Education reform discourse highlights a major distinction between parent involvement and family engagement. Despite parent involvement, including the common goal of student success, involvement is framed by unequal partnership between the school and family, with activities and expectations directed and constructed primarily by schools, undergirded by the expectation of passivity from parents while overlooking or even dismissing the needs and potential contributions of diverse families (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

Pivoting from parent involvement to engagement shifts the ownership of student learning and development from the confines of school leadership and staff to shared partnership with families and the community. Critical parent engagement models recognize the “funds of knowledge” that parents and their communities hold, viewing the expertise for optimal child academic, social, and emotional development as a collective responsibility and commodity (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Instead of providing events or mild touchpoints for parents, parents are seen as leaders, advocates, co-constructors and decision-makers capable of making a meaningful impact in their child's learning. “Engagement” necessitates a focus on reciprocity—shared understanding of roles, goals, strategy, and desires for educational change that is representative of the needs of school stakeholders (students, families, community), while seeing students and families as a part of the broader community, thus engaging them in a way that is responsive to community needs, norms, and relational histories.

In this way, schools begin to shift from focusing on school-centered goals to those centered on students, families, and the community in an effort to build consistent practices around student development in students' homes, schools, and community spaces. Here, schools must be intentional about creating opportunities that allow families to contribute to educators' understanding of students' and families' experiences outside of the school building, including the ways that systemic oppression has cultivated current conditions. Concurrently, families are able to learn from educators about the structures that make up their children's learning environments and identify appropriate entry points to collaboration.



Pivoting from parent involvement to engagement shifts the ownership of student learning and development from the confines of school leadership and staff to shared partnership with families and the community.



The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Version 2)



The Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Mapp & Bergman, 2021; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) provides a robust and comprehensive model for developing authentic school-family partnerships. This framework (on [page 20](#)) emphasizes the need for an increased capacity to engage authentically from both school staff and families. By supporting families and educators in their personal continued growth and development, district and school leaders create the circumstances to better facilitate and achieve students' social and academic goals.

Instead of unidirectional, segmented, and decontextualized activities and directives, effective parent engagement efforts are characterized by these five elements, shaped by the context where they are employed: 1) linked to learning—engagement efforts and initiatives have a clear connection to the school's learning and development goals for students; 2) relational—engagement strategies are based on a foundation of trust and safety between parents and educators; 3) developmental—there's a mindset and action orientation towards growth and development of both educators and caregivers; 4) collective/collaborative—there are engagement initiatives where parents and teachers can partner in their learning through groups and networks rather than in isolated silos; and 5) interactive—school's initiative plans include opportunities for practicing and coaching of learnings and skills. These five elements closely map to the foundational components of the collaborative problem-solving construct in our relationship skills competency.

In honoring the diversity of past experiences of students and their families, relationship- and capacity-building are important. Many schools have imposed years of harm onto marginalized communities through exclusionary practices, competing priorities, politicized decision-making, and deficit mindsets, which has resulted in mutual distrust. Without building trusting relationships, authentic school-family partnerships cannot exist. In prioritizing relationship-building, there is also a need to acknowledge a wide range of family structures and work to build relationships with families that are representative of/responsive to their experiences based on values, identities, and aspirations for their children's education. For engagement to sustain and ultimately move to empowering school-family relationships, infrastructure (funding, systems of communication, personnel, parent boards representative of student demographics, grievance policies, etc.) must be established, and educators and families must agree they are mutually accessible and beneficial/helpful.

A blue-tinted photograph showing several hands reaching in from different directions, each holding a piece of a puzzle. The puzzle pieces are interlocking, and the hands are positioned as if they are about to place the pieces together. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR AUTHENTIC SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

There is a great deal of empirical evidence demonstrating that relationships and relational trust between school stakeholders and families are foundational to any engagement or partnership effort (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). In thinking about the construct of trust, actions matter, as do one's belief systems. With almost half (43 percent) of teachers saying that establishing strong relationships with families is not easy, a lack of positive and ongoing connections can lead to mistrust and deficit-based views about low-income families and families of color. The majority of surveyed educators (73 percent) believe "some families are just not interested in supporting their child's education." Yet an overwhelming majority of Black (78 percent) and Hispanic (87 percent) parents consistently and overwhelmingly think it is "absolutely essential" or "very important" that their child goes to college (Bergman, 2022, p. 8). These statistics spotlight the disconnect between educators' perceptions and families' goals and intentions, which must be overcome to establish the foundation of trust in an authentic school-family partnership.

Consistent with CASEL's competency of relationship skills, it's imperative to acknowledge and honor students' background and their families' cultural norms and contexts. This work establishes trust and lays the foundation for strong communication and collaborative problem-solving. Mutual trust between school staff and the families with whom they serve are based on four key elements: respect, integrity, competence, and personal regard (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). These elements are similar to the process conditions (i.e., relational, linked to learning goals, asset-based, culturally responsive and respectful, collaborative, interactive) outlined in the Dual-Capacity Framework (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Consistent with CASEL's competency of relationship skills, it's imperative to acknowledge and honor students' background and their families' cultural norms and contexts. This work establishes trust and lays the foundation for strong communication and collaborative problem-solving.



Examples of questions that educators should ask themselves in establishing trust according to these elements are:

- Am I seeking input from, and do I listen to and value, what all families have to say? (Respect)
- Am I demonstrating to all families that I am competent and that I see them as competent and valuable caretakers? (Competence)
- Do I keep my word with families? (Integrity)
- Do I show families that I value and care about them as people? (Personal Regard)

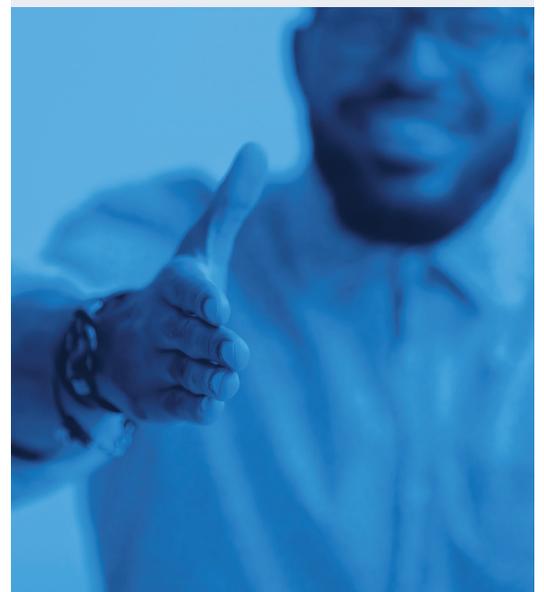
In integrating these elements as actions of relationship-building with families, educators should also be centering and acknowledging the identities and cultural norms of their families. In doing this, educators are building a sense of belonging and fostering an environment where families can exercise their agency and become authentic partners.

