

# STRONGER TOGETHER



THE POWER OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIP IN ALASKA



association of  
**ALASKA**  
school boards

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) is committed to helping kids succeed and creating educational equity for all students in Alaska. Research shows that family and school partnerships are an essential element for equitable learning and student success.

While each school will need to determine how to best build partnerships with families based on the needs of their own school and community, *Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska* provides a roadmap and key milestones for family, student, and school partnerships. These relationships and practices will have lifelong implications both in and out of school.

The AASB thanks school staff, school board members, community partners, parents and grandparents, and other contributors from across the state. All content is the property and responsibility of the AASB.

Many of the concepts outlined in this document have been adapted to the Alaska context from the SEDL: Dual Capacity Framework and other national resources. Other resources have been adapted from local family engagement tools designed for Alaska. A special thank you to teachers, families, school board members, and administrators from across Alaska who shared their stories for *Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska*. Additionally, the AASB staff thanks national leaders in the field who have paved the way for these conversations in Alaska.

Special thanks to Rebecca Braun for her assistance to the AASB staff in technical writing. The AASB also would like to extend our appreciation to Evon Zerbetz for the linocuts, artwork, and input into this document. Finally, thank you to

Finally, thank you to Element Design for layout and production of *Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska*.



All rights reserved for the Association of Alaska School Boards. Any adaptations, publications, reproductions, or public display of materials require partner credit and written permission from copyright holders. Please contact [info@asb.org](mailto:info@asb.org)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	<b>DEFINITIONS</b>
05	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Partnering with Families for Student Success
13	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 1: MINDSET</b> Embrace Families as Partners
20	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 2: RELATIONSHIPS</b> Build Connections with Students and Families
28	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 3: CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS</b> Value and Lean on Family and Community Ways of Knowing
37	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 4: LINKS TO LEARNING</b> Connect Families to Classroom Content and Student Outcomes
45	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 5: SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE</b> Build Family and Staff Capacity to Work Together
54	<b>BUILDING BLOCK 6: CO-REGULATION</b> Help Families Support Students' Emotional Growth
63	<b>VISIONING:</b> Moving from Mindset to Action
71	<b>PARTNERING AT A DISTANCE</b> Reducing the Distance During Covid-19
79	<b>END NOTES</b>
81	<b>MORE RESOURCES</b> (building block resources, planning tools)

## DEFINITIONS

**Family partnership:** The practice of building family and community involvement to improve student cognitive, social, and emotional development both in schools and beyond. Family involvement in a child's education is strongly correlated with improved student learning, attendance and behavior. Families include parents, grandparents, foster parents, and other caring adults that regularly care for a child.

### [SOURCE](#)

**Culture and Community Context:** In Stronger Together refers to culture or context of the community. This is referencing the values, knowledge, connections, and skills that are shared in a family, community, or affiliated group.

**Cultural safety:** The development of culturally-healthy relationship between schools and communities through policies, curricula, physical spaces, and conversations that reinforce the cultural histories and practices.

### [SOURCE](#)

**Historic trauma:** The cumulative emotional and psychological harm created by policies, systems, and institutions impacting communities, families and students for multiple generations. To move forward, the history and the ongoing reinforcement through systemic and institutional inequalities must be understood.

### [SOURCE 1](#)   [SOURCE 2](#)

**Co-creation:** Collaborative development between schools, communities, and families. Alaska communities have cultural and collective strength that, when used respectfully, can increase opportunities for healing, learning, and positive relationships with caring adults that deepen a shared responsibility for students.

### [SOURCE 1](#)   [SOURCE 2](#)

**Emotional regulation:** The ability to manage one's emotions and behavior in accordance with the demands of the situation. It includes being able to organize behavior, control impulses, and solve problems constructively. Emotional self-regulation is a critical factor in success at school and beyond as it allows students to bounce back from failure and stay calm under pressure.

The ability to manage one's emotions and behavior. It includes not overreacting to upsetting stimuli, calming yourself down when you get upset, adjusting to unexpected change, and handling frustration without an outburst. It is a set of skills that enables people to direct their own behavior towards a goal, despite the unpredictability of the world and our [their] own feelings.

### [SOURCE 1](#)   [SOURCE 2](#)

**Co-regulation:** The way a person adjusts their emotions and behavior through interaction with another person, in order to maintain or regain a regulated state. When adults provide warm and responsive interactions, they support, coach, and model emotional self-regulation.

### [SOURCE 1](#)   [SOURCE 2](#)



# INTRODUCTION

*The relationships we form with our kids' teachers and school staff are important to show our kids we are all working together for their success.*

*- Lisa X'unyeil Worl*



# INTRODUCTION

## *Partnering with families for student success*

**When school staff and families see each other as equal partners in our students' success, students perform better, attendance increases, and graduation rates rise. True family partnerships result in more equitable learning opportunities and improved outcomes for all students. This document describes core elements and offers key strategies and tools to help educators and families work together to benefit each student.**

## What Is Family Partnership?

**A partnership is an equal relationship. This means families and educators work together to support children's growth and success from birth through high school and beyond.** Family partnerships begin with a mindset where schools and families see one another as an asset and an essential part of student success.

Family *participation* may be a first step toward deeper engagement. This may mean attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering for a parent-teacher organization, or helping a child with homework. Family partnership is a deeper level of engagement where families are integral players in shaping their child's learning.

These partnerships require mutual trust and investment to build strong relationships. Partnership means that families help create and define their roles as well as participate meaningfully in all aspects of their students' education.

## Benefits of Effective Family Partnership

Families are children's first teachers and their most influential role models. In Alaska, students in Grades 6 through 12 who say their families are involved in their education are more likely to have better grades and less likely to miss school without permission than their peers who say their families and community are not involved.<sup>1</sup> These findings are consistent with national research and theory. The national Coalition for Community Schools explains:

Children receive powerful messages from family–school relationships. When children view their families as interested in what happens at school and see them in regular and respectful contact with school staff, they are more likely to bond with their teachers and learn more from them. Teachers tend to have higher expectations of students whose families are more involved; such children tend to have higher test scores and grades.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most inspiring finding is that family involvement is a more accurate predictor of student achievement than family income or socioeconomic status.<sup>3</sup> **Successful family involvement is a path to equity and opportunity for all students.**

Students' educational experiences can be transformed when school staff and families see each other as equal partners in creating the conditions for students to thrive. Students perform better, attendance increases, and graduation rates increase. Other student outcomes associated with strong family-school partnerships include:

- improved social skills and behavior,
- increased enrollment in higher-level academic programs, and
- increased enrollment in postsecondary training and education.<sup>4</sup>

Effective family partnerships improve the feel of a school and community. When family engagement practices are embedded in schools, staff say they have stronger relationships with students and their families, they feel like they are part of a community, they feel more connected, and they are less likely to want to leave the school.

All families have the capacity to help their child, regardless of education level, socioeconomic status, or other factors. Families are the experts on their students' habits, strengths, needs, and temperament. They are also critical in providing the conditions at home needed for a student to grow and learn.

Aligning conditions and expectations at home with those at school is a two-way street. When teachers and school staff understand and incorporate families' expertise on their students, students experience the consistency and support they need. Family partnership is a cornerstone of trauma-sensitive practice, as students thrive when their school and family work together to support their growth and learning.<sup>5</sup>

In recognition of the critical importance of families, the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development in 2011 adopted an Alaska Family Engagement Action Plan. The Board also included family engagement in the state's Early Childhood Strategic Plan.<sup>6</sup>

## Why Change Common Practice?

Schools typically reach out to parents in ways that work well for some families, but may leave out those with less schedule flexibility, confidence, or resources to participate. Researchers say the most common forms of family engagement, such as attendance at school events, volunteering in the classroom, and raising money, tend to



work for middle-class families, but may be less accessible to others. As one researcher explained, “forums for family leadership, such as the PTA and other committees, can feel unfamiliar, uninviting, and insensitive to families’ schedules, resource constraints, and practices.”<sup>2</sup>

In Alaska, many families and communities have mistrust or trauma stemming from their own educational experiences or the experiences of those who came before. It requires extra effort and thoughtfulness on the part of educators to build trusting, respectful relationships in many Alaska Native communities that experienced family separation and abuse in the name of education. [Building Block 3, Cultural Responsiveness, delves further into this.]

As Alaska districts and schools refocus their approaches to family partnership, families must have real opportunities to help define family-school partnerships. This can facilitate buy-in to schools’ goals and practices and create greater educational equity. **Meaningful partnerships lead to better student outcomes and enable schools to become centers of democratic participation and equitable opportunity.**

## About this Framework

**BACKGROUND:** The Association of Alaska School Boards receives many requests from districts seeking tools and strategies to strengthen family partnerships. Most educators and administrators understand the benefits, but few are trained in effective partnership strategies. *This framework is written by Alaskans for Alaskans and has been reviewed and strengthened by Alaska families, school staff and administrators, and school board members.*

**PURPOSE:** This document is meant to provide frames for thinking about family partnership as well as tools and strategies to consider in bolstering the role of families in your schools. Each community will need to chart its own approach based on local needs, wishes, strengths, and goals. Effective approaches to family partnership **boost student success.** These partnerships are grounded in two-way collaboration – that is, between the home and schools – and are built on trust and authentic relationships.

*After getting a better understanding of what family engagement and partnerships look like, I thought, ‘Duh! How did I not see that partnering with families was actually an equity issue and would result in better outcomes for my students?’*

*- Alaska principal*

**AUDIENCE:** This document is primarily geared to school staff and administrators. School personnel are key to making families feel welcome, helping families build skills and confidence in their role, and providing specific and meaningful ways families can help their child succeed. This takes vulnerability for school staff. The framework is also a resource for school boards, community partners, and others to better understand their role in developing policy, building bridges, and building capacity for effective school-family partnerships.



For families with difficult personal or cultural histories with the school system, it is particularly important that the school take the first step in reaching out. It is up to school staff, administrators, and policymakers to demonstrate through words and actions that all families are welcome and all families are valued.

**HOW TO USE:** This framework is designed to help point readers in the right direction, serving as a compass and highlighting key destinations rather than specifying the exact route. This document provides examples, case studies, resources, and reflection questions to help users chart their own path. The appendices offer additional examples and planning tools. We encourage readers to use or adapt the tools and strategies that are most appropriate to their own context.

## Structure of This Framework

Following this introductory chapter, the framework includes six chapters focused on essential building blocks of family partnership and two chapters to help users implement these tools during Covid-19 and beyond.

