

LEADERSHIP

# Parents aren't the roadies, they're now in the band

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore    October 4, 2024



The pandemic changed the way parents view their role in education, offering a “backstage pass” to the classroom. This new visibility has given rise to demands for more engagement and transparency, sometimes framed by the political parents’ rights movement.

Whether viewed positively or negatively, one fact remains: schools must engage parents more effectively. This means making them a permanent member of “the band”.

Parent engagement has long been linked to student success. Research consistently shows that students perform better academically, behaviorally and socially when their families are involved in their education. Federal mandates, like those under ESSA, require Title I schools to engage parents in meaningful ways.

The Department of Education’s updated [2024 EDGAR guidelines](#) emphasize structured and transparent community and family engagement. Schools are now expected to document how they provide regular, clear communication and ensure parents’ voices are reflected in decision-making processes, particularly in the use of federal funds.

## Parent engagement pitfalls

The true intersection for parents is the concert hall of the schoolhouse, not the superintendent’s office. A 2024 survey shows that 82% of parents rated teachers highly for



their handling of education, only 21% of dissatisfied parents believed that their school superintendents prioritized academic excellence (National Parents Union, 2024).

This disconnect highlights a broader trend of discontent. Parents are eager for a more significant role in decision-making processes, particularly regarding curriculum and school policies about topics such as cell phones, library materials and transportation. But many feel their voices are not heard (Mittal, 2024).

Many are frustrated by what they see as superficial engagement efforts—sporadic meetings, limited communication, unclear pathways for feedback and lack of transparency into how their feedback is implemented. They can tell when planned engagement is a “box checker” for compliance. Give them some credit.

As schools attempt to meet these demands, they need to navigate the growing pressure from parents, many of whom express frustration with a perceived lack of accountability from school leaders. Without clear, routine communication and evidence that parent input is valued, trust in school boards and administrators continues to erode (Mittal, 2024).

Engagement is now a core competency that public school leaders must master. Studies show that without intentional efforts, parent engagement remains fragmented. Research into community schools shows that while schools provide crucial wraparound services, they often fail to maintain robust communication channels with families (Galindo & Sanders, 2022).

This gap is especially pronounced in low-income and diverse communities where schools must do more to ensure equitable access to engagement opportunities. Joyce Epstein's work on school-family partnerships highlights that districts need strong leadership and clear roles at every level to successfully engage parents in their children's education (Epstein & Boone, 2022).

Solidifying partnership roles on smaller issues helps foster agreement when tougher issues like school closures come up. We can ask the community to support us if they aren't part of the band. That's like saying, “you don't know why we need to close schools, but if we hum the tune you should play it.”

### 3 bright spots

There are places where engagement is trending and going viral. We offer three 'bright spots' aligned to the research, from the state, district, and school levels:

- **State:** [Ohio's Statewide Family Engagement Center](#) has a leadership ladder approach, which establishes clear roles for parent engagement at every level—from state to school. This initiative has scaled up family involvement programs across urban and rural districts.
- **District:** [Baltimore City Schools](#) utilizes a full-service community school model, offering academic support, healthcare and family resources. This comprehensive approach has deepened parent involvement and increased school enrollment.
- **School:** A public charter school, [Aspire Public Schools](#), reflects its vision of families as critical partners in the educational process, with core values centered on purposeful collaboration, accountability, and equity.

What can we learn from these examples? Simply to be flexible, structured, responsive and collaborative. Above all, engagement requires training. Like any competency, it needs to be



learned and applied. Education leaders should seek this level of training and ensure it's incorporated into pre-service prep programs and in-service leadership development. Consider incorporating these five core areas:

1. **Flexible and trust-building communication:** Schools should offer a range of communication methods (virtual, in-person, text, email) to accommodate diverse family needs and schedules, while also ensuring transparency. [Dr. Mapp's Dual Capacity-Building Framework](#) highlights that schools must focus on building relational trust between educators and families, particularly post-pandemic when many families experienced a deeper connection to the classroom. Communication must be frequent, accessible and relationship-centered to foster trust and collaboration (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).
2. **Routine feedback loops:** Schools need to establish regular feedback cycles where parents see how their input shapes decisions. This means creating structured opportunities for parents to co-construct solutions with school staff. This ensures that parent input is visible in school decision-making processes. For example, schools can involve families in planning meetings or advisory boards focused on student outcomes and school policies.
3. **Culturally responsive engagement:** It is critical to meet parents where they are, culturally and linguistically. This goes beyond just language interpreters. It can further enhance engagement by including culturally relevant events or workshops that address specific needs of the community.
4. **Collaborative family-school partnerships:** Establish family engagement teams or committees that work directly with school leaders to set shared goals, develop initiatives and monitor measurable progress. These partnerships ensure that both families and educators are working together as co-educators in students' learning journeys.
5. **Teach communications for families and educators:** Schools should provide professional development for educators on how to engage families effectively and respectfully, while offering parents workshops or resources that help them support their child's learning at home. For example, schools can host workshops on navigating the curriculum or understanding state testing, empowering parents to play a more active role in their child's education.

## Not sure where to start?

Here are a few practical quick starts:

- Use multiple modes of communication—email, text, in-person meetings, and virtual platforms—to reach parents where they are.
- Host “open-door” sessions where parents can casually drop in to discuss concerns with school leaders.
- Create a parent engagement task force that includes parents, teachers, and community leaders to co-design involvement strategies.
- Collect and analyze data – by school, grade, demographic, and activity type – to broaden outreach to and engagement with all families.

In the post-pandemic era, parent engagement is not just a legal requirement—it's our music score. Schools must adopt communication strategies that are flexible, culturally responsive and consistent if they hope to meet the demands of today's families and foster long-term partnerships for student success.

[soliloquy id="138239"]



#leadership

#superintendents

← PREVIOUS

Does technology make us more human or less human?

NEXT →

School safety: How to shift from reaction to prevention

### YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



**steps down from a big  
ver keeps churning**

May 11, 2023



**This is what spearheading telehealth looks  
like in one of the nation's largest districts**

By Micah Ward August 16, 2023

My top three pric  
superintendent: Li:

**My top three  
superintend**

By Neil Gupta Ma



#### District Administration Leadership Institution

is a Premier K-12  
**Membership  
organization** with a  
vibrant community of  
**educational leaders**  
committed to driving  
change in education  
and enhancing the lives  
of students across the  
nation.

#### LINKS

LEARN ABOUT  
MEMBERSHIP

PARTNER WITH US

ATTEND A DALI EVENT

DISTRICT  
ADMINISTRATION



222 Lakeview Ave Suite 800 West Palm Beach FL  
© 2025 DA Leadership Institute *Part of the Arc Network*