CULTURAL NORMS, CONGRUENCE, AND CONTEXT

Parents' motivation for school involvement can be driven by their beliefs about what their role and responsibility are as co-educators in their child's learning and their confidence in their abilities to be constructive and helpful in their child's learning (i.e., self-efficacy). Parents with high self-efficacy show a greater tendency to get involved in student learning, interact with school leadership and teachers, and develop strategies for addressing student school problems (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lopez et al., 2005). This is further emphasized by access to resources and school-to-home cultural congruence, with white and/or higher SES parents feeling a greater sense of entitlement and belief that their concerns and priorities will be addressed by the school (Horvat et al., 2003). Lower SES parents and parents of color, however, must navigate additional barriers to access while managing worse institutionalized social supports, serving as a mechanism for reduced parental involvement (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yonezawa, 2000). Additionally, personal past experiences with school as a child, childhood family structure, and recent experiences with their child's school all impact the motivation to be heavily involved with the school (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Parents' perception of being invited and welcomed as active participants also plays a significant role, especially when differences exist between the school and home's culture, language, and worldview. The default ways of relating that many schools use are nested in values, practices, and artifacts associated with the dominant culture (Baquedano-López & Hernandez, 2013; Ishimaru, 2020). However, parents are more likely to be engaged when responsive leadership creates a welcoming, trusting, and respectful environment, and

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parents can trust students are treated with respect, welcomed, and are disciplined appropriately and equitably (Hodges & Yu, 2015; Nzinga et al., 2009). This is evident in the literature regarding parent-teacher relationship quality. A study by Hughes and Kwok (2007) found that the relationship between a child’s racial/ethnic background and their engagement in the classroom were mediated by how positive the relationship was among teachers and students and their parents. Access to staff and/or teachers who speak their native language has also been found to increase parental involvement and satisfaction of Spanish-speaking parents (Olivos & Lucero, 2018). As teachers are the most proximal, accessible, and visible representation of the school setting for parents, parent-teacher relationships are at the heart of effective parent involvement, especially those characterized by warmth, trust, and communication (Ford & Kea, 2009; Nzinga et al., 2009).

Life context variables are elements and details that make up a parent’s cultural milieu—time and energy, personal knowledge and skills, and their family structure and dynamics. For instance, it was noted above that parental academic socialization is strongly linked with positive academic outcomes. Academic socialization—defined as “communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future” (Hill et al., 2009, pg. 5)—is dependent on a parent’s ability to navigate their child’s school system as well as the quality of communication between home and school. Parents who lack the social and cultural capital, or meaningful and valuable social relationships to leverage additional resources, may be unable to fully engage with schools on their terms, and therefore decide to reduce involvement (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011).

Effective parent engagement models based in authentic family-school partnership address each of these variables above from an equity-minded perspective. They do this by taking into consideration and tackling the socio-ecological components that shape parent involvement, reclaiming ownership of student learning and development from the prevailing school culture and bureaucracy to redistribute power and responsibility back to parents and the community (Bryan, et. al, 2020).

FAMILY SOCIALIZATION AS A DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Warm, supportive, and responsive parenting has been considered the key parental characteristic that promotes social and emotional growth as well as cognitive development (Landry et al., 2001). Parents implicitly and explicitly support their child’s emotional competence (Katz et al., 2012). For example, Eisenberg et al. (1998) identified three modes of parental emotional socialization: 1) reactions to emotions, 2) discussion of emotions, and 3) expression of emotion. Studies have examined these three modes of socialization extensively over the past 30 years. For example, parent modeling and expressivity (Denham et al., 1994), explicit discourse or discussions about emotions (Dunn et al., 1987; Kopp et al, 1992; Baker et al., 2011), and parental emotional support of child emotional expression (Denham et al., 2007; Fabes et al., 2002) have all been cited as behaviors that contribute to the emotional socialization processes parents utilize that impact children’s emotional developmental outcomes (i.e., emotional knowledge, understanding, and regulation).

The family context can function as a safe and open environment where children and youth can be themselves, learn, and practice social and emotional norms, cues, and skills. Substantial evidence has supported that family protective factors

such as quality parent or adult-child relationships, communication of prosocial behavior, positive discipline methods and monitoring, and values and expectations influence adolescent youth prosocial behaviors (Ary et al., 1999; Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2000; Kumpfer & Alvarado, 1998).

Although researchers have examined the positive impact parents have on child emotional competence, these studies have largely focused on mothers from white, middle-class families. This is problematic because specific individuals of specific genders, ages, ethnicities, and cultures differentially emphasize different experiences (Ford & Kea, 2009). For example, Japanese mothers expect early mastery of emotional maturity, self-control, and social courtesy, whereas European-American mothers expect early mastery of verbal competence and self-expression (Bornstein & Putnick, 2018). Fortunately, research that now includes racial/ethnic minoritized populations and fathers paints a more inclusive picture regarding emotional socialization in families (Bowie et al., 2013; Cunningham et al., 2009; Labelle & Masten, 2018; Nelson et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2013).

The ways parents support and teach their children about emotions in the home are also driven by parents' beliefs about and experiences with emotion, as well as their goals for their children's emotional development (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 2014). Parents who believe that emotional experiences should be discussed tend to use emotion words, talk about the causes and consequences of emotions, emphasize the importance of being aware of your own and others' emotions, and model expressing and managing emotions appropriately in interactions with their children (Gottman et al., 1997). These parenting strategies are associated with children's greater social and emotional competence in the classroom and academic outcomes (Nelson et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2020). However, for parents of historically marginalized groups, the ways they help their children learn about and engage with their own and others' emotions are also shaped by a combination of ethnic-racial cultural and socioeconomic norms about emotion as well as experiences and concerns about bias and discrimination toward their own and their children's emotions and behaviors (Dunbar et al., 2017; Lozada et al., 2022).

Historically marginalized parents tend to have greater concerns that there are negative consequences for their children's emotion expression (Nelson et al., 2012). They are concerned that their children's emotion-related behaviors will be labeled as problem behaviors in the classroom (Dow, 2016). To prepare their children for the ways their emotions and behaviors may be perceived outside of the home, these families may teach children to engage in emotional restraint and suppression by discouraging their emotional displays, particularly in contexts outside of the home and family (Dunbar et al., 2017).

Yet at the same time, these families may communicate to their children the necessity of being aware of one's own and others' emotions at school and other community contexts as important cues for when their child should alter their behaviors to avoid punishment or unfair treatment. Families who have been historically marginalized may provide various forms of emotional support respective to their background cultures for their children by inviting them to share their feelings, joining in on children's emotional experiences, affirming their children's feelings, helping to problem-solve in the face of negative emotion, and supporting creative and physical outlets for their children's emotions—all of which communicate that emotions are safe to communicate in the home and with family.

Further, families may also prioritize social and emotional skills such self- and social awareness that help their children maintain a positive ethnic-racial identity while coping with the stress of ethnic-racial discrimination to be able to reframe these experiences. It must be noted that families provide this social and emotional support while also

managing their own stress in the face of ethnic-racial discrimination experiences—a circumstance that should be noted by educators as they try to understand the nature of family socialization around social and emotional competence. It should be noted that parents find themselves having to teach their children how to cope with discrimination and exercise their self- and social awareness to be able to reframe discriminatory experiences they are facing.

