

**FAMILY LITERACY**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**FOR SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

*Developed by a workgroup of diverse educators, leaders, and community stakeholders  
from across Louisiana hosted by the Louisiana Department of Education*

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## PURPOSE OF FAMILY LITERACY ENGAGEMENT WORKGROUP

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- The Department’s Literacy Division believes families play an essential role in the literacy development of children.
- The purpose of the workgroup was to develop a strategic plan to improve communication to families around literacy.
- Through the launch and expansion of literacy initiatives across the state, accessible opportunities will be provided at the state and local levels for families to engage with their child’s literacy education at all ages and stages.

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## DEFINITION

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Family Literacy Engagement is more than just reading books and attending school activities.

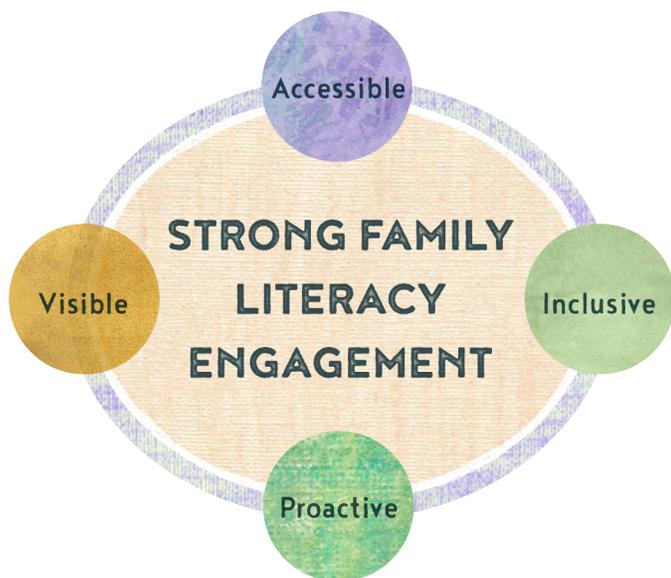
It is active involvement in authentic communication, building meaningful relationships, and fostering a learning community among school leaders, teachers, families, and students.

It is experiencing literacy through learning, speaking, reading, writing, listening, expressing, and sharing with accessible resources and ongoing support.

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## FRAMEWORK

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This framework provides the foundation for strong family engagement practices around children’s literacy development. The strategies and activities within this guide overcome common barriers to accessible, inclusive, proactive, visible family engagement.

**ACCESSIBLE:** using multiple modes of communication to ensure all families have access

**INCLUSIVE:** making all communication available in home languages and respecting cultural differences

**PROACTIVE:** ensuring timely notifications and avoiding unintentional exclusions

**VISIBLE:** reaching out during uncertain times and keeping all lines of communication open to families

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## OUTLINE OF THIS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

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### **PRIORITY CATEGORIES**

The workgroup identified six priority categories that organize specific strategies and resources for implementing and supporting family engagement around literacy. Each section focuses on engaging families in the priority categories.

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### **PREPARING TO ENGAGE**

After stating the importance of each category, a brief section outlines the basic steps for schools to take to effectively prepare to engage families in the identified areas.

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### **SCHOOL STRUCTURES**

On-site organizations, programs, or activities will be listed to provide schools with ideas for how they can incorporate family literacy engagement and build structures to sustain communication.

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### **TRENDING TECHNOLOGY**

In each category, there is a featured section highlighting ways that current trends in technology can support engagement around literacy for families.

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### **STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS**

One of the most challenging features of any type of family engagement is barriers that prevent two-way communication between schools and families. Specific strategies can help schools and families overcome common barriers to effective engagement.

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### **REFERENCES AND RESOURCES**

The sources of information used by the workgroup when developing this strategic plan provide opportunities for additional research and exploration around the topic of family literacy engagement.

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## **PRIORITY CATEGORIES**

**LITERACY ACROSS CONTENT**

**SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

**CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

**COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

**AT-HOME LITERACY ACTIVITIES**

**OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS**

## Literacy Across Content

The ability to read and comprehend text is necessary to succeed in math, science, and social studies courses, not just English Language Arts. In order to effectively engage parents at all ages and stages of their child's literacy development, literacy should be incorporated into all content areas.

