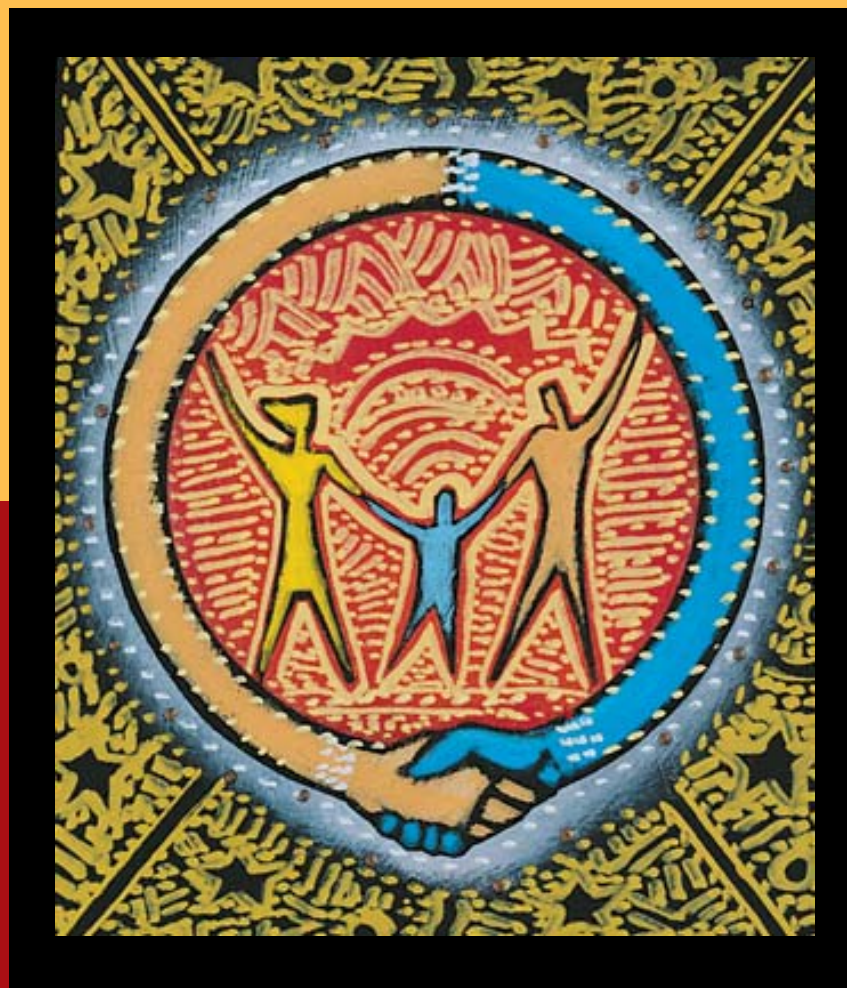


Improving Educational Impact through Family Engagement



A Review and Planning Guide



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.
Executive Director



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

MARÍA “CUCA” ROBLEDÓ MONTECEL, PH.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mission: Creating schools that work for *all* children.

Vision: IDRA is a vanguard leadership development and research team working with people to create self-renewing schools that value and empower all children, families and communities.

Functions:

POLICY AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT – IDRA policy and leadership development promotes accountability and responsibility. Using inclusive, cutting-edge and broad-based strategies, we develop leadership within communities, schools and policy-making bodies to create collaborative and enlightened educational policies that work for *all* children.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION – IDRA research and evaluation advance educational policies, programs and practices. Using collaborative and innovative methods, we investigate important questions and provide insights into compelling educational issues. As a national resource, we set standards in the design, analysis, and synthesis of timely and useful research involving diverse populations.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – IDRA professional development causes people across the country to take action that empowers others. We assist people to create educational solutions through innovative, participatory, and hands-on presentations, workshops, and technical assistance that promotes sustained growth and development.

Our assistance values the needs and cultures of our participants and acknowledges their experiences. We carefully craft training designs that include reflection and application. IDRA professional development causes participants to take a new look at persistent problems and equips them to take action that produces positive outcomes for *all* children.

PROGRAMS AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT – IDRA programs and materials cause people across the country to improve education for *all* children. Our programs produce results. Our materials are useful and timely; attractive, cost-effective and intuitive; linguistically, culturally and developmentally appropriate.