There are a range of cultural norms across ethnic-racial groups that shape how historically marginalized families negotiate both protective and supportive goals with regard to their children’s social and emotional development. Educators must learn about and recognize the complexity of families’ protective and supportive goals and should not assume that families of the same ethnic-racial group protect and support their children’s social and emotional development in the same way. Additionally, educators must understand that when supporting students’ SEL in the classroom, there may be mistrust about educators’ ability, willingness, and intentions for engaging the emotional experiences of children from historically marginalized groups. As such, there is often a mismatch or disconnect between families’ and schools’ expectations for children’s social and emotional behaviors that may pose significant barriers to authentic family and caregiver partnerships.

Effective engagement in an authentic family-school partnership must recognize and work to address the potential for cultural mismatch and mistrust surrounding emotion that has historically been represented by the schooling context. Educators must “show, not tell” regarding their care, support, and willingness to advocate for students’ social and emotional well-being, as it is the culmination of behaviors and experiences that earn families’ trust and engagement in the schooling context. For instance, when educators consistently share their knowledge of what a child does well, what they are interested in, and their positive contributions to the classroom community, this demonstrates an educator’s care for the child.

Another way for educators to show respect for families’ social and emotional socialization goals is to create a shared vision with families that is based on families’ values, knowledge, and strengths. This can be accomplished by inviting caregivers to be role models and thought partners in social and emotional classroom experiences, such as allowing caregivers to share narratives in the classroom about their own SEL and inviting caregivers to make choices about specific social and emotional activities that students will engage in. Such an openness in the classroom to caregivers will provide them further opportunities to see the authenticity of educators’ care for students’ social and emotional well-being.

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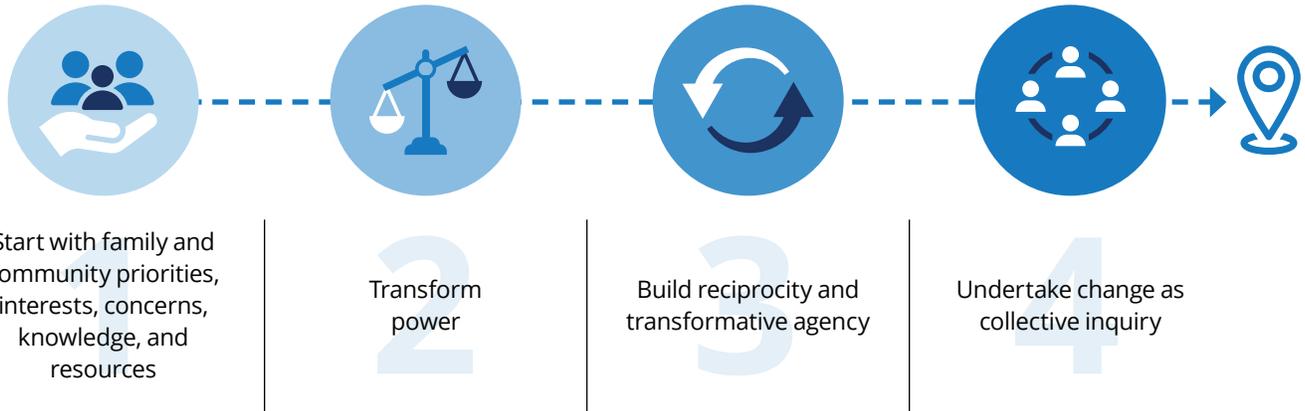


GUIDING ACTIONS THAT FOSTER AUTHENTIC SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

CASEL's SEL competencies and their aligned tSEL constructs connect closely with what researchers in the field offer as guiding actions to empower school-family partnerships (Ishimaru, 2020; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Existing frameworks that propose models for school-family partnerships discuss the need for families to be involved or engaged in schools and vice versa in various ways (Epstein, 2018) and across multiple contexts (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Ishimaru (2020) aims to advance the field of family and caregiver engagement by offering the equitable collaborations framework, which entails four principles to engage caregivers with a focus on systemic transformation, which we refer to as 'guiding actions' in the proceeding sections. The equitable collaborations framework builds from scholarship across the field of family and caregiver engagement and incorporates theories of community organizing and sociocultural learning, premising that historically marginalized families represent an "untapped source of expertise and leadership for achieving educational equity and social justice" (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 4).

The four principles are presented to guide equitable school-family collaboration across four key dimensions of educational systems: roles, goals, strategies, and change processes (Ishimaru, 2020). In considering the roles of educators and caregivers to engage in systemic change, this framework helps to reposition parents and communities as education leaders who possess important knowledge to shape schools. The goals of educational systemic transformation should be shaped with shared responsibility between schools and families and be attached to strategies that emphasize relationship- and capacity-building among caregivers and educators. Lastly, change processes should be culturally responsive to students, families, and their communities in that they address broader political and social injustices.

As a means to equitably collaborating with families across these dimensions, the following four principles/guiding actions are offered:



In the remainder of this section, we share thorough explanations of each principle in the form of a guiding action to build authentic school-family partnerships with historically marginalized families. For each guiding action above, we have expanded the language accompanied with the framework’s principles to communicate our interpretation in linking to tSEL. We then provide brief case studies of organizations who exemplify the corresponding guiding actions within their work.

GUIDING ACTION
1



School staff should begin with family priorities, interests, concerns, knowledge, and resources to create opportunities for building trust and genuine relationships

In striving for equitable collaboration between schools and families, we must begin by identifying, acknowledging, and then redefining the directionality and conditions currently framing unbalanced relationships. Historically, in the U.S. educational system, the relationship between schools and marginalized families has been defined in a stratified hierarchy that centers the agenda of school boards and leaders and families with higher social capital, placing the concerns of nondominant families on the margins (Ishimaru, 2020). Schools are public institutions that are influenced and shaped by their larger social and political context, but many of the policies and programmatic efforts surrounding parent engagement at the national, district, and school level are implemented as if they are acultural, ahistorical, and apolitical. This results in decisions that overlook or dismiss the very real impacts of the intersection of race, class, language of origin, (dis)ability status, and/or immigration status for families who are not considered primary to institutional agendas, while shaping the multiple aspects of activities and interactions encompassing the relationship (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2020). This inequitable school-family relationship produces limiting roles for each stakeholder—school as the curator and purveyor and families as recipients and presumed compliers—reducing the scope, reach, and capacity for meaningful impact in the lives of students.