### PREPARING TO ENGAGE

- Provide professional development to prepare teachers on how to integrate literacy in other content areas. Use teacher leaders who have demonstrated an ability to incorporate literacy to train and mentor other teachers.
- Teacher candidates need a deep knowledge of literacy to be able to engage families. Provide training, mentorship, and ongoing support to new teachers.
- Training for parents to help students with strategies used in school such as citing textual evidence, which can be done in all subjects. Training activities can take place at some of the school-based events, but be sure to also send home easy-to-interpret information for those who cannot attend.

### SCHOOL STRUCTURES

- **Career Night**
- **Content Family Nights**
  - › Share ways to integrate literacy into all areas.
- **Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT)**
  - › Provide on-demand assistance on standards and strategies.
- **Mentor Programs**
  - › Partner with high school students
  - › Host student-led and student-focused book clubs.
- **Literacy Expositions**
  - › Allow parents to engage with texts and tasks across content.
  - › Include content from all subject areas.
- **Cross-Curricular Themes**
  - › Many reading curricula incorporate other subjects such as science and social studies into thematic units. Add or extend tasks that promote cross-curricular discussions and activities.
  - › Teachers of all subjects should listen to students read and respond to text and provide individualized support as needed. Dialogue and reading comprehension are key to success in all content areas.

### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Audio texts across grade levels
- Podcast discussions on content
- Screencast commentary around assigned texts
  - › Improves dialogue and accessibility

## School Environment

A positive, welcoming school climate can strengthen bonds between students, teachers, leaders, and families. Schools should aim to maintain an open-door policy where strong relationships can be formed. No level of engagement around literacy development or any other content can be successful without a supportive environment.

### PREPARING TO ENGAGE

- Promoting a positive, welcoming school climate means all hands on deck!
- Build staff capacity to implement family engagement and communication strategies.
- Build strong, positive relationships and bonds among faculty and staff that can extend to families.
- Recruit retired teachers and educators to support and strengthen engagement efforts. If you have a student teacher on campus, involve them as well.
- Maintain visibility during uncertain times such as school closures due to health pandemics or extreme weather. Be safely accessible and friendly.

### SCHOOL STRUCTURES

- **Family Literacy Center**
  - › This can be a designated space in the school for families to have access to internet, community resources and programs, and information on at-home activities.
- **Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)**
- **Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)**
- **Reading for Enjoyment**
  - › Bulletin boards dedicated to reading
  - › Reading corners or classroom libraries
  - › Dedicated reading time daily or weekly
  - › Enriching literacy activities that are not connected to assessments
- **Diversity Inclusion**
  - › Use a strengths-based approach to engage families in their child's literacy development by focusing on the positive assets of students and families to improve relationships.
  - › Keep educational jargon to a minimum. Define and explain terms in ways that families can easily understand and apply.
- › Students should see representations of themselves in the school through displays, posters, and pictures that feature the cultures and languages present in the student population.
- › Make every effort to communicate and connect without language barriers such as using interpreters when language barriers exist. Make resources available in the languages represented by students and families.
- › Develop an equity and literacy framework to promote grounding principles and provide a foundation of support for diverse families.
- › Provide cultural awareness and sensitivity training for faculty and staff. This can be provided by a vendor and many offer webinars or workshops free of charge. This can also include training on diversity and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for teachers to be informed of the impact on these experiences and how they manifest in the classroom.
- › Connect using multiple modalities such as paper, websites, text updates, and emails to accommodate diverse communication needs.

### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Zoom or social media livestream meetings in a hybrid or virtual environment

## Cultural Responsiveness

Different cultures have different norms, beliefs, and languages, all of which are worthy of respect and accommodation. The diversity of Louisiana's classrooms may require different types of access when it comes to literacy and learning. Students perform best when they feel cared for, supported, and their basic physical, mental, and emotional needs are met.