**BUILDING BLOCKS:** This framework distills knowledge from Alaska and national best practices into six building blocks for effective family partnerships:<sup>8</sup>

### 1. **Mindset:** *Embrace families as partners*

Effective partnerships have shifted from isolated acts to consistent, ongoing practices and policies. Families and school staff share power to ensure goals and

strategies reflect community values. School leadership is supportive and engaged, and they communicate to all staff that families are valued and partnership is a priority.

### 2. **Relationships:** *Build connections with students and families*

Authentic relationships built on trust, shared power, and two-way communication are the foundation for family partnership and community engagement. These connections with families engender a more holistic view of student growth.

### 3. **Cultural Responsiveness:** *Value and lean on family and community ways of knowing*

Respect for family and community cultures, languages, histories, and values is foundational to any successful partnership. Cultural and community strengths are critical assets for students, families, and schools.

### 4. **Links to Learning:** *Connect families to classroom content and student outcomes*

When teachers and school staff help families understand what is expected of their children to succeed, families can better support their students' learning through goal-setting, high expectations, and a sense of shared mission.

### 5. **Skills and Confidence:** *Build family and staff capacity to work together*

Families and staff often want to work together more effectively but don't know how. Successful partnerships build the skills, confidence, and capacity of both partners. Through training and specific

opportunities – these may be baby steps – staff and families can build the skills and confidence they need.

6. **Co-Regulation:** *Help families support students’ emotional growth*

Adults can help students regulate their emotions and manage their behaviors, an essential skill for success in school and beyond. We do this by modeling, creating expectations, helping students explore emotions, and identifying effective coping skills to manage negative emotions. Families and schools can share tools and resources with each other to help support co-regulation.

Each Building Block chapter includes the following:

- Summary
- Key concepts and research
- Case study and analysis
- Tools and strategies
- Signs of success
- Reflection questions

The following table summarizes each Building Block from the perspective of both families and school staff.

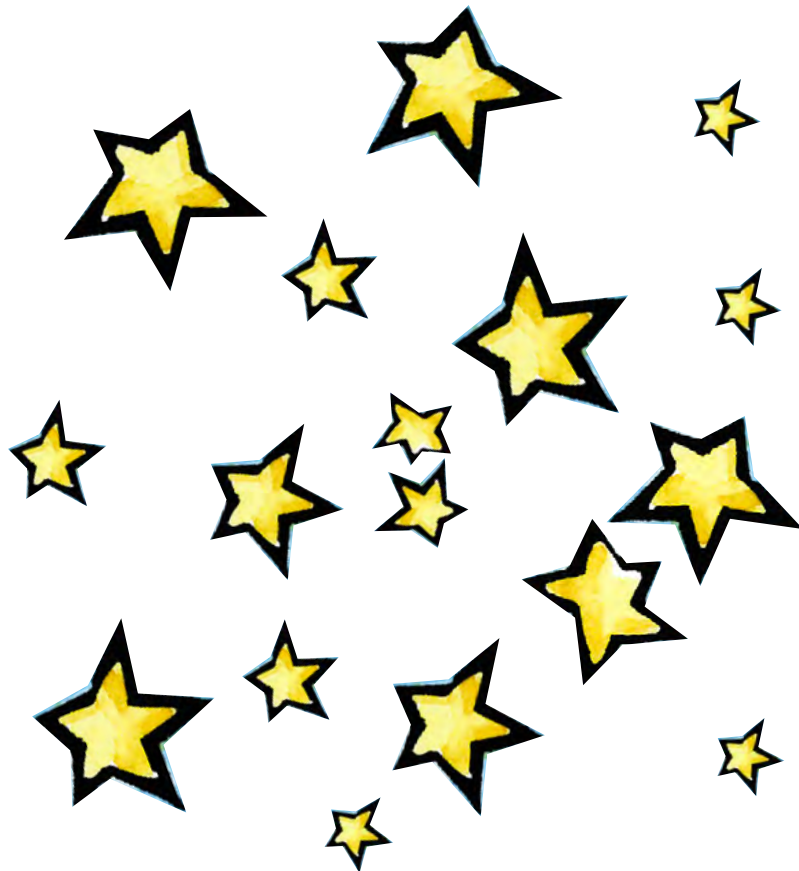
## BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAMILY PARTNERSHIP IN ALASKA

BUILDING BLOCK	FAMILY ROLE	SCHOOL STAFF ROLE
<b>Mindset</b>	Seeing a role I can play to contribute ideas, resources, and time to the school and to support my child’s learning	Shifting my approach to engaging with families to see strengths and set direction together in school and in the classroom
<b>Relationships</b>	Reaching out and being open to creating supportive networks with other school staff and other families	Proactively building and nurturing trusting relationships with families and communities
<b>Cultural Responsiveness</b>	Feeling that my child and family can bring our whole selves into the school and can share our culture and ways of knowing	Deepening my understanding of cultural practices and community history to support culturally respectful practices, teaching through students’ cultures, and cultural values
<b>Links to Learning</b>	Learning new skills and knowledge related to my child’s development and education, asking questions, and actively engaging in my child’s learning	Focusing on sharing school content, educational goals, and student progress with families, and building a thriving home-to-school partnership
<b>Skills and Confidence</b>	Believing in my ability to make a positive impact, and having the confidence to work with my child and school	Feeling confident and comfortable reaching out to all families, and learning from family skills and strengths
<b>Co-Regulation</b>	Learning and sharing tools and strategies that help my child feel calm and manage difficult emotions	Learning and sharing tools and strategies that help my student feel calm and manage difficult emotions

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The final two chapters help users create a roadmap for putting the ideas in this framework into practice:

**Visioning: From Mindset to Action** helps school-family planning teams develop a meaningful and systematic approach to family partnership.

**Reducing the Distance During Covid-19** provides ideas and resources for adapting each Building Block during Covid-19.



## Eight Guiding Principles

**Our beliefs shape our actions, and true family partnership requires a shift in mindset and practice. The following principles are compiled from Alaska educators and families as well as national research. Reflecting on these ideas and seeking to incorporate them into our everyday practice will enhance our partnerships with students, colleagues, families, and the community.**

- **APPROACH FAMILIES WITH HUMILITY AND RESPECT.** A foundation of genuine respect is essential to any successful relationship between a child's school and family. Families usually know their own child best. Listen and learn.
- **FOCUS ON STRENGTHS.** Every family has something to offer. Make an effort to see and build on each family's assets and strengths.
- **RESIST ASSUMPTIONS.** Families come in every size and shape. With few exceptions, families love their child and have hopes and dreams for their child.
- **SEEK UNDERSTANDING.** Seek to understand a family's cultural traditions, expectations of their children, and their own past experiences with the education system. Families may "show up" for their child in places outside of the school. Meet families where they are, metaphorically and physically.

- **ESTABLISH STRONG COMMUNICATION.** Establish systems for two-way communication beyond the traditional family-teacher meeting. Seek to learn the communication norms and preferences of your students' families.
- **UNDERSTAND FAMILY STRUCTURES.** Extended family members can play a key role in education and discipline. Set up structures that help you learn more about your families and get permissions to reach out to the caring adults in a student's life.
- **CELEBRATE CULTURE.** Incorporate culture into each aspect of family outreach. This may mean participating in cultural and community events outside school.
- **BE PATIENT.** Relationship-building takes time and persistence. Keep looking for opportunities to build trust and common understanding. Don't take setbacks personally – know that you are part of a larger context and keep trying.

## Reflection Questions

Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on your own, or journal about them.

- How can my students benefit from family partnership?
- How can I learn from families in my community?
- What does family partnership look like to me?
- What mindset shifts need to happen to deepen family partnership? What practices could strengthen family partnership in my school or classroom?
- What do I want to learn about family partnership?
- Which building blocks could be most useful to me?



## BUILDING BLOCK 1:

# MINDSET

*Partnering with families makes a big impact on students, and we want the best for our students. This is just what we do at our school.*

*- Alaska principal*



# BUILDING BLOCK 1: MINDSET

## *Embrace Families as Partners*

**Successful family engagement starts with a mindset that families are equal and essential partners in their children's education. Part of this mindset is a view of family engagement as a continuum, with true partnership as the ultimate goal.**

## Key Concepts and Research

For families to feel truly valued as a partner in their child's education, they need to have a clear role and invitation from school leaders, teachers, counselors, and other staff. Schools need to send consistent and welcoming messages to families.

When we send consistent messages through words, actions, and opportunities, students and families gain trust and feel comfortable defining their own roles as a partner. As one Alaska teacher says, "Be as positive as possible. Assume good will." Embed these beliefs into your practice.

### ***What beliefs foster effective family partnerships?***

The following eight beliefs are adapted from evidence-based family partnership resources. When schools adopt these beliefs, families feel welcomed and supported, and the doors to real partnership are opened.

1. All families have hopes, dreams, and goals for their children.
2. The home is one of several spheres that shape a child and their education.
3. Family partnership is an essential element of education.
4. Family partnership is a process, not a program of activities; it requires ongoing commitment, effort, and resources.
5. Family interaction with their own children is a cornerstone of involvement.
6. Most barriers to family partnership have their root in school practices – past or present.
7. Successful family engagement nurtures relationships and partnerships.
8. Effective family partnership boosts student achievement.

Another important mindset is to understand family engagement as a continuum. Families may start out with small steps, such as coming to a school picnic. This is not partnership, but it is an important start. As schools and families build trust, and as their skills and confidence for partnership increase, family involvement can deepen into a full and equitable partnership.

## FAMILY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP CONTINUUM

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

### FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

Families talk to teachers at the time children arrive and when they leave at the end of the day.

Families attend meetings.

Families attend meetings. Staff ask questions about the child, his or her family, and home life.

Staff provide resources/ideas for families to use at home and in the community.

Families share suggestions and concerns with staff.

Families and staff work together to create activities that reflect families' cultural traditions

Families and staff share in the development of activities and events over time based on their strengths/interests/abilities.

Families and staff work together to discuss, implement, and share responsibility for a child's learning plan.

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Adapted from work by Michele Brooks, Joyce Epstein and Karen Mapp.

## Mindset in Action: Evolving Attitudes

**Dan, a longtime Alaska teacher and principal who has worked in rural and urban districts, shared the evolution of his experience partnering with families:**

Early on, I felt like I was in a defensive posture, always needing to justify my choices as a teacher. There are just so many choices and there's always so much you're not able to do, so I think my earliest stances with families were probably a little bit defensive and nervous.

Much later, I came to realize that families are actually giving their best. What they're able to provide for their children is the best they're able to do in that situation in that moment. I try to remind myself when I get a kid coming to school without their needs met that families are doing their best. Whatever that looks like, it's up to us to take it from there and to always assume the family wants the best for their child.