To build equitable school-family collaborations towards educational transformation, school leaders must create opportunities for building trust and genuine relationships that center family and community priorities, interests, concerns, knowledge, and resources. With this approach, educational institutions shift the focus from viewing families

as deficient or something to “fix,” to recognizing and then integrating the extensive and valuable funds of knowledge they hold. Positioning the knowledge held by families as critical to educational transformation helps school leaders form relationships that repair the harm from historical deficit-focused activities and interactions that shape current school-family relationships. The development of authentic relationships between educators and families then fosters capacity and openness for collaborative problem-solving. By acknowledging the expertise present on both sides, not only are roles redefined and expanded to facilitate authentic partnership, but opportunities arise for building trust and creating the momentum and synergy necessary for solving the large and complex problems disrupting and impairing students’ learning experiences.

The [Community Schools](#) model is an innovative approach for increasing the school’s capacity for authentic family-school partnerships with families at the center. In contrast to traditional public schools, community schools are based in a community of particular interest, commonly located in under-resourced or underserved communities, to address inequitable learning environments. Model community schools are founded with a commitment to family and community engagement, imagining it as a systemic, integrated, and sustained element of school operations and policies (Blank et al., 2021; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The most effective community schools include family and community input from inception; thereby, they are designed to accommodate the needs of families such as early opening/late closing times, summer enrichment programs, or affordable, on-site health clinics and daycare (Maier et al., 2017).

Another important characteristic of Community Schools is that they “support the SEL needs of both students and families,” recognizing that parent learning and development is essential to student success (Blank et al., 2021, p. 2). Through community-centered approaches, such as needs and asset assessments, community schools can provide salient, accessible, and more broadly utilized resources (e.g., English-language learning and degree-completion courses, home-based student learning support, parent leadership and empowerment coaching). For instance, in Community Schools in Redwood City, Calif., almost three-quarters (70 percent) of all enrolled families made use of provided resources, especially reaching families of low SES status (Castrechini & London, 2012). Simultaneously, school leaders and staff improve their capabilities to engage with families while acknowledging and incorporating their funds of knowledge through programs like [Parent Teacher Home Visits](#). Parent Teacher Home Visits have been shown to increase students’ and their families’ trust in educators, improve communication between parents and teachers (Sheldon & Jung, 2015), decrease deficit assumptions about students’ home lives, increase parent commitment to student learning, and produce greater positivity about school interactions among parents’ beliefs (McKnight & Laird, 2017).

Another example of a programmatic model that centers the experiences and priorities of its caregivers and children is that of the [Father and Sons Program](#). The Fathers and Sons Program is a family-centered, culturally relevant, and gender-specific intervention designed to improve the relationship between non-resident African-American fathers and their preadolescent sons (ages 8-12 years). This improved relationship is a means to prevent or reduce the substance use and violent behavior of fathers and sons and to prevent early sexual initiation among sons (Caldwell et al., 2004). The program was developed through a community-based participatory research approach through which community partners formed a steering committee that guided program development, implementation, and evaluation. The program entails 15 sessions, with the core content being delivered in 13 two-hour sessions (sessions 2 through 14) which occur between the introductory meeting (session 1) and the closing celebration (session 15). The program uses small-group implementation (six to twelve families), and sessions are conducted twice a week over a two-month period. Fathers and Sons features 24 hours of specific content in the areas of African-American cultural connections and history, effective parent-child communication, parental monitoring and role-modeling, social support networks, and prevention of violence, unsafe-sex, and substance-use behaviors.

Communication between fathers and sons is a critical piece of the program. At the beginning of each session, each father-son pair “checks in” by describing an experience of the previous week, or any topic of their choosing. This provides a forum for the families to discuss issues that are important to them. Sons also have an opportunity to write about their feelings in journals, and they can share their entries with the entire group during “check-in” time. In another communication activity, the fathers and sons are asked to write letters to each other.

The program has been studied; one evaluation study included 158 intervention and 129 comparison group families. Results indicated that the intervention was effective for improving fathers’ parenting skills satisfaction, which was positively associated with sons’ satisfaction with paternal engagement. Results also indicated a high level of engagement; the average attendance was 12.2/15 sessions for fathers and 12.5/15 sessions for sons. Participating fathers experienced increases in reported parental monitoring, communication about risk behaviors, race-related socialization, satisfaction with parenting skills, and intention for future communications with sons. Sons in the intervention condition reported greater monitoring and communication about sex by their fathers. (Caldwell et al., 2014).



GUIDING ACTION SPOTLIGHT

Communities in Schools of Michigan

[Communities in Schools \(CIS\) of Michigan](#) works to connect students with caring adults and community resources that help them see, confront, and overcome barriers to their academic success (cismichigan.org). Through relationships with caregivers, educators, and organizations in students’ communities, CIS of Michigan provides targeted supports to students identified as having significant needs. Additionally, the organization becomes a part of school communities to help improve school culture and climate. Using an integrated student support model, the organization places student support coordinators in schools to address needs that serve as barriers to the academic, social, and emotional well-being of students. Examples of CIS of Michigan’s integrated support services includes academic assistance, basic needs, community and service learning, and college and career preparation. Parent and caregiver engagement is imperative in the work of CIS of Michigan to ensure that the needs, values, and aspirations of students and families are central.

CIS of Michigan identifies, acknowledges, and aims to redefine how caregivers are engaged by student support professionals at school. Prior to engaging within schools or with individual students, CIS of Michigan conducts a needs assessment to identify strengths and areas of improvement that are most important to students and families. CIS of Michigan’s senior regional director shared that ‘caregiver voice’ is an important component of the assessment process. When shaping their engagement for whole-school supports, CIS of Michigan collects data via surveys, interviews, and focus groups from caregivers about their vision for their child’s school and the community that they reside in. For students receiving targeted supports, CIS’s coordinators build relationships with families through ongoing conversations, student- and family-focused needs assessments, home visits, and community events involving coordinators and students’ families.

CIS of Michigan’s coordinators engage with students and their caregivers and families from an asset-based, non-punitive lens in an effort to build strong alliances to better support students’ well-being. Home visits are a strong way to connect with families, especially those who are unable to regularly attend school events such as parent-teacher conferences or family nights. This is one way that CIS practices responsive engagement with families who experience barriers to accessing physical school spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, home visits were a powerful way for the organization to stay connected to families.

CIS of Michigan aims to disrupt deficit perceptions of the ways historically marginalized families engage in their children's education. In acknowledging prevalent assumptions, they take a more family-centered approach to engaging caregivers that emphasizes two-way communication. Typically, schools present barriers to engagement that caregivers are unable to mitigate in under-resourced communities. CIS of Michigan's student support coordinators engage in communication with families at appropriate times of the day, create networks of support in their communities, and encourage parent-parent relationships. In this way, CIS of Michigan is getting away from the 'parents are not involved' narrative and instead takes responsibility to engage families appropriately. The organization takes responsibility for initial outreach to and engagement of caregivers, given the traditional exclusion of historically marginalized families by educators. Furthermore, CIS's coordinators act as a bridge to more transparent communication between schools and families, given their relationships with caregivers. Examples include creating physical spaces for open dialogue about practices and policies between educators and caregivers, communicating thematic findings gathered from caregivers to school leadership, and supporting caregivers participation in Title I Parent Meetings.

