

Family Engagement in Middle School and High School Student Career Development

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The Goal of Engaging Family in Student Career Development

Family involvement and input are critical components to any robust career development program. To get students to fully engage in their own career development activities, we need parents/family who are:

- informed
- inspired
- know how to help their children

This document provides family engagement principles to keep in mind as you create career development programming and resources for families, as well as a list of common family engagement strategies and exemplar models from across the country and the world.

General Principles and Practices for Effective, Equitable Family Engagement

When considering the best ways to engage families in the student career development process, it is important to keep in mind the principles and practices that undergird *all* effective and equitable family engagement strategies.

Adapted from sources developed by the California Department of Education and PPIC, below are a list of general family engagement principles organized under two broad themes and supplemented with examples of each principle in the context of career development practice.

Provide the resources and opportunities necessary to appropriately engage families and create investment

1. Reformat school events to make them more focused on **engaged family learning**

Ex. Rather than just taking families through the results of a student's career assessment results, have them complete the career assessment themselves.

2. Offer **capacity-building opportunities** for parents to help them help their children meet their educational goals

Ex. Coach and prepare families to execute conversation guides with their students in age-appropriate ways over time

3. Provide parents and families with **ongoing** interactive engagement opportunities

Ex. Emphasize how planning in earlier grades isn't meant to lock student into a path and instead serves to create a starting place for student career exploration

Ex. Schedule multiple career discussions over the year, once in the fall as students are applying to colleges and once in the spring as students are applying for jobs

4. Acknowledge the **contributions and current relationships** of parents and families and communicate understanding of their needs and expectations for their students.

Ex. Have parents reflect on and share their own career development history in meetings

5. Develop effective **partnerships with the greater school community** and effectively use community resources to support families' needs to enable parents to actively participate in the school

Ex. Ask community partners to cosponsor or present at career-related events such as job fairs

Create a welcoming, accessible environment to make all families feel safe and involved

1. Provide **translation**, especially simultaneous translation when possible, for parents and families with a primary language other than English and include opportunities for questions

Ex. Have staff or even family volunteers who can provide translation services during family outreach events or workshops

2. Ensure adequate resources for **parents and families with special needs** to understand the proceedings

Ex. Arrange for an interpreter for parents who are deaf to attend meetings and workshops

3. Schedule opportunities for parents and families to participate in school and LEA-supported activities and training at **times and places conducive for full participation**.

Ex. Consult with parents to determine whether evening or weekend meetings are preferable

4. Provide supports, such as **transportation, food, and child care**, when possible, to enable parents and family members to participate in school and LEA activities

Ex. Arrange for and advertise child care options for families with younger children who might not otherwise be able to attend meetings or workshops

5. Use linguistically **accessible communication methods**, accessible to and used by parents, including, but not limited to social media, e-mail, printed letters, telephone and face-to-face communication, and visual aids such as charts and diagrams.

Ex. When collecting family information, ask family members their preferred communication method(s)

6. Educators must be **culturally responsive to diverse families** and use an assets-based approach to understanding families

Ex. Be attentive to cultural differences in values associated with work and education

Example Career Development Family Engagement Strategies

College Tours

Definition

Students and families visit college campuses led by campus staff and/or students to get acquainted with the school and everyday student life.

Value

Inviting families to accompany students on college tours allows them to gain more information about the college in particular, get a sense of what student life in college looks like, and ask questions related to college life in general.

Considerations

- Make sure that college tours are offered in the requisite languages to make them accessible to all families
- Provide transportation to and from colleges on the day of the tour

Career Assessment and Exploration Workshops

Definition

Gatherings put on by qualified teachers and practitioners with the aim of building knowledge about the career assessment and exploration process and of building empathy for students' exploration processes

Value

Career assessment and exploration workshops build family understanding of the career development process, mutual understanding, and capacity for ongoing exploration.

Considerations

- Engage parents in tracing their own career trajectories to build self-awareness and empathy for their children
- Enable parents to participate in career assessments to better understand their own interests which may help shape their attitudes toward their children's career interests, and to understand the career assessment process—what it is (an opportunity to build self-knowledge and explore options) and what it is **not** (a prescription for the future)
- Ensure that all assessments used are available in multiple languages
- Leave time to debrief any results; err on the side of less assessment time and more discussion time to avoid opportunities for confusion around unexplained results
- Honor the role of families' values and cultures in the career exploration process

Informative Workshops

Definition

Gatherings put on by teachers and practitioners with the aim of engaging families in understanding topics such as labor market information (LMI) , postsecondary financial aid options, and skills needed in the changing economy

Value

In-person workshops not only give educators the opportunity to answer family questions, they also help to ensure that families are not merely passive consumers of important information. These workshops should not only highlight critical information, they should facilitate real capacity-building.

Considerations

- Leverage speakers from local colleges and businesses to share their insights into how career development practices for students apply to real world outcomes
- Provide LMI in intelligible forms — using concrete examples of growth trends, salaries, and KSAs needed in occupations of direct interest to the families and in demand in the local economy
- In addition to providing financial aid information, conduct workshops to assist parents in completing the required forms
- Build foundational vocabulary and financial literacy, to the extent possible, e.g. in partnership with the local adult school or college, to support long-term family success
- Emphasize self-knowledge, adaptability, critical thinking, and other skills needed to navigate career changes and changes in the economy over time

Invite-Parents-to-Class Days

Definition

A day during the school year where families are invited to either sit in on a class or present in a class related to career development.