IDRA pro-actively disseminates cutting-edge information to educators, administrators, decision- and policy-makers, parents and community leaders.

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Improving Educational Impact through Family Engagement – A Review and Planning Guide

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., and Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

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Intercultural Development Research Association
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350
San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190
Ph. 210-444-1710
Fax 210-444-1714
E-mail: contact@idra.org
www.idra.org

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First Edition


IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization, directed by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., dedicated to creating schools that work for all children. As a vanguard leadership development and research team for three decades, IDRA has worked with people to create self-renewing schools that value and empower all children, families and communities. IDRA conducts research and development activities, creates, implements and administers innovative education programs and provides teacher, administrator, and parent training and technical assistance.

Foreword

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is pleased to share these tools to help families and school personnel assess the degree of accessibility and readiness for parent and community engagement on the part of educational systems. These are indicators of pathways that exist or need to be created in order to begin a dialogue toward shared accountability and greater impact for student success.

Positive impact through engagement stems from partnerships between schools, parents and communities that are based on mutual benefit, respect and accountability. Engagement for impact goes beyond temporary or limited outreach on the part of educational institutions. While the process is challenging, an approach that embraces engagement can yield significant results in learning for all spheres.

To foster lasting and meaningful educational impact, mechanisms for engagement with parents and families need to be firmly embedded in the mission, vision and central activities of educational institutions from pre-school through higher education. A culture of engagement needs to be fostered that ultimately has a lasting impact on student access, success and graduation for all students. Although difficult to achieve, by forming lasting partnerships and engaging with parents, schools and universities can make an important investment in the future of their young people and have lasting positive impact on their communities.



María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Intercultural Development Research Association

Designing and Implementing Meaningful Family Engagement Strategies

Engagement is a reciprocal relationship in which institutions and communities form lasting relationships that influence, shape, and promote success in both spheres (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002).

This guide uses a three-step approach to help assess and foster meaningful family engagement in the learning process from preschool through college.

Schools that are committed to engagement and are genuinely using the partnership approach do three things before embarking into the process of developing a plan.

- I. Schools identify the degree to which barriers to family involvement exist and impact the creation of the school-family partnership. Educators and parents can use the “Family-School Barriers and Solutions” tool for this assessment. Page 3

- II. Once this information is collected and analyzed, schools adopt a set of guiding principles that can be used in selecting effective family involvement strategies. Those guiding principles are based on the elements of a successful partnership. Page 10

- III. Schools integrate into their operational plans the role that community and family involvement will play in complementing the schools’ efforts to improve student achievement. Page 13

Analysis and Planning Worksheets

Use “Family-School Barriers and Solutions, Step I – Review” to identify barriers to effective engagement with families. School staff and families should use this tool independently and compare answers. This is a good activity for beginning a dialogue for engagement.

Use “Step II – Adopt Guiding Principles” to collaboratively plan with faculty, administrators and families to determine what action steps might be taken to realize the vision.

Remember, the goal of effective engagement is student success.

Educators and parents can use this tool for assessing whether certain barriers exist. Possible solutions for counteracting the impact of these barriers in creating a partnership are also provided as guides for planning in your setting.

Family-School Barriers and Solutions

Step I – Review

Directions: For each item, read across from Vision (4) to Barriers (1) and check the oval that most accurately describes your assessment of the degree to which this is present in your setting.

Step I – Review

Vision		Barriers			
1. Parents always feel valued at your school.	Parents sometimes feel valued at your school.	Parents rarely feel valued at your school.	Parents never feel valued at your school.	Don't Know	
4	3	2	1		88
2. Parents always have good experiences with your school.	Parents sometimes have good experiences with your school.	Parents rarely have good experiences with your school.	Parents never have good experiences with your school.	Don't Know	
4	3	2	1		88
3. Parents believe that your school treats <i>all</i> families equally.	Parents sometimes believe that your school treats <i>all</i> families equally.	Parents rarely believe that your school treats <i>all</i> families equally.	Parents never believe that your school treats <i>all</i> families equally.	Don't Know	
4	3	2	1		88