When asked what caregiver engagement means to CIS of Michigan, leadership shared that it is "all-encompassing," meaning that caregivers should be engaged in every aspect of their child's education by schools. CIS of Michigan operationalizes this practice by helping caregivers build capacity to support their child's development in the areas where they identify needing support. Caregivers have requested workshops on topics such as adult education, financial literacy, and health and nutrition, and have taken an active role in identifying community organizations that should be involved in supporting families and students. This is important because, with their input, CIS of Michigan can ensure that the values of caregivers and students are represented and that they are able to access the resources after working with CIS of Michigan's organization. In some instances, caregivers have become volunteers who coordinate support after receiving help from CIS's coordinators. For example, caregivers who have received resources from their local food pantries have then volunteered in the pantry to 'give back' to other families and create supportive relationships.

The organization has a call to action for professionals who want to center families in their work. They believe in the importance of honoring and respecting caregivers, making them a top priority, and making engagement accessible. This example demonstrates how families might be centered in the work of organizations that aim to provide needed services and resources to historically marginalized students and their families.





Schools and caregivers can transform power dynamics by increasing the capacity of both families and staff around knowledge and confidence

To shift power between families and schools, it is important to identify the roles, practices, and structures that reinforce hierarchical school-family relationships (Green & Gooden, 2014; 2015). Power dynamics in school-family partnerships are enforced under the presumption that students, their families, and communities are deficient in the knowledge and skills needed for equitable collaboration (Horsford et al., 2019; Ishimaru, 2020). However, caregivers hold funds of knowledge, rooted in their lived experiences, that are necessary for educational change (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Because current educational policies and practices don't always align with the values, preferences, and practices of families, educators and school leaders assume an expert position and act *for* instead of *with* families (Ishimaru, 2020). In addition to academic learning, students acquire social and emotional skills from their families to navigate their local experiences, which schools often problematize and use as indicators for perpetuating power dynamics in their interactions (Jagers et al., 2019; Pena-Shaff et al., 2017). As a result, relationships between schools and historically marginalized families can be characterized by distrust and skepticism, which necessitates the restoration of positive relationships before educational change can ensue (Khalifa, 2012).

Transforming power between schools and communities provides an opportunity for involved stakeholders to improve the education of all students. Traditionally, historically marginalized parents are involved in schools based on preset goals and expectations even when school-family relationships demonstrate more engaged practices (Horsford et al., 2019; Ishimaru et al., 2019). To transform power means to reconsider existing structures and policies driving school improvement efforts and embed parent leadership into schools as fundamental to its operationalization. Valli et al. (2016) exemplified how school-family relationships intended to transform power engaged parents in all components of school organizations, including funding decisions, hiring, program and curriculum development, and policy setting. Green and Gooden (2014) conducted a study and found that when power was truly transformed, changes occurred not only with regard to in-school conditions but also addressed resource inequities that commonly affect families in low-income neighborhoods. This occurs through a process of cultural brokering in which school leaders, families, and community institutions engage in actions and interactions that are supportive of equitable collaboration (Green, 2018; Ishimaru, 2020).

However, Ishimaru (2020) cautions against tokenistic practices that commonly undermine these collaborative efforts. Some examples include providing engagement opportunities for parents after school-centered priorities have been decided upon, or when families are asked to voice their perspectives about improvement efforts but final decisions are made 'behind closed doors.' Additionally, research has demonstrated the inadvertent reinforcement of existing hierarchies when tensions arise in collaboration and school professionals revert to normative powered dynamics (Gross et al, 2015). Therefore, establishing trusting relationships is fundamental. As both partners practice relationship-building, opportunities then arise for increased capacity in capabilities necessary for optimal growth and learning, such as parent skill development (e.g., language, SEL, degree completion, or continued education) and district/school staff knowledge for partnering with diverse populations (e.g., cultural and critical pedagogy practices, parents as assets and funds of knowledge).



GUIDING ACTION SPOTLIGHT

The Allegheny County Family Center Network's Parent Advisory Council

The Allegheny County Family Center Network is a countywide network of community centers that provide authentic and supportive connections to families throughout Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. The Family Center Network has integrated family voice into the creation of programming and supports at the centers and prioritized parent leadership development to empower all families so they thrive in their communities and beyond.

As a part of the Family Center Network, Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) were launched and are composed of parents and caregivers of young children to help lead and make decisions about their center. Programs and services that are planned without family input can lack depth and social accountability. Therefore, PAC allows for center staff to step back and families to step forward in the decision-making process of planning activities and events within the centers. PAC is a vehicle for meaningful engagement, social connections, building confidence, developing leadership skills, and increasing knowledge of how programs and systems operate.

Family Center staff are mindful of recognizing leadership as they seek out families to participate in the center's activities. A veteran parent leader shared how she was asked to take on leadership in her community center. "I visited the Family Center to take my children to an event." On that day, this mother was asked if she wanted to join the Family Center and participate long term. She said, "My children became drawn to the center and asked to visit regularly." The more she became involved and participated in center activities, the more staff saw that she could play a bigger role in helping shape the center.

This mother began to spread the word about what the center had done for her and her children to other families who could benefit from the activities and services the center provided. As more families joined the center, they began thinking about what they could do there. Families would organize block parties to bring the community together and decrease community violence. They also began to advocate for a safer community and helped write grants so the Family Center could get more funding to continue and advance programming. Families became committed to the success of the Family Center.

Center staff said, "Parents came together to build the center. Parents asked for programming that met the needs of the community. We were dedicated to making it successful because these were things we were asking for." Families would also step up when there were changes in staffing at the centers. They would fill in the gaps to keep the center functioning. It was communicated by center staff that families "own the center," and the PAC is how they organized the families to exercise their leadership.

Governance of Parent Advisory Councils (PACs)

Assigning structure to PACs gives parents a launching pad to keep meetings functional and effective. Structure also establishes guidelines and roles to the members. Parents have the choice of being a general member in the PAC or assuming an official role on the council. The PAC officer composition may vary across centers; however, many centers adopt this governing body standard:

- Chair
- Co-Chair
- Treasurer
- Parliamentarian
- Secretary

Nominations are made for each of the offices, and members get the opportunity to vote on the candidate they believe best fits the role. There are recommended term limits of two years for general membership and one year for officers. This allows for all parents and caregivers to have an opportunity to serve the center as a part of PAC. This structure helps PAC function smoothly. Having a governing body and formal meetings communicates that parent voice and input is taken seriously. It puts parents in a position of power and raises their leadership awareness.

PAC Functions in Family Centers

At least once a month, PACs meet to strategize, plan, and implement events and activities at their centers. Parents have autonomy and agency to make decisions about what experiences and learning opportunities are integrated into the center activities with the center's staff available to provide support and guidance.