And along with that, I became mindful in every conversation with families who have been impacted by colonialism that there's a whole other story that's gone on. A key is building trust. As an educator, **I am always inventing a new relationship with families, but I am also inheriting relationships that have gone on for decades.**

As I got to know my families, the big realization for me was how many kids are being raised by grandparents

or aunts or uncles and what a rich source of energy and support that group of people can be. They're often not asked to be part of the PTA, what they know, or what they can contribute. Instead, they hear about problems because there's usually a reason why they're the primary caregiver, usually because their families have been under stress and the parent can't be there at the moment.

I truly believe that each family has things to share no matter what their attitude seems to be. So I started wondering, how do we structure our events so they can come and say, *I have something to contribute*, and not just think, *I hope the principal doesn't talk to me about my kid*. Sometimes, when we're planning an after-hours "family fun" event at school, a student might say, *My dad's really good at building; he'll build a miniature golf course*. It's always in my mind that families are people with assets.

It does, however, take commitment and reflection. Right now, we are really working on getting our school site council to be more reflective of our school demographics – to get Alaska Native families, Filipino families, and lower-income families on our site council. Our equity committee believes that if we can get a few more people involved in leadership from all parts of our school community,





then we can learn new ways to make decisions collectively. Additionally, others might also see them and think, *Oh, look! There is an invitation and role for me here too.*

**Our team keeps coming back to what draws our families in, what our community values.**

I've noticed that the more arts integration, ceremony, and celebration we do, the more families we draw in. Dance, music, art shows, and food are huge. Sharing and celebrating gets all kinds of families into the building, and that's a big step to building trust, building relationships, and becoming real partners in education.

**DEVELOPING COMMUNITY MINDSET:  
BABY RAVEN READS**

*"The Baby Raven Reads program at Sealaska Heritage Institute not only promotes early literacy but the idea of involving parents in their child's education by reading a book as well. It's a simple and positive way to set expectations. It shifts a perspective of education from schools being solely responsible to 'We are all responsible for this child's education.'"*

-SOUTHEAST ALASKA TEACHER

# Analysis: Evolving Attitudes



## WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

- How does Dan view his own evolution and growth as an educator?
- What beliefs does Dan hold about families?
- What does Dan notice about families at his school that do not fit the traditional mold?
- How does Dan try to welcome the contributions of all families and caregivers?
- What does Dan observe about what the community values?
- What does Dan believe about relationships?
- What does Dan mean by "inherited" relationships?
- How does Dan's mindset translate to action in his school?

## WHAT ELSE COULD DAN DO?

- How could Dan help others in his school adopt a more open mindset toward families?
- How could Dan and his school engage families and the community to help structure events to be more welcoming to all?

## PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- What do your students' families look like?
- What assets might they have to offer that are being overlooked?
- How might you acknowledge inherited relationships while inventing new relationships with families?
- How do you avoid responding defensively to families?



## Tools and Strategies

**Alaska educators share strategies for building positive relationships with families:**

### SELF-ASSESSMENT OR SMALL-GROUP

**DISCUSSION.** How strongly do you agree with each of the eight statements listed above? Which do you think are most important? Which do you find hardest to internalize?

1. All families have hopes, dreams, and goals for their children.
2. The home is one of several spheres that shape a child and their education.
3. Family partnership is an essential element of education.
4. Family partnership is a process, not a program of activities; it requires commitment, effort, and resources.
5. Family interaction with their own children is a cornerstone of involvement.
6. Most barriers to family partnership have their root in school practices – past or present.
7. Successful family engagement nurtures relationships and partnerships.
8. Effective family partnership boosts student achievement.

**SEEING STRENGTHS.** Individually or in small groups, study the following picture. What do you see? [include or adapt drawing of apparently chaotic home environment]



Now look again. Look for signs of learning or educational tools, such as reading materials, art, creativity, or celebration of children and family. How many can you identify?

Discussion: How does this exercise apply to families in our schools? How can we look for and find strengths in every family?

**SUGGESTED RESOURCE:** [Video](#): Three Georgia principals describe mindsets and key strategies for family partnership (5 minutes).<sup>1</sup>

## Signs of Success and Growth

- There is willingness by all parties to communicate about difficult issues without fear of backlash or judgment.
- There is ownership on all sides – school staff and families feel invested in what is happening at school.
- Families and students say they feel welcomed in the school.
- There is a sense of unity and collaborative problem-solving between the school and family, no “blame game.”
- Relationships are characterized by trust and confidence; schools and families believe all parties have students’ best interests at heart.
- Families and students say the school is inclusive, and they feel they are a valued part of the community.
- School staff say families in their community are doing their best and want the best for their children.

## Reflection Questions

**Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.**

- What messages does my school send families? Are they consistent?
- How do we talk about family partnership in my school?
- What assets do families in my community have to offer?
- How can I learn more from families in my community?
- How do I build a spirit of collaboration and trust?
- How can I expand on that?
- What beliefs help me open up to family partnership?
- Of the eight beliefs listed in this chapter, which are hardest for me to adopt? Which are easiest?





## **BUILDING BLOCK 2:**

# **RELATIONSHIPS**

*Talk with young people about their families, and notice ways that kids are supported and loved by their family members.*

*- Fairbanks educator*





## BUILDING BLOCK 2: RELATIONSHIPS

*Build connections with students and families*

**Building trusting relationships can help families and school staff to authentically work together. These connections help each partner value the other and develop a shared understanding of how to work as a team. Relationships are critical for addressing mistrust some families experience toward the educational system and serve as a foundation for solving problems and resolving conflict.**

### Key Concepts and Research

**Relationships are built over time, often through small but consistent actions that show caring or interest in another person.**

#### RELATIONSHIPS AS CORE MUSCLES:

To succeed in basketball, running, yoga, or Alaska Native Youth Olympics, we must first build our muscles and reflexes. We strengthen our core – the back and abdominal muscles that prepare us for any physical challenge that might arise. Relationships are the “core” of our partnerships; they are the muscles that strengthen and prepare us to work as a team toward student success.



Like our core, trusting relationships take time to build, and they provide a foundation of strength and stability for navigating unexpected challenges and taking on higher goals.

Research supports the importance of strong relationships. In Chicago, researchers found that trust among school staff and families is a key predictor of school performance.<sup>1</sup> The Search Institute, which studies and promotes “what kids need to succeed,” explains:

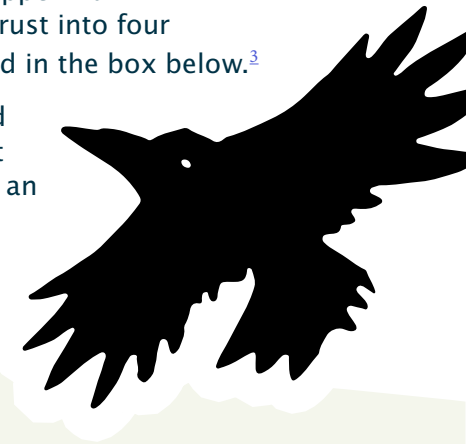
*If relationships are, in fact, the “active ingredient” in successful interventions they are neither fluff nor a distraction from what really matters. We cannot leave relationship quality to chance. We need to become more intentional in forming, strengthening, and sustaining the web of transformative relationships in the lives of children and youth.<sup>2</sup>*

Authentic relationships occur when people can bring their whole selves and feel seen as a whole person. Such relationships are built on **trust**, which in turn is built on sincerity, reliability, competence, and care. Organizational development coach Charles Feltman defines trust as “choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable

to another person’s actions.” In the case of education, families are being asked to make their children – and themselves – vulnerable to educators and the education system. Teachers and staff, in deepening partnerships with families, are being asked to make their practice vulnerable to families’ input and judgment.

Feltman notes that trust doesn’t just happen. It takes attention. Feltman breaks down trust into four components, or “distinctions,” described in the box below.<sup>3</sup>

Feltman says, “It can take time to build relationships and common goals. Trust happens over time – baby steps. Bring an attitude of openness to the table.”



## THE FOUR DISTINCTIONS OF TRUST

CHARLES FELTMAN

**SINCERITY** the assessment that you are honest, that you say what you mean and mean what you say; you can be believed and taken seriously. It also means when you express an opinion it is valid, useful, and is backed up by sound thinking and evidence. Finally, it means that your actions will align with your words.

**RELIABILITY** the assessment that you meet the commitments you make, that you keep your promises.

**COMPETENCE** the assessment that you have the ability to do what you are doing or propose to do. In the workplace this usually means the other person believes you have the requisite capacity, skill, knowledge, and resources to do a particular task or job.

**CARE** the assessment that you have the other person’s interests in mind as well as your own when you make decisions and take actions. Of the four assessments of trustworthiness, care is in some ways the most important for building lasting trust. When people believe you are only concerned with your self-interest and don’t consider their interests as well, they may trust your sincerity, reliability and competence, but they will tend to limit their trust of you to specific situations or transactions. On the other hand, when people believe you hold their interest in mind, they will extend their trust more broadly to you.

## Relationships in Action: Not One-Size-Fits-All

**Sarah, a longtime Alaska high school teacher, puts relationships with students and families at the heart of her teaching. She describes how she forms relationships with families:**

In the summer, as soon as I get my class list, I email families to say, *Hi, I'm Sarah*, and to ask them to send me a little information about their kid ahead of time: *What do I need to know to greet your kid on the first day?*

Families sometimes share really important information, such as *my kid is struggling with their best friend*, or *we're getting divorced*. The email also tells me whose email address doesn't work and that I need to get for future communications.

I also try to email or call each parent or family member early in the school year to start off with a positive report like, *Hey, this really awesome thing happened today. I saw your kid help another student open his locker*. This is especially important for me if I know a particular student usually gets in trouble.

And families sometimes say to me, *No teacher has ever told me they liked my kid*, or *No teacher has ever called me with something positive*. They usually wait until the end of the call, waiting for me to say something bad.

Some parents actually cry when they realize there is no bad news. **I work really hard to find something positive to share.**

Or I'll call and say, *I noticed something that worked really well for your kid*, and share a specific successful strategy, so we can then team up to support the student.

Sometimes families have such a negative impression of school from their own experience, especially some Alaska Native families. So for some families, I take our meetings someplace neutral to meet: *Hey, let's meet for coffee at ...*

And when I take time to organize events outside school, I am amazed at how many family members are willing to help; they offer to make cookies or help set up. I organized a spooky story reading at the beach around Halloween, and so many families you'd never see at school or parent-teacher conferences showed up to hear their kids read their scary stories. **They all care about their kids and want to show up for them.** I try not to do one-size-fits-all because every kid and every family has their own story.