Vision		Barriers			
4.	The school always values and celebrates parents' cultural and language differences.	The school sometimes values and celebrates parents' cultural and language differences.	The school rarely values and celebrates parents' cultural and language differences.	The school never values and celebrates parents' cultural and language differences.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88
5.	The school always takes care of logistics, such as transportation, child care, and scheduling.	The school sometimes takes care of logistics, such as transportation, child care, and scheduling.	The school rarely takes care of logistics, such as transportation, child care, and scheduling.	The school never takes care of logistics, such as transportation, child care, and scheduling.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88
6.	Teachers always know how to work with and value families.	Teachers sometimes know how to work with and value families.	Teachers rarely know how to work with and value families.	Teachers never know how to work with and value families.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88

Vision		Barriers			
7.	There is always clarity over the roles of school personnel and families.	There is sometimes clarity over the roles of school personnel and families.	There is rarely clarity over the roles of school personnel and families.	There is never clarity over the roles of school personnel and families.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88
8.	School educators always welcome parents into your school.	School educators sometimes welcome parents into your school.	School educators rarely welcome parents into your school.	School educators never welcome parents into your school.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88
9.	Your school always takes into consideration the varied work and time commitments of families.	Your school sometimes takes into consideration the varied work and time commitments of families.	Your school rarely takes into consideration the varied work and time commitments of families.	Your school never takes into consideration with the varied work and time commitments of families.	Don't Know
	4	3	2	1	88

Analysis and Planning

Directions: Analyze your findings. In collaboration with other faculty, administrators and parents, consider some of the ideas for realizing this vision in the future.

Barriers	Some Ideas for Realizing Vision	How is your school addressing this issue?	What will be done in the future?
1. Parents never feel valued at your school.	In one-on-one interactions, small group settings, meetings and workshops use every opportunity to have parents validate themselves for their positive qualities as parents. Ask open-ended questions about their children and the quality of education their children receive and listen non-judgementally to their answers.		
2. Parents never have good experiences with your school.	Validate parent's experiences in life, in rearing a family, working and the general school-of-life. Highlight successes and encourage them to identify and talk about their accomplishments as parents, as workers, a stewards of limited funds that are stretched to meet family needs, etc. Distinguish in positive ways between positive human worth inherent in every individual and the value of a formal education.		
3. Parents never believe that your school treats <i>all</i> families equally.	Listen to parents and encourage their advocacy of all children. Handle problems as they arise. Encourage input, participation and ensure that all families and children have their fair share of school resources and attention.		

Barriers	Some Ideas for Realizing Vision	How is your school addressing this issue?	What will be done in the future?
<p>4. The school never values and celebrates parents' cultural and language differences.</p>	<p>Conduct meetings bilinearly focusing on the largest language groups present. Make cultural sharing and interactions move beyond surface topics like food and stereotypic "folksy" traditions. Have parents exchange ideas and make positive comparisons of their family values and traditions. Notice and reduce class distinctions while encouraging collaborations and working together across race, ethnicity and socio-economic groupings. Encourage and support parent leadership from groups, neighborhoods and language groups previously under-represented in decision-making positions.</p>		
<p>5. The school never takes care of treats logistics such as transportation, child care, or scheduling.</p>	<p>Schedule school programs for parents during non-work hours and at multiple times to accommodate a variety of work schedules. Provide child care and transportation for families to attend school functions. Engage other parents to help with scheduling and transportation.</p>		

Barriers	Some Ideas for Realizing Vision	How is your school addressing this issue?	What will be done in the future?
<p>6. Teachers never know how to work with and value families.</p>	<p>Provide mandatory professional development for teachers on how to work effectively with families. Engage professionals to work with educators throughout the year in developing skills of interaction and outreach. Create linkages with universities, local community-based organizations and other parents to identify resources for this purpose. Positively reinforce and reward teachers who have mastered this skill and enlist their help in mentoring other teachers.</p>		
<p>7. There is never clarity over the roles of school personnel and families.</p>	<p>Clarify roles in joint meetings and sessions: encourage parent participation as resources beyond fundraising, in decision-making positions and as leaders and trainers of other parents.</p>		
<p>8. School educators never welcome parents into your school.</p>	<p>As part of a year-long strategic plan, create a schedule for outreach, visitation, parent-led activities and school programs. Make the schedule available early in the year with multiple contacts each month. Strive for ongoing, consistent and regularly scheduled times for parents, making sure these times allow for testing, curriculum assessment and other mandated school time lines. Encourage parents to engage school personnel in documenting the benefits and rewards to children's achievement and to improve campus attainment of goals and plans through dynamic parent participation.</p>		