### PREPARING TO ENGAGE

- Open lines of discussion regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion among staff, faculty, and families. Provide and model safe, supportive dialogue practices and encourage respectful and productive conversations around sensitive subjects. Mediation by the school counselor or other unbiased professional can be helpful and provide support through these practices.
- Conduct frequent stakeholder surveys using a variety of methods including written forms, phone calls, or digital formats to accommodate diverse response needs.

### SCHOOL STRUCTURES

- Participate in community outreach programs that engage community organizations such as social service agencies and nonprofit groups to promote diverse literacy through read alouds, book donations, and presentations from community members.
- Promote exposure to multiple cultures through diverse supplemental texts.
- Host cultural fairs throughout the school year to celebrate the customs, foods, languages, and traditions of other cultures, especially those represented in the student population. Facilitate space for more than just certain weeks or months to be dedicated for cultural celebrations.
- Ensure supporting documents and resources are available in the spoken languages represented by the student and family populations.

### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Teachlets are quick, 5-minute recaps of what kids are learning in school. They can be provided in the form of videos or modules shared through social media or email.
- Encourage schools to create virtual documents which celebrate student and family culture. A template could be provided. Varying forms of literary pieces could be contributed by families (poetry, short stories, videos of dances or songs).

## Community Connections

Strong connections with the community increase access to local resources, programs, and organizations. Building relationships with community liaisons and mentors provides ongoing access to resources. It is imperative to foster partnerships from birth and early literacy stages through higher education.

### PREPARING TO ENGAGE

- Determine what resources are already available and capitalize on it. For example, many community organizations such as reading councils and other nonprofit groups already exist that promote literacy and diversity, but they are waiting on an invitation or response from schools.
- Designate a person to serve as a family liaison to connect with community offices and organizations. Within the school, Mentor Teachers, Content Leaders, or Teacher Leaders could serve in that capacity.

### SCHOOL STRUCTURES

#### Engage local organizations through:

- Community Helpers Features
  - › Highlight public service employees such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and grocery clerks and invite them to read stories and share experiences.
  - › Invite community leaders to get involved at literacy events and book drives.
- Partnerships with community groups or services to share books and resources
  - › Library
    - » Story time
    - » Night events
    - » Bookmobiles
    - » Rewards/incentives for families to participate
    - » Field trips to local libraries
  - › Family doctor offices
  - › Pediatricians
  - › Mental health centers
  - › Regional organizations
  - › Local community groups or organizations
  - › Family advocacy groups
  - › Reading councils
  - › Law enforcement
- Donations of books representing diversity or supporting high-quality curriculum
  - › Large companies
  - › Churches

#### Engage high school or college students through:

- Saturday morning sessions to teach parents skills and provide interactive practice at the school
  - › Grant funds to cover associated expenses
  - › High school or college students to provide assistance or lead sessions
- Morning or afternoon tutoring or homework assistance
- Buddy system to read together, share books, and create projects

#### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Blog to share read alouds and activities with parents
- Zoom capability for tutoring or practice sessions

## At-Home Literacy Activities

Families are a child's first educator and can serve as valuable partners throughout a child's literacy development. Providing families with quick, easy-to-use activities and strategies to use at home strengthens school-home connections and deepens learning.

### PREPARING TO ENGAGE

- Allot time for planning ahead of events so that teachers and support personnel have adequate time to prepare engaging, interactive, sustainable activities.
- Encourage families to take pictures at home or do so at school and have the student provide the words to tell a story. Publish and leave around the community for others to read while waiting.

### SCHOOL STRUCTURES

While these are activities that are designed to promote at-home interaction, the school plays an essential role in setting families up for success. Schools can promote at-home family literacy engagement by sharing ideas with families including:

- **Family Book Clubs**
  - › Trade books with other families in the class or community.
- **Storytelling**
  - › Read and tell stories.
  - › Document or write stories.
  - › Record stories on a phone.
- **Family Fun or Game Night**
  - › Reading is involved in lots of games and activities like charades, board games, or card games.
  - › Something as simple and fun as reading directions to a board game provides real-world practice and application.
- **Family Movie Night**
  - › Read books first then watch the movie.
- **Table Topics**
  - › Place topics in a bowl and pull one each night and discuss.
- **Other at-home activities**
  - › Recipes
    - › Read the ingredients and steps with your child while cooking a favorite dish.
  - › Bedtime reading
    - › Let your child select a book that you or they can read aloud.
  - › Environmental labels
    - › Read road signs, grocery items, and building signs.
    - › Label items around home.
- **School-based challenges**
  - › Host contests with reading goals in classrooms or school-wide.

### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Living Literature
  - › Tell a tik-tok story
  - › Share on Instagram stories
  - › Retell a text, chapter, or section using video, props, and creativity
- Documentaries on Netflix, Hulu, or TV
  - › They often align thematically with literature from school.

## Overall Considerations

Family engagement around literacy development must be a priority for schools with the following goals:

- Sustainable partnerships with families and community programs
- Ongoing, open communication with families
- Accessible resources and activities for all

The biggest questions about any program or strategy implementation are When? and How? When should schools and school systems plan, set goals, and implement family literacy engagement strategies and activities? How can schools and school systems achieve those goals and effectively implement strategies and activities?

### WHEN?

- While challenging, time considerations for teachers and families are part of the planning and preparation for strong, sustainable family literacy engagement.
- With family literacy engagement as a priority, schools and school systems can incorporate strategies and activities into existing plans and structures to maximize effective implementation.
- Effective planning includes enlisting the help of:
  - › Mentor Teachers
  - › Teacher Leaders
  - › Content Leaders
  - › Student teachers
  - › Teacher candidates
  - › High school students
  - › Community leaders

### HOW?

- Check with your school or district's financial office to determine which funding sources can be used to support family literacy engagement efforts.
- Conduct needs assessment surveys from families to determine where to focus your efforts and energy. To model inclusiveness, collect data a variety of ways to ensure everyone has access and a voice.
- Don't try everything at once! Based on family's needs and wants from the survey results, start small, find out what works, and build on that.
- Form a "Family Engagement Committee" that includes a diverse representation of families to review recommendations. The committee can create a 1-, 3-, and 5-year plan to accomplish goals and track progress.
- Provide the materials that are needed for parents to be successful participants in the chosen activities.
- Be proactive. Make sure everything is accessible for different language and modality needs.
- Through all communications with families, consider educational levels, family backgrounds, economic status, and technology availability to ensure equitable access.
- Don't use any educational jargon - keep the language simple and easily understandable for all families.
- Utilize the family engagement resources on the Department's Literacy Division website.
- Administrative support is key to successful implementation and sustainability of any initiative at a school.

## SHARING LITERACY PLANS

Once literacy activities and campaigns have been selected, the next most important step is to consider the best methods for sharing information and resources for the planned activities and events.

### SHARING WITH TEACHERS AND FACULTY MEMBERS

- Create or provide webinars with guidance for teachers of what activities and resources can be shared.
- Leaders share newsletters and press releases sent from the Department with all faculty and staff.

### SHARING WITH FAMILIES

- Establish a resource library.
- Conduct regular informational meetings with teachers.
- Create and maintain updated class websites.
- Monthly or weekly tutorial videos featuring educators in action teaching skills that can be practiced at home.
- Send home informational packets, brochures, flyers, newsletters, or kits with activities and resources.
- Maintain a family literacy calendar with activities, ideas, and events.
- Personalize invitations to literacy events.
- Share information via email, social media, and newsletters to maximize impact.

### SHARING WITH STUDENTS

- Promote student-led literacy meetings or activities.
- Recruit local celebrities, whether it be someone widely-known like a famous sports player or a local celebrity, to produce quick videos encouraging literacy activities and involvement.

### TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

- Padlet videos or links with frequent interactive posts
- Zoom events with demonstrations of taught literacy skills and supporting activities
- Social media platforms, including groups, to promote literacy and demonstrate quick activities
- QR codes linked to at-home literacy activities and practice, videos, or quick demos
- YouTube videos
- TikTok videos
- Text messaging services
- Google apps
  - › Google Doc with activities and resources
  - › Google Sheet with lists of mentor or community organization contact information
  - › Google Classroom to help organize activities and resources

# INCORPORATING FAMILY LITERACY ENGAGEMENT INTO YOUR LOCAL LITERACY PLAN

Develop action steps that outline your school's plans for family engagement around literacy. Include the Overall Considerations from the previous section when developing an action plan. This plan can stand alone as a Family Literacy Engagement Plan or be built into an existing School Improvement Plan or Local Literacy Plan.