# Analysis: Not One-Size-Fits-All

## WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

- When does Sarah begin her family outreach?
- How does Sarah show families she cares about their students?
- How does Sarah build positive relationships with families of students who tend to get in trouble?
- How does Sarah support families in their own relationship with their student?
- In what ways is Sarah flexible and creative about family engagement?
- How does Sarah acknowledge the history of trauma in education and its ongoing legacy?
- Why does Sarah organize events outside of school? What are the impacts?
- What beliefs does Sarah hold that help her build relationships with families?
- How might Sarah's efforts to find something positive about each student affect her own attitude toward her students?

## WHAT MORE COULD SARAH DO?

- How could Sarah support her colleagues in developing more authentic relationships with families?
- How could Sarah work with her colleagues to make sure each student has at least three caring adults at the school to support them?

## PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- Which of Sarah's strategies might be applicable to your own practice?
- Have you noticed a difference in your relationships when you lead with positive feedback about a student?
- How can you create a more systematic or intentional approach to relationship-building?





## Tools and Strategies

Alaska educators share strategies for building positive relationships with families:

### **BUILD ON LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES:**

Each region and many communities in Alaska have values and ways of sharing knowledge. Learn about these values and how families discuss values and expectations.

**BE PART OF THE COMMUNITY:** Participate or volunteer in activities and events where families are gathering. This can include harvesting foods, community meetings, ceremonies, or other community events.

**WELCOME ALL.** Use the classroom or school as a hub for family activities and social events. Create fun and openness in the classroom.

**CONNECT WITH CARING AND SIGNIFICANT ADULTS** in your students' lives. Get contact information and permission forms at the beginning of the year to reach out to other significant adults.

**SHOW YOU CARE.** Reach out personally to hard-to-reach adults and their extended network. Ask for others in your school or community to use their connections, if appropriate.

**SCHEDULE OUT-OF-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES** for families and students that match their interests and expertise.

**CULTIVATE A LEARNER'S MINDSET.** Ask family members about their child, and work to better understand their child's strengths and needs as well as what resources the families bring to your school community.

**BE CREATIVE.** Use multiple approaches to share updates on student progress and school activities, including students sharing their own progress.

**LISTEN DEEPLY.** Have many conversations with groups in the community and with smaller family groups.

**SHOW HUMILITY.** Acknowledge the history of education in Alaska and the lasting mistrust created by policies such as family separations, punishment for speaking Alaska Native languages, and abuse.



*When a teacher came over to my house just to visit I was surprised (and a little uncomfortable), but I knew they cared enough to get to know us. My daughter thought it was fun too.*

*-Alaska parent*

*Often I waited to build relationships with families until something went wrong, and then it is hard to do. Now I am going to start building relationships at the beginning of the year so that when things get hard, we have something to build on.*

*-School Counselor*

**Parent-Teacher Home Visits (PTHV)** is a national organization that builds relationships, skills, and engagement for families, educators, and students from pre-K to 12th grade.

PTHV offers evidence-based training and support for developing and deepening school-family relationships.

**The Search Institute** offers a research-based framework for building relationships with families.<sup>4</sup> The focus is on strengthening developmental relationships within the family (i.e., between parents or caregivers and children) as well as the home-school relationship. The Search Institute summarizes its core strategies as follows:

1. Listen first to families to help determine the best ways to partner.
2. Focus on building relationships with families and students, rather than focusing on activities.
3. Highlight families' strengths, even amid challenges, rather than adopting and designing approaches based on deficits.
4. Encourage families to experiment with new practices that build relationships with their child, rather than giving them expert advice on what they need to do.

5. Emphasize the importance of caring, supportive adults and provide opportunities to strengthen those relationships.
6. Broaden coalitions focused on young people's success to actively engage families as a focal point for strengthening developmental relationships.

**The Flamboyant Foundation and Harvard Family Research Project** offer strategies and key insights for building relationships with families.<sup>5</sup> These include the following:

- Treat families in respectful and culturally sensitive ways and invite their engagement in the school.
- Understand each family's hopes and dreams for their child.
- Create a plan together to help families work toward this vision.
- Understand key strategies for building trust.
- Establish a meaningful home-to-school communication system with multiple modes of communication to meet different families' needs.
- Have a means to reach all families and be reached by all families in a timely way.
- Communicate with all families in a way that is accessible and easy to understand.
- Build a solid foundation with families so you can problem solve together.
- Learn from and about families to improve learning in the classroom.

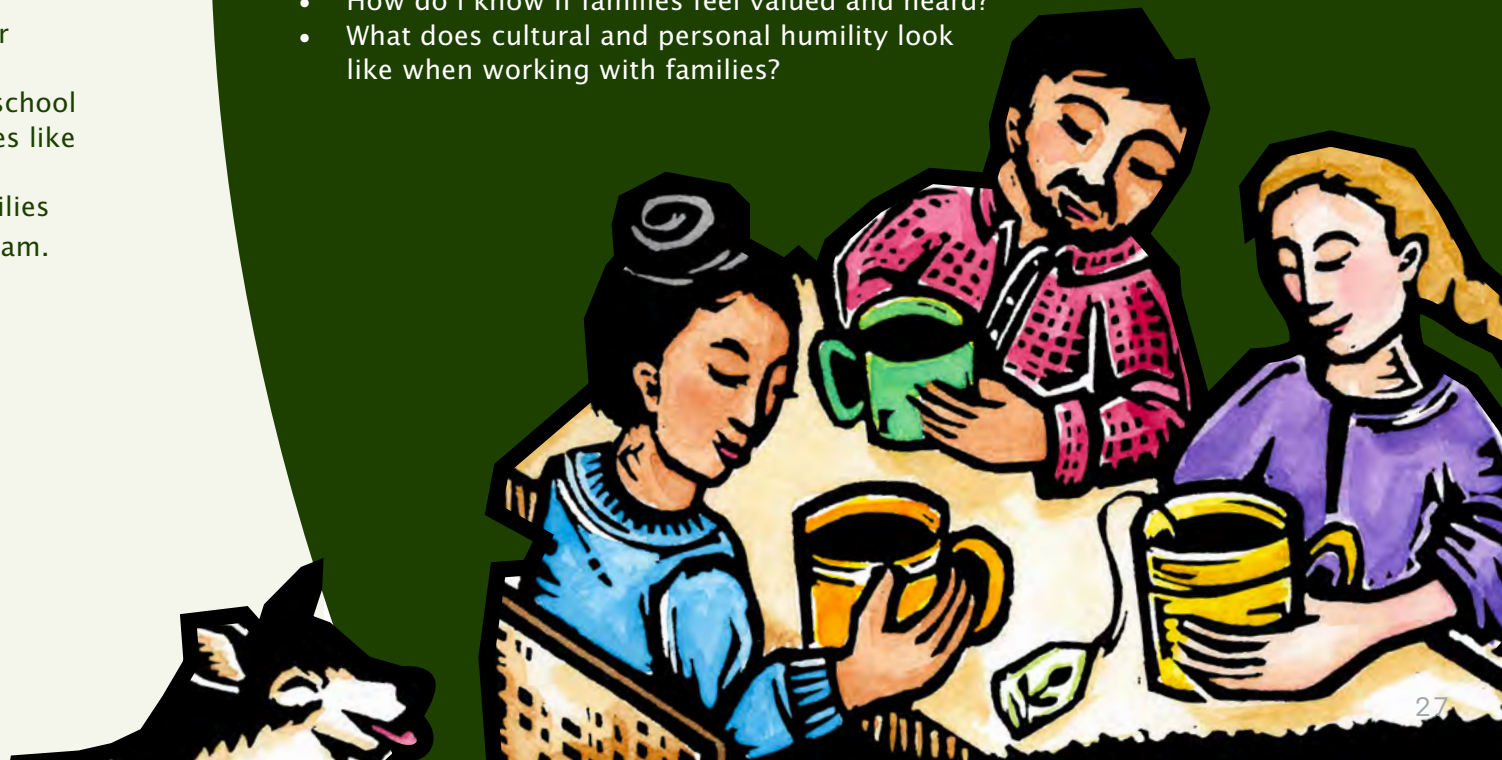
## Signs of Success and Growth

- Families report feeling heard and valued.
- Families share their knowledge, expertise, and stories with you.
- Adults in the community let students know school is important.
- Teachers and staff show personal regard for all families.
- Teachers seek input from families and listen carefully.
- Families trust staff to have their students' interests at heart.
- Families and students feel the school is a welcoming place for families like theirs.
- Students, school staff, and families believe they are on the same team.

## Reflection Questions

**Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.**

- How do I show personal regard for families and acknowledge their strengths?
- How do I build an authentic relationship?
- What are the roles and responsibilities each family member plays in the life of my students?
- Do I keep my word and follow through on commitments I make to families?
- How can I ensure families have a way to share their students' strengths and needs with me?
- How do I know if families feel valued and heard?
- What does cultural and personal humility look like when working with families?





## BUILDING BLOCK 3:

# CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

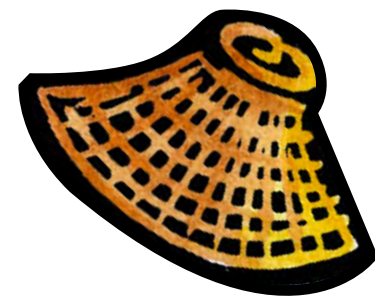
*Don't teach me about my culture,  
but use my culture to teach me.*

*- Benny Shendo*





# BUILDING BLOCK 3: CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS



*Value and lean on family and community ways of knowing*

**When school staff value family and community ways of knowing, families can bring their full selves into the school and can use their knowledge and strengths to support their students and schools. Respect for family and community cultures, languages, histories, and values is foundational to any successful partnership.**

## Key Concepts and Research

Every family has distinct traditions, values, stories, and connections to place. These experiences and affiliations, or culture, can influence parenting practices, communication, knowledge sets, and learning styles. Each of us uses our culture and experiences to build new knowledge, to make meaning of new information and experiences, and to integrate our skills. By incorporating a family's culture or experience, we can actually improve student learning and success.

In Alaska, schools are often very diverse or culturally specific. Some schools have students from many different backgrounds. The Anchorage School District has students whose families speak 100 languages, each bringing unique experiences to the classroom. In parts of rural Alaska, students may largely be raised

in a set of culturally specific values. In each of these cases, our cultural richness is a great storehouse of strength for our schools, for students, and for families. Bringing that strength into our schools requires **cultural responsiveness**.

Cultural responsiveness means using culture to integrate knowledge, skills, and practices. For many students, their culture is foundational to their identity, their learning style, and their social and emotional development. Each family adds their unique experiences, shaping the lens through which students and their families view the world. The better we understand a family's culture, the better we are able to ensure appropriate curricula, support effective ways of learning, establish reasonable policies, and develop common language or norms.