Family Center staff meet with the officers prior to the monthly meeting to co-create an agenda and complete any prework necessary to prepare for the general meeting. Much of what is discussed at the meetings is what activities and events will be planned for the families of the center with the goal to meet the educational, parenting, and social needs of families and children. Examples of events and activities that the PAC organizes include arts and crafts activities, family fun nights, field trips, holiday celebrations, resource presentations, parent groups, and leadership training.

Parents are responsible for facilitating the meetings and organizing the activities and events. When parents have the skills to improve what is happening around them and partner with other families in the interest of children, they become a stronger voice for equity, justice, and advocacy. Parents are empowered to speak up about what they need for themselves, their families, and their communities. The skills they learn and relationships they build because of their participation with PAC can extend even beyond their work at the centers.

To make a space for all voices across generations, one center has created two separate councils. They have the traditional PAC but also what they call a "veterans leadership development council" of parents who have served their terms on the PAC but still add value to the centers and emerging parent leaders. One center director said, "our veteran leaders have written grants and presented at conferences on a state and national level." This is an amazing testament to the work of parent leaders in Family Centers and how their leadership skills can be utilized to grow parents professionally and personally.

Community Voices

Community Voices is a committee that brings together families (specifically, PAC officers and members) across the network to collaborate around common goals and family activities and gives parents greater visibility and agency around decision-making and contributions within the Family Center Network. Community Voices, in Allegheny County, has a particular interest in advancing PAC officers and members' civic leadership and educating them on local- and state-level political systems. This committee emphasizes the importance of exercising their right to vote and prepares families to communicate with local and state legislators to discuss political decisions impacting their communities.

There was a time funding was in jeopardy for Family Centers across the state of Pennsylvania. Community Voices organized to advocate for the restoration of funding. They held rallies in Harrisburg and contacted other Family Centers across the state for support. Getting funding restored was not common. One parent reports, "Once a line item is erased, it's typically not restored." However, the efforts of Community Voices and other centers across the state prevailed, and they were able to get the funding reinstated to continue the work in the centers. This demonstrated the power of the families and their commitment to the Family Centers.

PAC Leadership Development, Support, and Resources

The Family Center Network has a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh's Office of Child Development (OCD) to provide ongoing leadership development and support for the parent leaders. OCD's Family and Community Partnership Division provides leadership development classes, tools, and technical assistance to help parent leaders build strong PACs and have access to support along their leadership journey. OCD leverages assets of the university and other service providers to give parents relevant and quality leadership development resources.

Family Center staff also provide leadership support and guidance at the center level to help parent leaders effectively manage PAC. One center site director reported, "It's bigger than our center," referring to parents transcending their leadership abilities beyond the Family Centers. A parent talked about how she uses her leadership skills to advocate for families of children with special needs. "I've done presentations for families about special education and Individual Education Plan (IEP) in schools." This mom is an advocate for special education concerns for herself and other families.

Family Center staff work with parents on writing skills, public speaking, and self-advocacy to advance the work of building strong families and communities. One parent states, "I've gained the ability to improve my communication, organize other families, and be a resource navigator."

Family Center staff encourage families to look at the bigger picture and for parent leaders to use the skills they develop through PACs to enhance their professional and family lives. These skills also help enrich and grow the Family Centers. Families reinvest their skills and talents back into the centers to continue the work and efforts of the Family Center and improve their communities.

Parents can become more confident, gain skills, and connect with other parents and staff through PACs. Program staff learn about the strengths, interests, and needs of the children, families, and communities they serve. Families develop knowledge and competencies that will benefit their professional and personal lives. Family Centers become stronger and more impactful to the communities they serve. PAC is a positive representation of parent leaders who are valued as experts and who inform, advise, and collaborate with Family Center staff. Families and center staff interactions work together to create respectful and nurturing cultures in Family Centers so that families, children, and communities can thrive.



Build reciprocity and agency between school staff and families

As the understanding and methods around power are transformed for all key stakeholders, efforts to build reciprocity and agency facilitate a conduit for these new partnerships. For one, families' funds of knowledge—especially those likely to be excluded from the conversation and kept from the table—are validated as legitimate ways of knowing, and the seat of knowledge is understood as shared and transferable between families and schools as the challenge or need demands.

This recalibration requires setting up systems and structures that foster a sense of camaraderie and collaboration, recognizing the need for increased capacity to engage authentically from both school staff and families, with the pursuit of growth and development on both sides. Models like the Dual-Capacity Framework illustrate how the development of educators' and families' capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence among and between each other facilitate this process. For instance, many districts have invested in parent academies, providing education, training, resources, and sometimes even meeting space for caregivers. Yet, these same districts very rarely administer similar capacities for educators to improve their capabilities working with caregivers, erroneously assuming a one-sided need for development. Investment in both groups ensures that the foundational competencies for partnership are established while also increasing opportunities for authentic connections.

As both sides lean into connection, they are able to determine the intersection (or departure from) shared goals, hopes, and outcomes for students while planning and strategizing as equal partners. These connections are not limited to only parents and educators, but also have implications for intra-group collaboration—families seeing each other as sources of knowledge and co-conspirators. Practices like collective organizing, a mechanism for shifting power dynamics, serve as an empowering space for families to use their increased competencies and capacities. This provides them with opportunities to coordinate the change they wish to see for their children and leverage their agency to ensure lasting, meaningful change instead of transient, inconsequential revisions that are typical in existing systems. The joint effort between schools and families to transform families' roles from impotent and compliant spectators to empowered and equipped collaborators is especially critical for nondominant families and ensures that quality education can be obtained for all students, regardless of cultural background, social capital, or other indicators of power and privilege.

For example, fellow collaborator Dr. Castro-Olivo worked with a District English Language Advisory Committee (DELAC) in Southern California to promote SEL for parents of students with English Learner (EL) status. In California, public school districts with 51 or more students with EL status are required to form a DELAC (California Department of Education, 2022). These districtwide committees allow parents of children with EL status to be represented at the district and school levels in their native language. Members of DELACs advise the school district governing board on key educational programs from supporting districtwide needs assessment of EL students to reviewing and advising on plans for ensuring teacher and programming compliance. They function as Parent Teacher Organizations, where they hold elections for board members, have monthly meetings where parent representatives from each school in the district share their updates, concerns, and needs. District administrators are also part of these DELAC meetings and later work with other departments within their district, or local universities, to address the needs identified by parents. Although it is a state requirement, not all school districts are successful at obtaining full participation from EL parents from every school in the district. In addition, not all districts have a well-functioning, fully empowered DELAC. While not all DELACs felt empowered to ask their district for evidence-based SEL programming, certain committees did advocate successfully for SEL programming within their districts.

What We DO



Organizing and Advocacy

We convene families through intense workshops exploring racial bias in education as well as strategies and resources to deal with racial bias. Our work helps families build political power and community interdependence.



Research and Create Tools

We build tools that allow families to easily inform and access quantifiable measures of inequity in their schools. Our research is informed by our work with families creating tools and frameworks that are truly responsive to the community.



Consulting and Evaluation

We offer school and nonprofits innovative, quantifiable measures or racial equity in their work with children and families. Our consulting also enhances organizations' culturally responsive practices.