Barriers	Some Ideas for Realizing Vision	How is your school addressing this issue?	What will be done in the future?
<p>9. Your school never takes into consideration the varied work and time commitments of families.</p>	<p>For each child, at any level, create a plan for support that includes a variety of strategies for success. Recognize that family work schedules and circumstances are subject to frequent change. Help parents feel welcome to discuss these changes with teachers so that continued support can be provided. Arrange for short-term interventions from the home as well as long-term meetings or committees in order to allow flexibility for parents to participate as their schedules allow. For upper grade students, be specific about how parents can help with planning for student graduation and higher education. Engage diversified personnel with flexible schedules to bridge the scheduling issues between home and school. Support staff flexibility in peer support so that more educators are available to meet with families outside of the regular school day.</p>		

Step II – Adopt Guiding Principles

Once this information is collected and analyzed, effective schools adopt a set of guiding principles for improving educational impact through family engagement that can be used in selecting effective family involvement strategies. Those guiding principles are based on elements of successful partnerships. The following is a set of guiding principles that have emerged from the literature that can be adopted for the local context.

1. **Basic Assumptions:** Valuing and asset acknowledgment
 - ◆ No fault, no deficit
 - ◆ Parents and teachers have unique contributions that support children's learning.
 - ◆ Parent involvement enhances, deepens and accelerates children's learning.
 - ❖ Learning is enhanced through mutual trust and respect.
 - ❖ Effective partnerships in learning are built upon a valuing model (no-fault, no-deficit).
2. **Roles:** Parents are their children's first teachers, rich resources for the school, capable decisionmakers in school issues, and potential leaders and trainers of other parents in all their roles.
 - ◆ Parents and teachers each have unique contributions to enhance the learning process.
 - ◆ Diverse needs, perspectives, and expertise strengthen the context for learning to take place.
 - ◆ Children's learning and development are enhanced by parent and family involvement.
3. **Process:** Active participation – a process where parents and educators meet as equals but with differentiated roles. Listening and speaking is balanced for all participants.
 - ◆ Information and mutual respect help break down cultural barriers and strengthen learning.
 - ◆ Communication is facilitated when it is two-way, ongoing, clear of jargon and reflective of the native language of the family.
 - ◆ Strong home-school partnerships and effective collaboration draw and build upon the strengths of parents.

4. **Support Services:** Logistics, transportation and support services are available so that all families regardless of resources can participate in school events.
 - ◆ Transportation and child care facilitates interaction with families.
 - ◆ Responsive schools are flexible in order to accommodate a variety of parental and caregiver schedules.
5. **Cultural Congruence:** All events celebrate and honor cultural diversity and draw on the strengths of all families and educators.
 - ◆ Parents are valuable resources who can assume important leadership roles in education.
6. **Leadership:** Events planned by parents, for parents and in part conducted by parents are the norm.
 - ◆ Learning strategies that are fun, inexpensive, and feasible encourage parent interaction.

What guiding principles will your school adopt?

From the set of principles provided or from others, identify principles that are most relevant for your setting.

Our school will adopt the following principles for family and parent engagement:

Step III – Integrate Community and Family Into Your School

Schools and campuses can integrate into their operational plans the important role that community and family involvement will play in complementing the schools' efforts to improve student achievement. Mechanisms for engagement need to be firmly embedded in the mission, vision and central activities of educational institutions. In this way, schools and universities can make an important investment in the future of young people and have lasting positive impact upon their communities. Some characteristics of an effective plans to partner with community and families, include the following dimensions for educational institutions and communities to work together collaboratively: (W.K. Kellogg Foundation – Engagement in Youth and Education Programming, 2001.)

- ◆ **See their present and future well-being as inextricably linked.**
 - ❖ Community members are served and valued by the school. For example it conducts trade, supports local merchants, and employs neighbors.
 - ❖ The community has a vehicle for sharing its priorities and concerns with the school.
 - ❖ The community and the school work together to resolve problems for their mutual benefit.
 - ❖ Engagement is based on mutual interest and mutual gain. For example, each actively supports the success of the other.