Understanding Alaska's history is also important for educators. For generations, colonial education systems actively separated Alaska Native children from their

families and punished them for speaking their languages, eating traditional foods, or practicing traditional cultural activities. These policies and practices, along with widespread abuse, have led to grief, anger, and mistrust that continues to impact students, their families, and the education system. When we understand this **historic or intergenerational trauma** and acknowledge the past, we are better able to establish the authentic relationships necessary for effective family partnership.

Relationship-building is at the heart of family-school partnerships. Authentic relationships stem from understanding a person's worldview, cultural background, values, and customs. This context is important for fostering trust and healing. This is also important so students and families can be free to be who they are and not have to "check their identity at the door" of the school.

Learning becomes more relevant when cultural knowledge and prior experiences are woven in.<sup>1</sup> And the corollary holds true: Disparities between the cultural values and communication patterns of the home and the school can undermine children's enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their own capacity to learn.<sup>2</sup> Experts advise using students' existing knowledge and strengths, whether teaching math or social and emotional skills.

"Culturally responsive systems are the key to improving outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native students in school and in life," writes Mandy Smoker Broadus:

These efforts can also play a significant role in increased family and community interaction, dialogue and collaboration. ... When a system is culturally responsive, families and the community recognize these thoughtful intentions to value who the students are and where they come from.<sup>3</sup>

This applies beyond Alaska Native families to the 100+ cultures represented in Alaska schools. Real-world experience in Alaska supports the research: According to Anchorage's 90 by 2020 Graduation Initiative, when Anchorage School District data showed that Pacific Islanders had a high rate of absence, family members from the community came together to offer an after-school dance program. Attendance for those students significantly improved. Families and the school worked together to improve student outcomes by tapping cultural strengths. **Culturally responsive teaching and family engagement is a critical building block for equity in education.**<sup>4</sup>

Zaretta Hammond, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, writes that a culturally responsive approach is not a program but a *mindset*:

*That means that it's equally important to do the 'inside-out' work to build your social-emotional capacity to work across social, linguistic, racial, and/or economic difference with students and their families. Too often I hear educators say that they are 'color-blind' or don't understand the socio-political issues that lead to inequities in education – like disproportionate discipline outcomes for boys of color or low achievement data for English learners, poor students, and students of color in general. ... We have to make it our personal business to build our emotional stamina to address our own blind spots and biases.*

## Cultural Responsiveness in Action: Graduation Policy

For decades, graduating seniors at Anchorage high schools were required to wear the standard cap and gown to graduation without any alteration. “We didn’t want cuss words or symbols that offended people, so we were pretty strict about it,” said Kersten Johnson-Struempfer, the district’s senior director of secondary education.<sup>5</sup>

Jacqueline Morris wanted her son, who is of Yup’ik and Inupiaq heritage, to be able to wear traditional regalia as he received his diploma from Service High School in 2018. She won an exception for her son, but she didn’t want her younger daughter and others to have to wage the same fight. So her family, along with the district’s Native Advisory Committee, pushed for and achieved broader change.

It took hard work and months of advocacy, but a district regulation now states that Anchorage graduates can wear

traditional tribal regalia and objects of cultural significance at their graduation ceremonies.



“I think we have one of the most diverse school districts in the country, and really, for us, I think it’s important to recognize that,” Johnson-Struempfer told the Anchorage Daily News. “I’m excited to see how students express themselves at graduation this year.”

Coverage in the *Anchorage Daily News* captured the impact of this simple yet profound change:

Even nearly a year later, as Morris talked about watching her son cross the stage in his sealskin cap to get his high school diploma, she got goosebumps. She was just so proud, she said, and she knows her ancestors were too. She can now share that feeling with more families of more graduates.

“They’re honoring their past while stepping into the future,” she said, “and they’re bringing their culture with them.”

Morris’ daughter Nyche Andrew shared, “When I graduate, I want younger Native students to see me in something that’s familiar to them and their family and their culture. I want them to feel inspired.”

In 2019, 70 students took advantage of the new policy to wear traditional clothing with their cap and gown. Milana Stalder, who is part Yup’ik, wore a kuspuk under her gown in memory of her grandmother. Her cap was adorned with ivory carvings and seal and sea otter trim. “It is really important because this gives me a way to connect to my culture,” she said.<sup>6</sup>

## Analysis: Graduation Policy

### WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

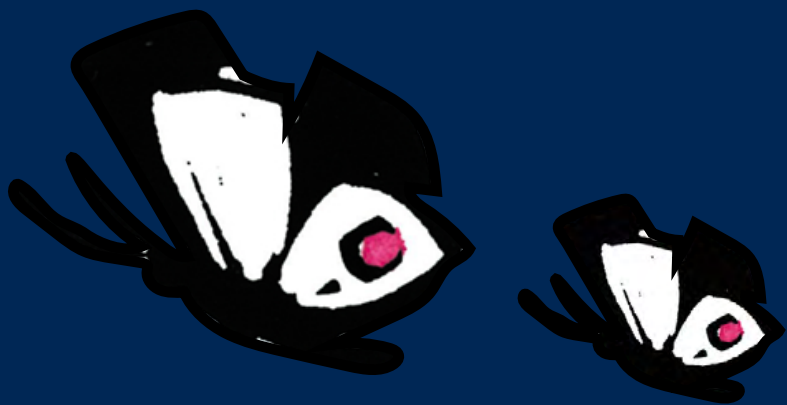
- How does the Anchorage School District's new policy allow students and families to bring their whole selves into the school?
- What does the policy communicate to students and families about their cultures?
- What does traditional regalia mean to students, their families, and Elders?
- How is the policy inclusive and encouraging of families to participate in their student's education?

### WHAT ELSE COULD THE DISTRICT DO TO HONOR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY?

- How can the school work with tribes or cultural organizations to enhance ceremonies or educational milestones to incorporate cultural protocols?
- How can the community and school district extend this kind of cultural connectedness beyond graduation into everyday school activities?
- How can the school and community create more coherence so students can do less conceptual translation between school and their families?
- How can the school and families work together to create opportunities to include cultural protocols, ceremonies, representations, or objects with them to school?

### PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- In your practice, how do you make room for students and families to bring their whole selves to school?
- How might you go further?
- How can you bring your students' cultures, languages, and cultural artifacts into your everyday practice?





# Tools and Strategies

**The Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) works with school districts to embed the concepts of cultural responsiveness and cultural safety into district and school practice. The following components can be helpful for culturally responsive family partnership:**

## **CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING:**

Establish on-boarding and continuing education for all staff to deepen understanding of community experiences and strengths.

## **CULTURALLY SAFE AND WELCOMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:**

Create a welcoming physical environment with physical space for community members and tangible cultural cues throughout the building, such as language, art, community history, and culturally significant materials. This can include space for families or Elders to use as a culture or community room.

## **OPPORTUNITIES THAT PROMOTE HEALING, HISTORIES, AND EQUITY:**

Schools can promote healing through community dialogues, school-based activities, cultural protocols and ceremonies, and resiliency training.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES THAT REFLECT CULTURAL CONTENT AND WAYS OF LEARNING:**

By building on students' existing knowledge and ways of learning, school staff can accelerate students' academic or social and emotional learning, and help families feel more connected to their students' learning.

**POLICIES:** School district policies, administrative regulations, and school handbooks can support cultural connections. The AASB has 40 policy recommendations for culturally responsive and trauma-informed policy integration. Likewise, job descriptions, interview questions, and candidate evaluation components can establish culturally responsive expectations from the start.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND CO-CREATION:**

Schools can host conversations and gatherings where families can share their priorities and actively participate in creating curricula or goals. This "co-creation" incorporates family views and deepens a sense of shared responsibility for student success. First Alaskans Institute (FAI) provides tools and training to support these dialogues. The FAI and AASB support communities and schools interested in hosting dialogues.

**CURRICULA AND LANGUAGE:** This can include regionally accurate histories, appropriate content, and language. This can be tied to place and people.

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP IDEAS

Participate in subsistence activities or cultural festivities.

Use place-based content, such as dissection of a moose to learn biology.

Learn and incorporate local or family histories.

Recognize past and present community leaders in social studies classes.

Consider cultural modifications when talking to families, such as less direct eye contact.

Listen carefully and practice silence when meeting with families and those who may speak less fluent English or who use longer “wait time” before speaking.

Work with families to conduct a cultural inventory of content and classroom materials.

Use art, language, and stories that reflect students’ cultures.

Incorporate questions into each lesson that draw on community experiences and knowledge.

Review curricula with families to ensure it reflects students’ cultures.

## Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive

**Schools**, published by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, provides the following standards for family partnership:

*Culturally responsive educators work closely with families to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school. Educators who meet this cultural standard do the following:*