Black Genius Brand

We have created the racially affirming brand that Black families deserve. Through Black Genius, we amplify public awareness of our work and support our community with positive images and stories about black people.

Organizations launching innovative programs (see image above), such as Village of Wisdom (VOW), are essential supports for building reciprocity and agency between families and schools, especially for marginalized families. Described as a “movement for Black parents protecting Black genius,” Village of Wisdom (VOW) is a parent support organization that equips Black parents to be empowered and support Black students in schools through four main areas: advocacy, tool creation, research, and branding (villageofwisdom.org, 2022). Families are given opportunities for training, equipping them to be critically aware and active advocates for their child’s learning through programs like the Family Learning Village. In the Family Learning Village, they are able to build the capacity to navigate and address racial bias and discrimination their children will experience in the school system and throughout life. As an intermediary organization, VOW conducts research utilizing a community-driven and participatory approach that draws on the parents in the community as experts, curators of research, and drivers of change.

Findings from a qualitative study examining the impact of the VOW program revealed that schools did not extend their capacity for authentic engagement through shared ownership of learning (e.g., districts made many decisions and held expectations of parents without inquiring of parents’ opinions, thoughts, or input) and a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy (omission of Blackness in the school curriculum and greater learning environment). Although parents shared experiences that reiterate the negative consequences of poorly developed family-school partnership (“They all expressed that they did not look to the school districts or schools to ensure their well-being”; Barrie et al., 2021, p. 10), they also relayed the autonomy gained through remote learning. Parents felt they could protect their children better from school staff and environment by learning from home, despite the additional stressors.



Organization Overview

Village of Wisdom (VOW) is an organization that supports family organizing and advocacy entities to eliminate racial injustice in schools. Described as a “movement for Black parents protecting Black genius” by their Chief Dreamer, Dr. William Jackson, VOW empowers Black parent leadership toward the protection and upliftment of the inherent Black genius of their children (personal communication, 2022). Positioning parents as leaders throughout their organization’s four functional areas, VOW honors the experiences, expertise, and aspirations of Black parents to create a network in which they can influence the development of themselves, their children, educators, school leaders, and community members toward creating culturally affirming schooling.

VOW’s four functional areas span engagement in research, the arts, instructional liberation, and the Black Genius Framework, comprising six elements. As outlined below, these include Interest Awareness, Racial Pride, Multi-Cultural Navigation, Selective Trust, Social Justice, and Can-Do-Attitude. The Black Genius Framework is intended to protect the intellectual curiosity and positive racial identity of Black parents and children by translating wisdom from their experiences into tangible strategies, engagements, and leadership that impacts the creation of racially just, culturally affirming learning environments. In the following case study, the work of VOW is explored under the four guiding principles described in this paper to create authentic school-family partnerships towards equitable educational improvement.

Black Genius Framework Elements

- **Interest Awareness:** Creating opportunities to identify new interests and deepen skills in current interests.
- **Racial Pride:** Exploring feelings about being Black and deepening pride in that identity.
- **Multi-Cultural Navigation:** Exploring other cultures and refining the capacity to skillfully move across cultures.
- **Selective Trust:** Developing the capacity to discern who is worthy of your trust.
- **Social Justice:** Building capacity to dismantle systems of oppression or create systems of justice and equity.
- **Can-Do-Attitude:** Building the belief and knowledge that effort grows ability and skill.

Exemplar and Guiding Principles

VOW considers parents as central stakeholders in the field of education. Mechanisms of exploring and uplifting the experiences of Black parents in education systems are therefore embedded within the four functional areas of VOW’s organization, and often are exemplified by parents’ transition from learners to leader-learners in organizational programming. VOW offers a number of immersive programs that uplift Black parents’ experiences to teach about the Black Genius Framework, a few of which are discussed here.

First is the Family Learning Village, which is a two-day session instructed in the form of a 'learning exchange' in which Black parents reflect on and engage in dialogue around their and their children's educational experiences and dreams. Additionally, Wisdom Wednesdays is an immersive program taught over a six-week period that guides parents through a deeper iteration of the Black Genius Framework, where components of the framework are practiced in the programming. In an interview, VOW's Parent Amplifier shared examples of culturally relevant activities that are drawn from the cultural experiences of Black parents to help build community in the programming spaces. For example, in a Wisdom Wednesday session, a welcoming activity was created in which parents were asked, "If you were a hairstyle today, what hairstyle would you be?", which resonates with Black parents given the diversity and meaning of hairstyles within Black culture. By connecting with Black parents in a way that centers them in the six elements of the Black Genius Framework in the context of their own lives, communities, and schools, the parents realize that within their experiences, they hold the wisdom to protect that of their children in their education.

To center parents in the way that the organization does, VOW protects the Black Genius of parents by creating intentional spaces for the attendance of only Black parents and caregivers. In an interview, VOW's Chief Dreamer shared the importance of a space for Black parents to unpack their genius without the presence of 'white gaze.' VOW's Parent Amplifier, Nadiah Porter, further shared unlearning white-centric ideals is necessary for creating immersive learning sessions that embody the Black Genius Framework. She continued to share that this centering of Black parent experiences is how VOW "raises Black parent leadership."

While parents are centered in the organization, it is important to note that they are centered in external-facing work of the organization as well. For example, VOW's Black parent leaders coordinated and led all components of a Juneteenth event in the community. Black parents also have been immersed in all components of community-driven research projects, including presenting findings to educational leaders in parent-led meetings. To further support Black parents in their leadership, VOW also has a culture of care in which relationships and the well-being of Black parents are central.

Ultimately, VOW centers Black parents by embedding the Black Genius Framework into all components of the organization, thus positioning parents as leaders driven by their own experiences and dreams. When asked about her call to the field for institutions and organizations that want to build authentic parent and caregiver partnerships, VOW's Parent Amplifier shared relationships that acknowledge the ways that parents learn and contribute, address their needs, and increase their leadership development need to be prioritized.

As VOW invests in parent leaders to engage their innate desire to protect their children's Black genius and advocate for culturally affirming learning environments, they reduce traditional power hierarchies. VOW practices a collaborative leadership structure in which they work to intentionally make sure everyone across the organization, parents included, are aware of the decisions being made and are able to provide insight. The ongoing examination of power that occurs within VOW is distinct from normative power dynamics that affect Black parents, further solidifying VOW as an organization for Black parents. In an interview, their Chief Dreamer called for the field of education to attend to local governments, superintendents, school leaders, and educators—those who traditionally hold power—to advocate for creating culturally affirming learning environments in schools instead of maintaining practices that exclude parents in leadership.

One way that VOW has operationalized this call to action is through their collaborative inquiry with parents using a community-driven research approach. Traditional community-based research is often critiqued for either researching on and not with Black communities or consulting them after research designs have been developed. VOW's community-driven research approach allows parents to lead all phases of a research project from its inception to the dissemination of findings and thereafter.

