

Shared Decision-Making for District Leaders



WORKING WITH FAMILIES ON ADVISORY BODIES

Working Directly with Families as Decision-Makers and Leaders on Advisory Bodies

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

- PTA Family Engagement Standards: Sharing Power

Including families in decision-making is a key foundational element of family engagement. District leadership can play a key role in supporting this principle by creating spaces for parent leadership at both the district- and school-level that ensure:

- Families are empowered and authentically involved;
- Families provide input on education issues and school improvement;
- Programs at the school level are in place to support engagement; and
- Families are engaged in discussions focused on data and formative assessment.



BuildInitiative.org/FamilyEngagementToolkit

This resource is designed for district leaders to plan and implement a strategy for creating family advisory teams for the school district.

Recommendations

Implementation Settings

- District level meetings
- Planned individual time

Planning Time: None

Implementation Time: 30 minutes to read

Principals can use this resource to ensure that the school supports the implementation of family advisory teams.

Through Title I Parent Action Committees (PAC) and locally driven school-based shared decision-making teams, districts and schools have historically created advisory committees that include families as key contributors and decision-makers. Now districts can leverage experience and lessons learned to create advisory bodies that engage families in shared decision-making focused on formative assessment and the engagement of families in the process.

At a district level, families serving on advisory groups:

- Provide insight and information needed to inform efforts to include families in the formative assessment process at the school sites; and
- Serve as a model for how engaging families in shared decision-making can increase effective practice and policies in schools.

At a school level, families serving on advisory groups:

- Offer unique insights into district/school areas of strength and needs;
- Provide important feedback on specific practices and policies from a family perspective; and
- Provide more context and a bigger picture than can be gained through traditional forms of soliciting input from families such as surveys and questionnaires.

Serving on advisory committees provides a formalized process for including the family perspective on district and school decision-making issues and providing

parent concerns to district and school leaders. Parents on advisory committees “...engage, inform, and represent parent perspectives, ideas, and voices on education matters. Serving on PAC promotes, supports, and builds parent leadership to improve outcomes for all students.”

Five roles district leadership can play to support family engagement and leadership in decision making at the school level:

- ✓ Provide leadership and model best practices by involving families in advisory groups at the district level to advise on district-wide policies and school-level plans to include families in the formative assessment process and shared decision-making;
- ✓ Deploy resources to support family engagement in the formative assessment process based on identified staff and family needs for effective implementation;
- ✓ Build capacity at the district and school level including provision of training and technical assistance focused on topics associated with effective engagement of families in the formative assessment process and parent-teacher shared decision-making;
- ✓ Measure progress by monitoring levels of engagement across the school, evaluating effectiveness and outcomes, identifying barriers to family participation, and seeking direct input from families with regard to most effective strategies and approaches; and
- ✓ Provide equitable access to data and assessment information by encouraging robust home-school communication and ensuring published information is available in multiple languages and formats. Support families serving on district-level committees in their role as spokespersons and liaisons to other families in the community.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES 101ⁱⁱ

District/School Advisory Committees:

- Focus is most often on a single issue;
- Representation reflects the broader student body population;
- Members bring special expertise; and
- Membership can be formal or informal (formal groups include appointed members who commit to a 1-2 year tenure; informal committees are for shorter duration and include open invitation to participate).

Key Activities of Committee Members:

- Seek the views of others;
- Provide advice and input based on experience and expertise;
- Serve as public spokespersons and liaisons with their communities; and
- Serve as a resource to the decision-making process.

Processes Groups Use:

- Create a shared vision;
- Represent constituents and stakeholders;
- Act as equal partners;
- Engage in collaboration;
- Assume shared responsibility;
- Openly share information and stories; and
- Produce results.

Keys to Success:

- Agreed upon expectations;
- Ongoing communication and networking;
- Neutral facilitator;
- Meaningful activities; and
- Ongoing focus and provision on training and technical assistance.

Increasing Participation of Diverse Families:

- Learn about the unique cultural values and beliefs of all members of the group;
- Recognize and respect the uniqueness of each family's culture, language and experience.
- Provide trained interpreters and written materials in a language and format easily understood by all members;
- Include multiple families on a group;
- Encourage members to mentor each other to build skills and confidence; and
- Encourage families to tell their stories and draw on personal experience.