## Family Literacy Engagement Plan Template

Activity	Materials Needed	Person(s) Involved	Success Criteria

## Family Literacy Engagement Plan Sample

Activity	Materials Needed	Person(s) Involved	Success Criteria
<b>Community Helpers Feature</b>	Read-aloud books connected to theme	Classroom teachers Community leaders Family members	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each classroom experienced a read aloud and conversation with a community leader or volunteer.</li> <li>Family members were involved in recommending and assisting community leaders.</li> <li>Diverse communities and families were represented.</li> </ol>
<b>Literacy Exposition</b>	Texts from all subject areas that have thematic connections Displays (tables, posters, boards, etc.)	Classroom teachers Family members High school student volunteers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All subject areas were well-represented with a connection to how literacy is embedded.</li> <li>Family members and volunteers had a clear role in supporting the event.</li> </ol>

## ENGAGING FAMILIES IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3!



**1.** Form a collaborative team to manage and track goals and activities.



**2.** Set goals and identify action steps.



**3.** Celebrate partnerships and successful activities!

## SAMPLE FAMILY LITERACY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

		Never	Sometimes	Always
<b>Accessible</b>	My child's school uses several methods for two-way communication about important literacy information and events.			
	I am well-informed of what is going on at school with my child's literacy development.			
	I am able to provide input to my child's teacher about my child's literacy development.			
<b>Inclusive</b>	I receive information from my child's school in our home language.			
	I am able to communicate with my child's school in my home language through an interpreter or other resource.			
	I see my family's culture represented throughout my child's school and in textbooks.			
<b>Proactive</b>	I know about my child's literacy development and school events around literacy in advance.			
	I am invited to be involved in literacy events at school.			
	I feel like my child's school makes every effort to ensure my family receives information about literacy learning and events.			
<b>Visible</b>	Even in uncertain times such as school closures, my family receives support from my child's teacher including strategies and activities to use to improve literacy.			
	Two-way communication methods are available during school closures or other unexpected events.			
	I feel like I can reach my child's school or teachers when I need help with literacy activities.			

**A SPECIAL NOTE FOR FAMILIES:** “Literacy” means the ability to read and write, but it includes many other skills including spelling, speaking, and comprehending. Literacy is not just limited to English Language Arts classrooms. Strong literacy skills are needed to succeed in reading and understanding math problems, social studies and science lessons, and directions on any task or activity.

## STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

Barrier to Engagement	Research-based Strategies
<b>Transportation and schedule</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering transportation to family literacy events</li> <li>• Providing multiple offerings of the same event at various times to accommodate variety of work schedules</li> <li>• Locating family literacy events close to where families are located e.g. in their neighborhood, library, or organization (e.g. mobile family literacy events in a bus)</li> <li>• Hosting/attending multiple enrollment events in small, localized communities throughout the school system</li> </ul>
<b>Language barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating with interpreters to participate in family literacy events</li> <li>• Enlisting parent volunteers, faith-based leaders, or community leaders who speak the same language, come from the community, and have access to the housing</li> <li>• Utilizing translation services</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosting family literacy events in the communities near where children and families live</li> <li>• Providing materials that emphasize the short- and long-term benefits of literacy at all stages of development</li> <li>• Initiating family volunteers of students to share information about literacy with their neighbors or coworkers</li> </ul>
<b>Families with previous negative experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building authentic relationships with families in the community prior to activities and events</li> <li>• Partnering with social service providers or other organizations that have trusting relationships with families to disseminate information</li> <li>• Connecting with leaders and teachers across grade levels to spread the important of family engagement around literacy</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating the distribution of outreach materials with the social worker or homeless liaison located in each school system</li> <li>• Collaborating with the local housing authority to share resources and referral information</li> </ul>

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For additional support on implementing family literacy engagement strategies and activities, visit the Department's [Literacy Division Family Resources](#).