Value

Families gain greater insight into the career development lessons and activities their students engage in during school time. When families are invited to speak during these days, they are able to offer their career expertise and experiences with students in their community.

Considerations

- Prepare guidance, materials, or activities for family members attending a class session orientated around career development
- Offer supports such as child care and transportation to better enable family members to attend

Take-Your-Child-to-Work Days

Definition

An opportunity for students to accompany a family member to work in order to shadow them and gain exposure to the everyday machinations of a particular career and role.

Value

This strategy elevates the more traditional job shadow experience by allowing students and families to connect concretely around career opportunities in which a family member has expertise.

Considerations

- Consider alternative options for students whose family workplaces may not be amenable to student visits
- Assist in the coordination and logistics of these visits to ensure feasibility and availability to all families

Family-Student Career Fairs

Definition

An event where students and families are invited to visit with representatives from different sectors, companies, and organizations to connect, network, and gather information.

Value

By inviting families to attend career fairs with students, families gain insight into a wide variety of career options available to students, as well as further insight into a student's particular career interests.

Considerations

- Prepare families to engage in conversations with students and potential employers via a related workshop or resource
- Provide logistical support to enable all families to attend

Family Volunteer Mentor Program

Definition

A program that leverages family volunteers to mentor students in college and career topics.

Value

Such programs leverage the experiences and familiarity of family members to provide mentoring to students throughout the community. This also encourages family involvement overall. (Arizona Department of Education 2018)

Considerations

- Provide training and logistical supports for those volunteering as mentors

Family Service-Learning Projects

Definition

Include families in the research, planning, action, and reflection steps of service-learning projects, which are opportunities that combine learning goals with meaningful community service.

Value

In Arizona, this strategy has proven particularly effective for engaging students in ELL or migrant families. By including families in the process, schools can open another channel of communication with families and families can engage in discussions around civic engagement and skill development. (Arizona Department of Education 2018)

Considerations

- Get a sense of what volunteer opportunities are important to families and the local community
- Provide transportation and child care services to make these opportunities feasible for students and family

Career Development Syllabi/Schedules

Definition

A resource that outlines the expectations and activities for students and families at every grade band/level.

Value

This not only helps families develop an awareness of what to expect in terms of student learning and upcoming activities, it should also provide a clear reasoning for the activities. (Arizona Department of Education 2018)

Considerations

- Ensure that these are accessible in both format and language

Family-Student Conversation Guides

Definition

A resource that provides questions and prompts for families to use when having conversations with students about career development and exploration.

Value

Conversation guides offer support to family members who may feel less prepared to engage their students in a career development conversation.

Considerations

→ Coach families on how to use such conversations guides at a related workshop

Parent Engagement Models Throughout the Country

Arizona's Education and Career Action Plan Process

Description

In Arizona, schools are expected to guide students through the process of career reflection, exploration, and planning that results in a tangible portfolio of activities students build on year after year. Parent engagement is a central feature of this planning process.

Promising Parent Engagement Strategies

[City High School in Arizona](#) has had great success in engaging families in career development by hosting student-led parent-teacher conferences that emphasize the student's experiences in self-exploration activities, career exploration activities, and career planning and management activities. Parents, teachers, advisors, and peers are all invited to attend. According to the Arizona Department of Education, "The student-led conferences give parents important insights into their child's learning, provide an opportunity to discuss post-secondary planning, and create an authentic format for students to candidly discuss the work they care about the most".

Nebraska Career Development Model

Description

Nebraska's Career Development model features three segments: self-awareness, career exploration, and career planning and management. To support student learning in these three segments, Nebraska's Career Education systems includes CTE programming, Workplace Experiences, professional development for school personnel, and partnerships between schools, colleges, local industry, and economic and government agencies.

Promising Parent Engagement Strategies

To support parent engagement, the [Nebraska Department of Education provides guidance](#) and leverages survey research with parents and families performed by The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth to highlight the needs and desires of families when it comes to career development. For each finding, they provide a series of suggestions for how to incorporate this knowledge into family engagement practices.

Victoria, Australia Career Education

Description

The Career Education model espoused in the Australian state of Victoria emphasizes a series of six steps aligned with grade levels 7-12, ranging from “I discover” to “I apply.” At each of these levels, students develop Career Action Plans that help them set their goals, clarify the actions needed to achieve these goals, and commit to participating in planned activities.

Promising Parent Engagement Strategies

In addition to provide comprehensive toolkit around its “Engaging Parents in Career Conversations” model, The Victoria Department of Education and Training provides [specialized guidance](#) for educators seeking to engage parents from special populations, such as immigrant/refugee families, families from indigenous or *Koorie* communities, families from low-SES communities, and families with students with disabilities, in conversations around career development.

Helpful Resources

Arizona Department of Education

- [Arizona ECAP Implementation: Administration Toolkit.](#)

Victoria Department of Education and Training

- [Engaging Parents in Career Conversations](#)

South Carolina Department of Education

- [South Carolina Career Guidance Model - Parental Involvement](#)

Nebraska Department of Education

- [Nebraska Career Education - Family Engagement](#)

PPIC

- [Family Engagement Practices in California Schools](#)

California Department of Education

- [Family Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Local Control Funding Formula \(LCFF\) Priority 3 Statements of Model Practices](#)
- [Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California Schools](#)