- ◆ **Collaboratively plan and design mutually beneficial programs and outcomes.**
 - ❖ There are effective mechanisms in place to ensure partners reach a common understanding of mutual needs and concerns and that they design mutually beneficial programs and outcomes to support mutual success.
 - ❖ In partnerships between schools and community-based organizations, a shared vision is created and reflected in each other's annual goals and long-term plans.
 - ❖ Representatives from the community and community-based organizations are included in planning funding requests that will benefit all parties.
 - ❖ Partnership is viable with active collaboration and shared oversight providing for an active exchange of ideas and plans.

- ◆ **Engage in reciprocal learning.**
 - ❖ The school applies its resources to problems that matter to the community.
 - ❖ School faculty work in conjunction with students and residents to identify and address problems of mutual interest.
 - ❖ The school and community discuss problems of mutual interest and responsibility before entering into research or implementation agreements.
 - ❖ Curricular and extracurricular activities are designed to involve faculty and students in community life and exchange knowledge and wisdom.

- ◆ **Respect the history, culture, knowledge and wisdom of the other.**
 - ❖ The school incorporates the community's wisdom into the curriculum.
 - ❖ The school and community honor the knowledge, language and resources of the other.
 - ❖ The school has a mechanism in place to make its policies and practices more understandable to the community.
 - ❖ Both the community and the school work to develop opportunities to gain mutual understanding and trust.

- ◆ **Create structures that promote open communication and equity with one another.**
 - ❖ Mechanisms are in place to facilitate effective listening and learning between the school and community regarding mutually relevant issues.
 - ❖ Resources are committed to promote open communication for planning, implementing research and developing service programs.
 - ❖ The school has designated places where the community feels welcome.
 - ❖ Both school and community use a variety of methods to communicate with each other effectively.

- ◆ **Have high expectations for their performance and involvement with each other.**
 - ❖ The school and community acknowledge their responsibility and demonstrate their willingness to work with one another.
 - ❖ The school and community have mutually agreed upon high standards of performance that are used to evaluate their work with each other.
 - ❖ Partners are willing to move beyond limited self-interest to work toward mutually beneficial returns.
 - ❖ A stated part of the school's mission is the promotion of its community.

- ◆ **Value and promote diversity.**
 - ❖ The school reflects the diversity of the community in its staffing, students and advisory groups.
 - ❖ The school employs policies and practices that value and promote diversity.
 - ❖ School and community decision-making bodies and leadership reflect diversity.
 - ❖ The community welcomes students and school faculty, and the school welcomes diverse community residents.

- ◆ **Regularly conduct a joint assessment of their partnership and report results.**
 - ❖ Engagement is built into the merit and reward systems for the school.
 - ❖ The school is committed to use the data it collects as the basis of continued planning with community.
 - ❖ The school and community formally examine their progress in dealing with local issues, programs and activities.
 - ❖ A regular report card of engagement is released publicly, measuring progress toward established benchmarks.

IDRA has developed a Community Engagement Review and Planning Guide for schools and colleges around these eight characteristics. This can be accessed free from our web site at www.idra.org.

Feedback Form

Please copy or tear out this form, respond to the questions below, and send to IDRA by fax (210-444-1714) or by mail (IDRA, 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190). Or, visit the IDRA web site and complete this form online (<http://www.idra.org/enlace/imreview.htm>).

1. With whom of the following did you use the *Improving Educational Impact through Family Engagement A Planning Guide*?

Higher education faculty

K-12 educators

Parents

School administrators

Students, K-12

Students, higher education

Other _____

2. Number of participants _____

3. How much time did you spend using these materials? _____

4. Was the time allotted sufficient?

Yes No

5. Does your school have family engagement objectives that were not addressed in the guide?

Yes No

6. If yes, what are they?

7. Was the guide effective in identifying elements of family engagement?

Yes No

8. Did the guide help facilitate discussion?

Yes No

9. Did the guide help facilitate planning and decision making? Yes No

10. What feedback was received from participants?

11. What worked well?

12. What would you do differently?

13. Would you recommend this guide and process to others?

Yes No

14. Other comments:

Name of School or Organization: _____

Date: _____

City, State: _____

Contact person*: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

* For potential clarification purposes only, not for attribution.



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

MARÍA "CUCA" ROBLEDI MONTECEL, PH.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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IDRA is a non-profit research and development organization dedicated to the improvement of educational opportunities for *all* children.



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

5835 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 350
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228-1190
210-444-1710 FAX 210-444-1714
contact@idra.org www.idra.org