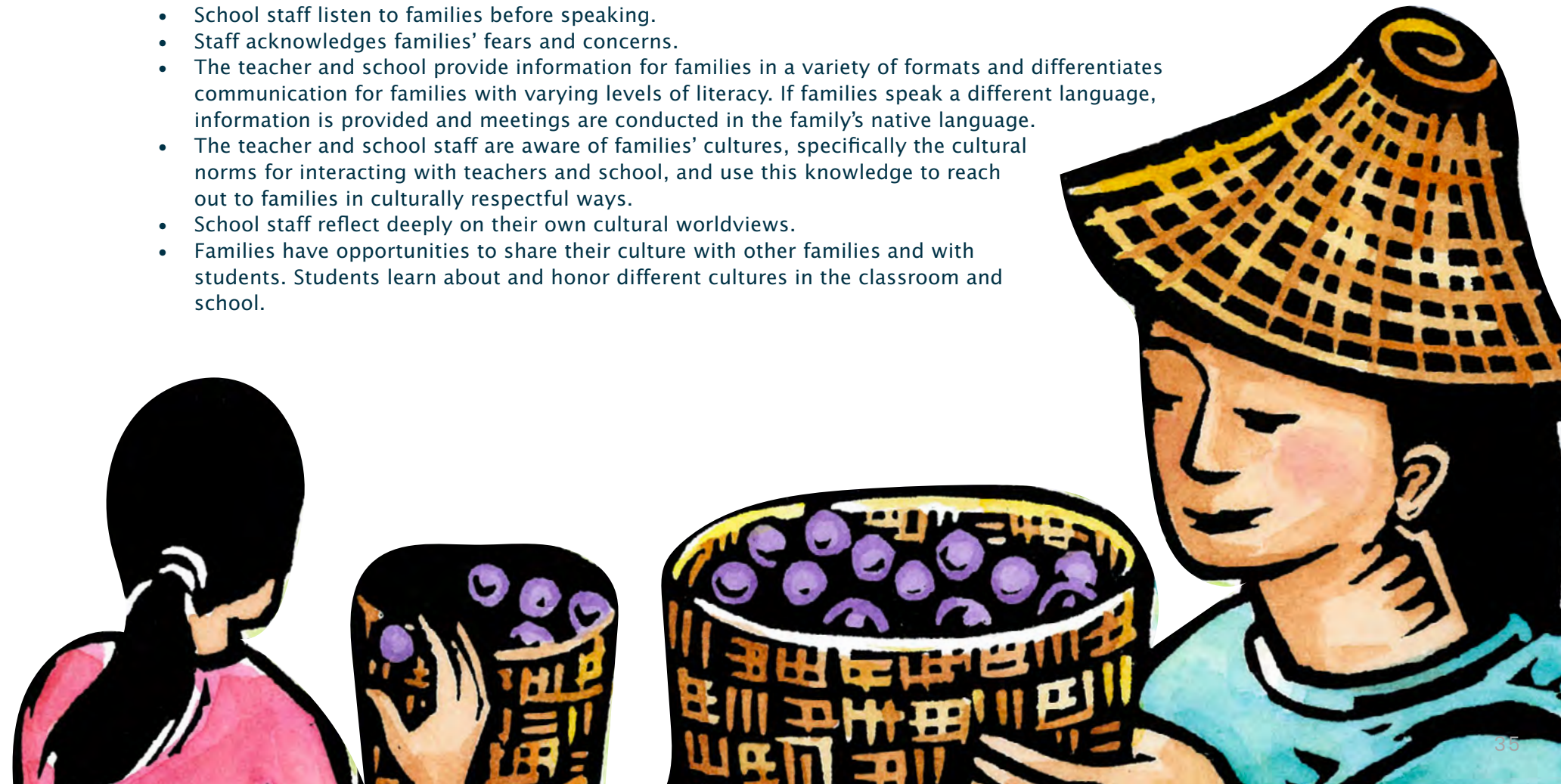
1. Promote extensive community and family interaction and involvement in their children’s education;
2. Involve Elders, parents, and local leaders in all aspects of instructional planning and implementation;
3. Seek to continually learn about and build upon the cultural knowledge that students bring with them from their homes and community; and
4. Seek to learn the local heritage language and promote its use in their teaching.

**Recommended resource:** *The Principal’s Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools* by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (n.d.).<sup>2</sup>

## Signs of Success and Growth

**The following indicators of successful beliefs and strategies for family engagement are adapted from the Flamboyan Foundation's School-Wide and Classroom Family Engagement Rubrics:**

- School staff work to understand families' histories, communication styles, and cultures, and adapt partnership styles.
- School staff listen to families before speaking.
- Staff acknowledges families' fears and concerns.
- The teacher and school provide information for families in a variety of formats and differentiates communication for families with varying levels of literacy. If families speak a different language, information is provided and meetings are conducted in the family's native language.
- The teacher and school staff are aware of families' cultures, specifically the cultural norms for interacting with teachers and school, and use this knowledge to reach out to families in culturally respectful ways.
- School staff reflect deeply on their own cultural worldviews.
- Families have opportunities to share their culture with other families and with students. Students learn about and honor different cultures in the classroom and school.



# Reflection Questions

**Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.**

- What are the cultures of the families I serve?
- What are some important cultural practices to acknowledge or participate in?
- What are the stories of my students' families? What is their relationship with the education system?
- What opportunities exist for families to share their culture and experiences with school staff? How are these included in our course content?
- What am I doing to reach out to families who have been marginalized from school, and what structures might be helpful (e.g., family liaisons, dialogues, parent-peer groups)?
- Which components of the cultural safety framework do my district and school consider?
- Do I consistently value and acknowledge the strengths and gifts that families from diverse backgrounds and languages can bring to the teaching and learning process? How do I do so?

- How are families teaching culture to their children? What cultural strengths do my students and their families bring?
- How can I help families harness those cultural strengths to drive their students' success?
- How do I bring your own culture and world to the classroom and link it back to your current home, Alaska?

## FOR STAFF WORKING IN THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES

- What are some roles I can play to support family school partnerships?
- What information and tools might be helpful to my colleagues?
- What assumptions or expectations might I have to put aside to meet families where they are?



## BUILDING BLOCK 4:

# LINKS TO LEARNING

*Invite parents in to celebrate their children's growth and successes.*

*- Second-grade teacher*



# BUILDING BLOCK 4: LINKS TO LEARNING

*Connect families to classroom content and student outcomes*

**Successful family partnerships are a lever for student achievement and school improvement. When teachers, school staff, and families have shared expectations for students, they can work together to support student learning, goal-setting, and a sense of shared mission.**

## Key Concepts and Research

Effective family partnership is centered on student success. This means the ultimate purpose of partnership is to help each student meet their goals.

Linking families to their students' learning happens when school staff provide a clear understanding of classroom goals and how families can practice, play, and learn together in support of these goals. The research is clear that family involvement in helping a child learn at home bolsters academic success. When families and school staff work together, they reinforce academic and social and emotional learning more effectively.

Research finds that family involvement in at-home learning – for example, through conversations about school, talking about reading, and expressing interest in

a child's personal and academic progress – has significant positive academic impact regardless of income or educational background.<sup>1</sup> Teachers play an important role in connecting families to learning and maximizing family strengths and home time to reinforce classroom learning.

Students, families, and school staff have a critical role in developing shared goals and clear steps. School staff can do the following:

- Demonstrate respect for their students' families and cultures.
- Work collaboratively with families to set goals and foster high expectations for student achievement and relationship-building skills.
- Help students and families outline steps to reach goals.
- Show families what children are learning, and demystify grade-level standards and assessments.
- Identify at-home and everyday activities that support learning goals.

- Use data to show families how their children are doing.
- Offer specific, fun family activities to support academic, social and emotional, and other instructional goals.
- Provide regular updates on current class assignments, semester goals, and objectives as well as ways families can support learning.

**Family partnership is critical for closing the gaps in educational opportunity and achievement between higher- and lower-income students.** These gaps will only be remedied when those closest to students – their families and communities – drive decision-making. As one study states, “Parental engagement boosts student achievement both directly and through other improvements to families’ situations.” A case study of low-income families found that families in a structured program of support “become more likely to make academics a priority, to engage with their children’s schools, and to be focused on sending their children to college.”<sup>2</sup>

Because family engagement is strongly linked to student success, federal law mandates Title I schools, which serve disproportionately low-income communities, establish structured school-family partnerships through “compacts,” or agreements. These compacts can be helpful tools for all schools when linked to learning and focused on building relationships.



## Links to Learning in Action: Partners From the Start

As a kindergarten teacher, Karen understands she is the first school-based teacher for many of her students and families. She works to build skills and confidence in families, not just students, by actively involving families in their children's learning and growth. Early in the year, Karen reaches out by phone to each family to learn about their child's strengths and interests, and about each family's goals for their child. She makes an extra effort to contact all families, using multiple modes of communication if needed. Karen believes it is critical to make positive, proactive contact before reaching out to discuss a behavioral or learning challenge.

To ensure all families have supplies to work with their children, at the start of the year, Karen gives each family a kit with items like a deck of cards, dice, and instructions for age-appropriate math games.

To help families support their children's learning throughout the year, Karen uses a classroom app, a weekly one-page newsletter sent home in hard copy, and short email updates about what students are learning and doing together. This goes to any family member on the approved list of family members set up at the beginning of the year.

These communications focus on what students are learning, with tips for how family members can reinforce these concepts at home. She also asks families to share

pictures and ideas about how they are practicing and having fun learning at home. For example, when students work on measurement, Karen encourages families to let their children measure ingredients while cooking with their family or while working on sewing or building projects around the house. She asks families what other activities they do that use measurement so families can share ideas.

When Karen shares photos, she explains what the students are learning. For example, the caption for a photo of a student holding a worm might say, "Students learned how worms help put nutrients back in the soil," or "Ask your child how worms put nutrients back in the soil." Each newsletter includes a few questions family members could ask their child based on the week's activities, such as, "How did it feel to hold a worm?" or, "Ask your child to compare two characters in a movie you watch together."

Karen uses student-led conferences to help children and their families learn to talk about their goals and academic growth. They all talk as a team about the next steps to support and encourage the student's learning.

Years later, Karen says, parents will often tell Karen they are more engaged in their children's learning because of the habits and skills she helped foster early on. She is always gratified when families seek her out at their student's high school graduation or other milestones to share stories of their students' successes.



## Analysis: Partners From the Start

### WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

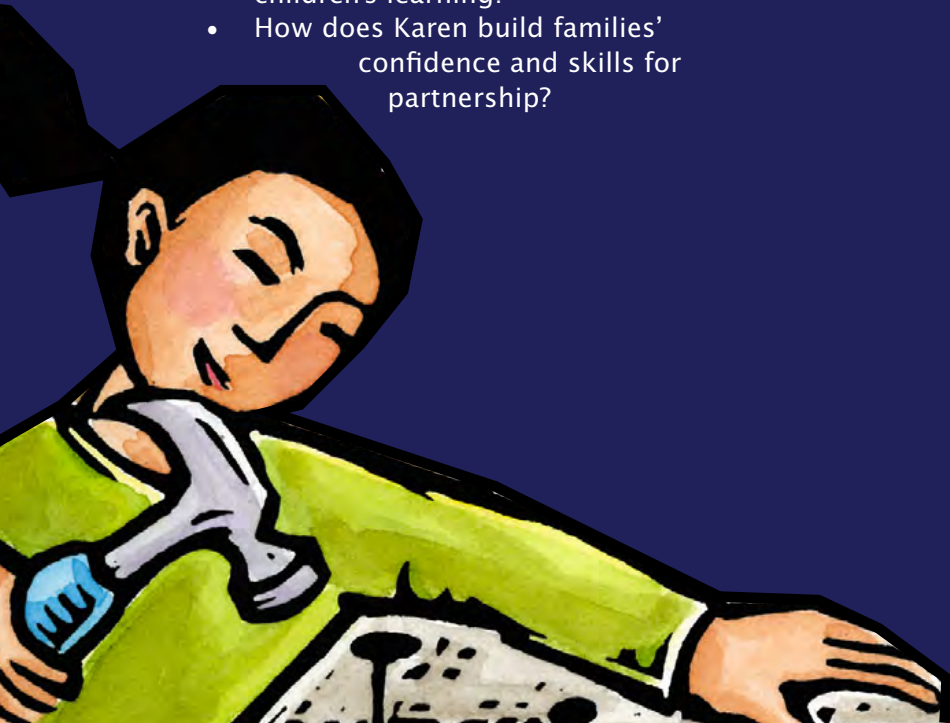
- How does providing simple supplies support families?
- Why does Karen reach out to families before there is a need for intervention?
- How does Karen show she values families?
- How does Karen link families to their children's learning?
- How does Karen build families' confidence and skills for partnership?