CREATING DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES and ENGAGING FAMILIES as KEY PARTICIPANTS: A 3-Step Processⁱⁱ

Step 1:

Outreach and Recruitment: To ensure membership is representative of the community at large, outreach and recruitment efforts must include strategies and approaches that recognize and accommodate the diversity of all families in the district. Effective outreach strategies include:

- Get the word out through multiple pathways to ensure all families have access to information:
 - Disseminate information broadly through on-line and print resources including brochures produced in multiple languages and formats, announcements on district and school web-sites, and announcements at school and district events; and
 - Use personal invitations, including phone calls, to communicate interest and authentic intentions to include families.
- Provide opportunities for families to learn more by holding information sessions for interested family members:
 - Include information on the purpose of the committee, expectations of members, and duration and time commitment; and
 - Consider using a simple self-assessment/ application that provides information on prior experience, interests and skills; readiness to participate; and ability to share stories and work in a group setting.

Step 2:

Training and Technical Assistance: While research shows that engaging families in decision-making increases student outcomes and improves the level of family engagement in school, findings also indicate a need to provide families with training and ongoing support and technical assistance. Effective training builds capacity and efficacy to assume a leadership role on committees. Training considerations include:

- Provide an orientation to the committee and its work, including:
 - Statement of goals and objectives for the committee;
 - Overview of issues and topics to be addressed and how members can contribute;
 - Overview of roles and responsibilities;
 - Background information on district policies and practices with regard to family engagement and formative assessments;
 - Introduction and information sharing among participants; and
 - Logistics regarding meeting format, calendar of meetings, typical agenda, etc.
- Provide training on topics to support families serving on committees, such as:
 - Active listening and reflection;
 - Collaboration and partnering;
 - Strategies for conducting outreach and sharing information with other families;
 - Sharing personal stories and experiences as an important aspect of decision-making;
 - Effective processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems;
 - Cultural relevance;
 - Acceptance and tolerance.
- Provide training on key school policies including the formative assessment process and family engagement. Possible topics include:
 - Review of Learning Standards;
 - Overview of the formative assessment process;
 - District policies regarding student assessment;
 - District policies regarding educator professional development; and
 - District policies regarding family engagement (including Title I requirements, processes, and procedures).



Step 3:

Work of the Committee: Families can provide valuable information, insight, and guidance on issues associated with engaging families in the formative assessment process. Given appropriate representation of diversity and ongoing support for participation, members can help address important issues of equity and engagement of all families in the district. Some of the ways families can inform implementation of the formative assessment process at the district and school levels include the following:

- Share and assess common questions and concerns with regard to the formative assessment process;
- Provide input on important professional development for principals and teachers;
- Identify barriers and opportunities for engaging diverse families, and develop plans and strategies for outreach;
- Identify needed resources the district could provide;
- Advise district leadership on roles it could play in supporting family engagement in the formative assessment process; and
- Provide input on effective strategies and approaches to sharing data with families.

RESOURCES

ⁱ San Francisco Board of Education Parent Advisory Council. (n.d.). Operating guidelines of the PAC. Retrieved from <http://pacsf.org/>

ⁱⁱ Malley, D. & Jennings, D. (2015) Building Parent Leadership Capacity for Serving on Decision-Making Groups. Presentation at the 2015 IEL National Family Community Engagement Conference. <http://iel.org/conference-resources>

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (ND) Guide to Parent and Family Engagement. Strategy 1. Working with Patient and Families as Advisors: Implementation Handbook. <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/systems/hospital/engagingfamilies/strategy1/index.html>

Fergusin, C. (2005) Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections with Schools: What School Leaders Can Do. SEDL: A Strategy Brief of the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/research-brief3.pdf>

The [key] is to work together solving problems and [finding] solutions while recognizing and supporting each other's best efforts and intentions.

- Wayne B. Jennings

1989, ASCD "How To Organize Parent Advisory Committees"