In summer 2020, a number of Black mothers engaged in 60-hours of training about research processes to conduct a Dreams Assessment with additional Black parents, students, and teachers about creating culturally affirming online learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was motivated by parents' own experiences with their children during at-home learning and utilized VOW's Dream Assessment methodology, grounded in principles of racial justice, equity, and empowerment. After leading the research study and making meaning of their findings, parents were then empowered to share results with educational leaders and communicate a number of recommendations.

The parent leaders also created the Dreamandments from the study's findings, which state the conditions required to affirmingly receive Black learners in educational spaces. The Dreamandments and Keep Dreaming reports on VOW's web pages have been viewed by over 13,000 subscribers and engagers on VOW's social media platforms. This example is indicative of intentional, strategic and authentic parent and caregiver partnership toward eliminating racial injustices in schools, as is the mission of VOW. While this case study does not provide an exhaustive explanation of VOW's work to authentically engage parents and caregivers as leaders in education, it exemplifies VOW as a leader in the field of Black parent empowerment.

To learn more about VOW engagement of Black parents and the Black Genius Framework, and to view their Dreamamendments and Keep Dreaming reports, [visit their website](#).



**GUIDING
ACTION**
4



Educators and caregivers undertake change as collective inquiry together using the relationships that they have built as a way to collaboratively problem-solve

Engaging in collective inquiry can help develop shared capacities for change between schools and families.

Traditionally, we see families' voices captured in surveys or through traditional means of gathering parent feedback (e.g., town halls, PTAs, parent-teacher conferences). However, involving families in inquiry processes that span from data gathering to agency in school decisions can foster the development of equitable school improvements (Auerbach, 2010; Ishimaru, 2020). Additionally, engaging families in collective inquiry from an approach of continuous improvement can contribute to improved school-family relationships and educational change. Collective inquiry that embodies a continuous improvement process to both school improvement and school-family relationships can also serve as a reciprocal process to the transformation of power between nondominant families and schools. Ishimaru (2020) discusses family leadership in data-informed transformation where families not only collect and interpret data but also are active in co-creating solutions and decision-making processes from the data.

To engage in the data in this way, it is important for educators to recognize the experiences and knowledge held by families that drive their processes of interpreting data and posing solutions. Reciprocally, parents must trust that educators are honoring their experiences, valuing their expertise, and engaging from a shared sense of care for their children's education (Green, 2018). As educators and families engage in this reciprocal process, transformative power dynamics are both fundamental and transitional. Therefore, relational trust is needed to sustain and grow school-family relationships during the collective inquiry process.

Traditionally, data can be harmful to families of color in light of accountability policies and their use of data as an indication that historically marginalized families are deficient in knowledge acquisition, skills, and important values (Milner, 2012). Acknowledging this and empowering families to engage in inquiry around issues that are important to their children's development is one strategy for utilizing collective inquiry to build relational trust. Parents should also be empowered to interpret data inductively. For example, parents might provide contextual knowledge of inequitable practices contributing to the results. Additionally, parents may identify inconsistencies in what and how data is gathered relative to their or their students' cultural understandings and funds of knowledge and misaligned engagement between students' school and home spaces.

Ultimately, the collective inquiry process helps schools and families address disparities in educational systems, policies, and practices (Kuttner, 2015), and provides an opportunity for schools and families to identify misconceptions, come to shared understandings about the purpose of education, and decide upon ways to help schools better serve students, especially those of color (Ishimaru, 2019).



GUIDING ACTION SPOTLIGHT

Minneapolis Public Schools Parent Participatory Evaluation Initiative

The Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) Parent Participatory Evaluation (PPE) is a program that creates parent capacity to shape and guide inquiry of district structures, processes, or factors that impact their children's learning, granting meaningful and sustained change to the student learning environment (PPE, n.d). Parents participating in MPS' evaluation program are drawn from a variety of activities and programs in the district, such as the Connecting Parents to Educational Opportunities (CPEO) program, parent advisory council, and individuals interested in having a voice about their child's learning experience.

The program is comprehensively integrated into district structures through the research and evaluation offices with buy-in at all levels of the district. Parents and district leaders commit a substantial amount of time to this endeavor, with each PPE session ranging around 20 to 25 hours (10 hours training followed by 10 to 15 hours collecting parent voice within the community). Parents undergo thorough training on culturally relevant data collection processes and evaluation—such as surveying, focus groups, and participatory methods—increasing their capabilities to be partners with educators and district leaders on their children's learning. A 'question of interest' is identified by the collective group of parent researchers and expanded into organized planning for each stage of research.

Research questions represent the concerns, desires, and dreams parents and their respective communities hold for their children in an intimate way that may not always be possible for district or school leaders to identify (e.g., How can a school value and respect your child for who they are?). After collecting relevant data from the community, this research collective reconvenes to discuss the findings and use their expertise as parents and community members to determine the most accessible way to share their findings.

The program sustains diverse and community-representative parent participation through financial compensation and opportunities to share research findings with district and school leaders as well as community members and other family members. An esteem for parent experience and expertise is demonstrated as findings are utilized to shape district policies and practices, increasing parents' sense of efficacy to effect meaningful change in student learning while reinforcing for district/school leaders both existing and newly generated valuable knowledge residing in the community (4C's of Dual Capacity Framework: Confidence). Parents as researchers serve to both increase parent knowledge and skills while also expanding their social capital about the processes that impact student learning and well-being (Dinallo, 2016). As of today, there have been two cohorts of parent-led research evaluations and 12 findings addressing the needs and desires of the MPS learning community.



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

With this report, we have outlined the empirical link between the fields of SEL and school-family partnerships, while offering an alignment in conceptual framework with that of tSEL. In addition, we have highlighted programs and organizations that are undertaking the work laid out by the four guiding actions previously discussed.

TSEL offers a conceptual framework based on the “CASEL 5” competencies that focuses on constructs (identity, agency, belonging, collaborative problem-solving, and curiosity) to better understand the conditions (and barriers) that must be acknowledged for authentic partnership. Justice- and equity-minded parent engagement models based in authentic family-school partnerships must address systemic and individual barriers. They take into consideration and tackle the socio-ecological components that shape parent involvement, reclaiming ownership of student learning and development from the grip of school culture and bureaucracy while redistributing power and responsibility back into the hands of parents and the community. Research has shown that strong family engagement that prioritizes two-way communication and decision-making positively impacts academic, social, and emotional outcomes (McWayne et al., 2004; Sheridan et al., 2019). So tSEL, as a form of SEL that centers equity and justice, can shape the context and rationale for moving beyond prescriptive forms of parent engagement, elevating caregivers and families as collaborators.

For readers, researchers, and educators alike, we’d like this piece to serve as a reference, support, and bridge to those in the fields of SEL and school-family partnerships to draw upon the necessary competencies in their own lines of work and connect to those programs and organizations that are leading the charge in embedding SEL in their programmatic efforts towards authentic school-family partnerships.



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