### WHAT MORE COULD KAREN DO TO LINK FAMILIES TO THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING?

- How could Karen ensure opportunities for families to provide meaningful feedback?
- How could Karen partner with families to co-create (create collaboratively) classroom newsletters, videos, and other celebrations of student learning?
- How could Karen partner with her colleagues to support family links to learning within her school?
- How could families share with each other some of the activities they are doing with students at home?

### PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- How might the ideas and practices in this case study apply to your school or classroom?
- How do you connect parents to your classroom and student learning?
- How do you show families you value their role?



# Tools and Strategies

**Below are some example tools and strategies to link families to learning. Use the space at the end of this chapter to write down your own strategies to establish a shared vision and to link families to learning objectives.**

**ALASKA TIPS:** Alaska school staff and families suggest the following for linking family partnership to learning:

- Understand why school is important for each student and family in a way that fits their goals.
- Place students in the driver's seat with student-led parent-teacher conferences.
- Invite families to participate in school and in out-of-school learning activities.
- Provide ideas and opportunities to read, learn, and play as a family.
- Seek feedback and suggestions from families to build stronger links.
- Share specific information about what students are learning and how it is connected to key education standards.
- Offer regular opportunities to discuss student progress, learning objectives and ways to help.
- Help families practice asking questions by having each meeting start with families asking questions about their children or the classroom experience.

**FAMILY COMPACTS:** Title I districts and schools are required to establish programs and procedures for meaningful family engagement. These include a written parent and family engagement policy developed jointly with parents and family members of children in the district.

A review of compacts in Alaska showed that most schools and districts have compacts that reinforce the dynamic of schools as rule-makers and families as followers of those rules and expectations. Creating a compact with families can be a real opportunity for conversation and an opportunity for families to become an integral part of the team in reaching school improvement goals.

Schools and families can create compacts that include strategies and opportunities to:

- meet school goals and academic standards,
- link high-quality curriculum and instruction to place and cultures,
- offer home support for learning connected to curriculum,
- reinforce student responsibility for learning,
- participate in activities to build partnerships,
- develop opportunities for meaningful input from families, and
- establish methods for two-way communication about student progress and supports.

Family partnership compacting resources:

- Alaska Department of Education provides an overview and sample forms.<sup>3</sup>

- The National Education Association provides a Quick Brief on Family Engagement in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.<sup>4</sup>
- Texas offers a manual on Five Steps to Success for Developing School-Parent Compacts.<sup>5</sup>
- Linking to Learning With School-Parent Compacts, by The Harvard Family Engagement Institute, offers tools for ensuring family partnership is truly centered on student learning.<sup>6</sup>
- Video resource: Link It to Learning: Concrete Tips for Making Family Engagement Happen includes a 7-minute video with expert Karen Mapp.<sup>7</sup>

### ACADEMIC PARENT-TEACHER TEAMS:

This national research-based model of family-school partnership is built on the idea that schools can thrive when families and teachers work together as genuine partners to maximize student learning inside and outside of school.<sup>8</sup>

- The Anchorage School District has participated in this program and created a video about the experience.<sup>9</sup> The narrator notes, “Children are more successful when they see families and teachers working on a common goal.”

### HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL?

- *Look at books or read with your child every night.*
- *Create a quiet space for homework. Help when you can.*
- *Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and is ready each day.*
- *Model problem-solving with the teacher or principal instead of talking negatively about the school.*
- *Encourage your child to discuss things about their day.*
- *Ask for strategies and activity ideas to practice at home.*
- *Let school staff know the best way to communicate with family members.*
- *Practice new academic knowledge and social and emotional skills.*
- *Ensure your child is responsible for their actions and their goals.*

- Adapted from Alaska Gateway School District's Migrant Education newsletter, which includes tips and games.

*Do I get to learn as a parent a new tip or tool, or practice something that helps support my kids' learning? ... Do the teachers get to hear from me about what I know about my kid that might help them be a better teacher to my child?*

- Karen Mapp,  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## Signs of Success and Growth

- Teachers and school staff believe that ...
  - to help students reach their goals, we need to partner closely with their families.
  - it is our job and responsibility to partner closely with families to support student achievement.
- Teachers and school staff want to know and understand each student's and family's goals.
- Teacher school staff offer families ...
  - regular, personal invitations to visit the school and classroom and engage in their child's education.
  - ongoing, individualized communication about their child that is positive, actionable, and linked to student learning.
  - opportunities to contribute to communication vehicles, such as newsletters, and celebrations of student success.
  - regular, meaningful avenues for families to ask questions and provide feedback.
  - frequent updates in accessible formats on what students are learning and how the curriculum is tied to education standards and student goals.

## Reflection Questions

Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.

- What beliefs do I hold about a family's role in their student's success?
- What tools and opportunities are there for families to talk to their child about school?
- What questions do I ask families about their students?
- How do I use that information to motivate each student?
- How do I systematically and consistently support families in working with their students?
- What tools, activities, and agreements do we set to work on school improvement goals together?
- How do our families' knowledge and values tie into academic and social content?
- How can I help families communicate high expectations to their students?
- How do I set students up to share progress with their families?
- How can I help families who may feel intimidated by school help their children set high academic goals? What new ways could I use to empower families to partner in their students' success?





## **BUILDING BLOCK 5:**

*I always had clear roles for families, but I realize now I did not actually think of them as a true partner. These were my expectations and requests. I realize now there are ways we can both decide how to work together to support each student.*

*- Alaska teacher*

# **SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE**



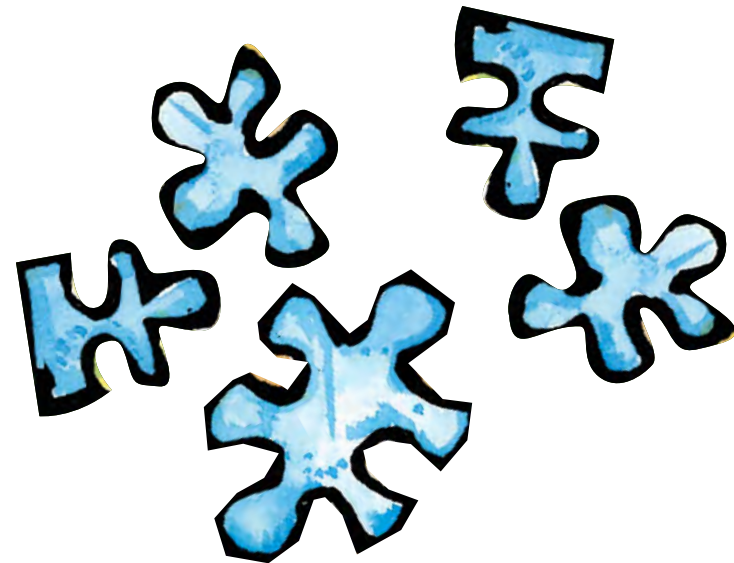
## BUILDING BLOCK 5: SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

*Build family and staff capacity to work together*

**Families and staff often want to work together more effectively but don't know how. Successful partnerships build the skills, confidence, and capacity of both partners. Through training and specific opportunities, staff and families can build the skills and confidence they need.**

### Key Concepts and Research

A growing recognition of the critical role families play in their children's educational success has led to greater interest in family partnership. However, families and staff don't always know how to work together as true partners. Experts say family partnership requirements are often built on the flawed assumption that the educators and families who are expected to partner have the skills, knowledge, confidence, and belief systems needed.<sup>1</sup> In reality, these skills need to be taught and nurtured. The good news is that *partnership skills can be learned, and confidence can grow through practice and success.*



## Skills and Confidence in Action: A Parent's Growth

When Laura's son Rob was 3, friends told her about a local preschool where families are expected to volunteer in the classroom, help with fundraising, keep the classroom supplied and organized, and participate in decision-making. Laura liked the sound of it, but she wasn't sure she had the skills and experience to contribute. A friend insisted she didn't need any, so she signed up.

The lead teacher, Mrs. Jones, shared child development information with parents, including developmental milestones and ways to create rich learning experiences for students in and out of the classroom. She took time to ask parents what she should know and understand about their child and their family. Laura felt like Mrs. Jones really wanted to learn from her and that, as a mom, she was really a part of her child's education. It was the start of meaningful two-way communication. Laura's confidence to engage with teachers as partners grew.

When Rob entered kindergarten, he and Laura both had to adjust to a new teacher. The first week of school, Laura visited the classroom and noticed all the students of color, including Rob, were in the back sharing a table. Laura's own experience as an Alaska Native in the school system, where at times she felt like a second-class citizen, came back to her. She debated whether to say something to the teacher, to go to the principal, to air her grievance on social media, or to just keep quiet.

Her experience in co-op preschool helped her decide to talk to the teacher first. She wanted to provide feedback in a solutions-oriented way. Laura emailed the teacher, Mr. Smith, with her observation along with some information on her own background and on implicit bias, or biases we don't notice. Mr. Smith asked to meet with Laura. The teacher said seating was not based on race, but he was open to feedback and agreed to change the seating chart. He later thanked Laura for helping him become more aware of the experiences of students from historically marginalized communities and how his actions could make a difference.

Laura felt it was important to have Alaska Native family members visible in the classroom and school, and she volunteered regularly. Her skills and confidence continued to grow. The principal noticed her dedication and asked her to join the school's Site Council, a staff-parent advisory body. After several years serving on that body, she ran for and won a seat on the school board.

"It all started in my son's preschool," Laura says. "I would never have seen myself on the school board when Rob started preschool, but each experience helped me feel that I could contribute and needed to contribute."

Laura believes her involvement helped her children. "They see that I'm comfortable and confident in the school, and that makes them feel it's a place where they can feel confident and at home too."



# Analysis: A Parent's Growth

## WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

- How does Laura change in her confidence and engagement with the school system?
- How does a positive early experience with Mrs. Jones set up Laura for an expectation of two-way partnerships with school staff?
- How does Laura's experience with Mrs. Jones prepare her to engage with Mr. Smith?
- How might Laura's experience shape her children's experience in school? How might it shape other parents' experience?

## HOW CAN THESE KINDS OF SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE BE FOSTERED MORE BROADLY?

- For families who do not have an experience like co-op preschool, how can school staff help build their confidence?
- What can teachers do to make sure more parents like Laura feel they have a meaningful role to play?
- What can principals and other school staff do to ensure all families feel they can contribute and provide feedback?

## PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- Have you had a difficult conversation like the one Mr. Smith had with Laura? How did you respond?
- How do you help parents gain skills and confidence to partner?
- What do you need to strengthen your own capacity to partner meaningfully with families?



## LEARNING TOGETHER

The Anchorage School District coordinated a day “of learning” for families and school staff to build shared skills and understanding on trauma engaged schools practices.

\*All 66 elementary schools invited parents, community members, and business partners into the schools to learn together.

\*The training used a series of videos developed by the district and its partners to serve as a springboard for meaningful conversation.

\*Schools provided lunch to create a welcoming atmosphere, and to give participants opportunity to build relationships and keep the conversation going over a shared meal..



## Tools and Strategies

**There is a wide range of ways to build confidence and skills in families and school staff.**

**FOSTER SKILLS AND HABITS EARLY:** Parents As Teachers<sup>2</sup> is a family support program that can serve families from pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten. The program provides child development information, parenting support, and community resource referrals to support family well-being. Alaska has programs in many communities across the state. According to program evaluations, in addition to benefits to children of enrolled families, parents gain skills, habits, and confidence that can help set up successful family partnership throughout their children's school years. The program helps foster the following:

- Parents improve their parenting knowledge and skills.
- Parents are more involved in their children's schooling.
- Families are more likely to promote children's language and literacy.

Other home-visiting programs in Alaska similarly help build families' confidence and skills as well as lead to better outcomes for children.

**HELP FAMILIES FIND THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK:** Some families say they avoid school because they do not believe they have the power to make change. One strategy to help combat this is to help families develop questions and identify their top priorities. These

activities can be in groups or one-on-one and can be led by parents, staff, or community members. One engaging 20-minute activity focuses on developing questions and advocacy.

1. Propose a topic or solicit a problem.
2. Brainstorm questions.
3. Look at questions and make them open-ended and closed.
4. Choose the top three questions.
5. Think about whom to ask and what action the responses might lead to.
6. Prioritize one or two as a group or individual to move forward.

**Example:** A student is being held back. As a caregiver, what questions do you have? Which are your best questions? Whom will you ask? What action do you want to take?

The Right Question School-Family Partnership Strategy<sup>3</sup> can be a resource for this process. The Right Question Institute explains, "When educators integrate the development of parents' questions into their practice, the focus shifts from teacher-driven conversations to a process where parents help set the agenda and identify information they need." The process involves several shifts summarized below.



Shift away from doing this:	Shift toward doing this:
Telling families what they should know.	Providing a process to ask questions and meet family/ student needs.
Asking families at the end of a conversation, “Do you have any questions?”	Setting aside time at the beginning for families to produce questions, set the focus of the conversation, and strategize about how to use them.
Telling families what they should do.	Providing a structure for families to think about and name what they can do.

This process focuses on developing two skills: asking important questions and participating more effectively in decisions. Working with families and staff to develop questions as well as practice when and where to use the questions can allow caring adults to support each student, monitor their progress, and advocate effectively when necessary.

**CULTIVATE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS:** Dialogues, hosted conversations, or other social technologies can be used to generate “conversations that matter” on a wide variety of topics. These conversations are based on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges.”<sup>4</sup> Models for cultivating meaningful conversations include First Alaskans Institute’s ANDORE project and World Café.

- **First Alaskans Institute’s Alaska Native Dialogues on Racial Equity (ANDORE)** project. With the aim to foster racial healing through engagement in community conversations across Alaska on equity, ANDORE strives to create open dialogues so communities can move toward increased

understanding, healing, and growth. To achieve this goal, the project elevates stories and experiences through community conversations and seeks to advance practice and policy solutions that will help achieve racial equity. Tools available include the following:

- Dialogue agreements – an approach outlining parameters to maintain respect among participants and creating a supportive atmosphere in dialogues
- Host guide – details the components necessary to host a successful community dialogue
- General project scope presentation – outlines the project aims
- Powerful questions to stimulate dialogue on racism – prompts to encourage group dialogue during community conversations
- Sample dialogue flow – to carry out an orderly dialogue and ensure that each voice is heard
- Sample model for hosting dialogues on racism and racial equity – an outline for hosting difficult dialogues

- **World Café.** Models for cafés for parents include Parent Cafés, Community Cafés, and Caring Conversations. These conversations can help families dig in to a problem practice in the school or district and look for root causes rather than Band-Aid solutions. For example, if someone has a toothache and takes aspirin, the toothache may go away temporarily. However, if the tooth is rotting, the problem won't go away until the rot is found and addressed. In the same way, certain problems at school won't improve until the root cause is identified and addressed.

The Association of Alaska School Boards and other organizations across the state offer trainings on community dialogue, café-style hosting, and facilitation.

#### ALASKANS SUGGEST DECISION MAKERS...

- Recognize families' expertise by asking families to help you to get to know and understand your student; they are the expert on their own child.
- Ask families what's working well for their student and celebrate successes or achievements.
- Incorporate family content into each lesson plan; create everyday opportunities to practice content at home and ask for suggestions from families.
- Work with families to create a shared vision and goals for each student, and then reflect and improve on your processes.
- Learn facilitation techniques and interactive technologies to support opportunities for families and school staff to learn together about developmental growth and relationship-building.
- Consider the best ways for families to have meaningful input in developing educational priorities; create advocacy structures, joint learning opportunities, and peer support.
- Build comfort and relationships with families, which will take time, practice, and making the most of our social networks.
- Ask families what role they might like to take on in or outside the classroom to share a skill, tradition, or story.
- Provide opportunities for families and school staff to share up-to-date information on student growth in both academic and social skills.
- Learn about mental health supports and other services that might be needed by families in your community. Refer and connect families to these services.
- Ask families what partnership strategies are working for them.
- Encourage families who might be willing to get more involved.
- Share successes and techniques among school staff to encourage schoolwide family partnership successes.



## Signs of Success and Growth

- School staff have a partnership mindset and believe all families have something to contribute.
- School staff feel confident encouraging and partnering with families in families' multiple roles.
- Families feel comfortable asking questions of school staff and feel they have opportunities to ask.
- School staff and families are looking at ways in which families are moving from involvement to real partnership.
- Families take on meaningful roles in designing family partnerships, teaching school staff and students, and collaborating to help students achieve goals.
- There are multiple opportunities for families to fully engage with their own child's learning, with school staff, and with school improvement efforts.
- Families believe they can communicate effectively with their child's teachers.
- Families have a plan of action when it comes to their children's education.
- Families feel they can effectively monitor their child's education and ask questions to get answers they need.
- Families believe their values and priorities are considered in family partnership opportunities.

## Reflection Questions

**Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.**

- In what areas do you and your school team want to build family partnership skills?
- What opportunities do staff have to learn more, get coaching, or refine skills?
- What practices can schools put into place to reflect on what has been working and what has not been having the impact needed?
- What are key areas in which families might help make decisions in your classroom or school?
- What opportunities exist for school staff to build their family partnership skills?
- What opportunities are there for families to practice their student support and school improvement skills?
- What do you do well? What do your families do well?
- What mindsets are you and your colleagues working to develop? What mindsets are families developing?
- Who in your school has used effective approaches to family partnership?
- What key issues would families like to address?



- What family-to-family supports are available for families to mentor and support each other? How might these be strengthened?
- How do families learn about advocacy and decision-making roles?
- How can other partners in the community, such as tribes, churches, bingo halls, and other organizations, support activities that build confidence in specific skills?
- What questions, activities, and tools can you offer families?
- What facilitation skills might be helpful for you (e.g., right question training, dialogue hosting, parent café skills)?

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

\*Not all families are able to come into the school. This can be because of work, childcare, documentation, language barriers, or other reasons. How can you involve these families?

\*Lack of reliable internet access can be a barrier for some families. What other methods can you use to reach families?

\*English is not the first language for some families. Who can be a resource to effectively reach these families?

## **BUILDING BLOCK 6:**

# **CO-REGULATION**

*If someone speaks to you in anger, you have two choices if they want an answer. Choose to respond in calmness. You may calm them and you won't feel regret at your response.*

*- Nelson Angapak*



# BUILDING BLOCK 6: CO-REGULATION

*Help families support students' emotional growth*

**Emotional self-regulation, or managing our emotions and behaviors, is a critical factor in success at school and beyond. Co-regulation is when one person helps another manage their emotions through warm and responsive interactions. Helping caregivers learn and practice co-regulation can help build healthier communities for our students and families.**

## Key Concepts and Research

We often seek support for managing our emotions. This can take the form of talking to a friend or loved one after a hard day, or talking to others about decisions we are making. For some of us, it is having others help us through emotional events or thoughts, calming down when upset, adjusting to changes, or handling frustrations. Co-regulation is the skill and art of modeling, teaching, supporting, and rewarding each other as we learn these skills. **Children look to the caring adults in their lives to help co-regulate their emotions and behaviors.**

For example, students who watch family members practice subsistence hunting often become skilled hunters. Students who have a strong early foundation

with words become strong readers. Likewise, children who have a foundation of social and emotional skills find it easier to self-regulate, managing difficult emotions without outbursts and undue frustration. Like hunting and reading, students can also develop these skills later. The key, however, is they need to be taught, supported, and given opportunities to practice. Caring adults have a key role in helping children build this foundation and helping them learn and strengthen skills later on.

*When parents and teachers use similar strategies to foster social and emotional learning, it eases the transition between home and school and creates consistency and continuity in expectations for behavior.*

*- School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth*

One author says emotional regulation “involves taking a pause between a feeling and an action—taking the time to think things through, make a plan, wait patiently.”<sup>1</sup>

Another way of thinking about emotional self-regulation is the ability to manage attention and emotions well enough to complete tasks, organize behavior, control impulses, and solve problems constructively.<sup>2</sup>

These skills allow children to express themselves in ways that are true to their values or to reach a difficult goal even when navigating emotional stress. Having these skills can allow students to study instead of getting distracted before a test, for example.

*In its most basic form, self-regulation allows students to bounce back from failure and stay calm under pressure. These two abilities will carry students through life more than other skills.*<sup>3</sup>

Research supports these claims, as studies have found self-regulation is a key to mitigating or overcoming the impacts of trauma and stress.<sup>4</sup> Research showed that stronger self-regulation predicts the following:

- lower rates of substance use and violence,
- higher income,
- better financial planning, and
- decreased long-term health costs.<sup>5</sup>

Controlling difficult emotions is much easier for children with the presence of a caring and supportive adult, which is where the concept of co-regulation comes in.

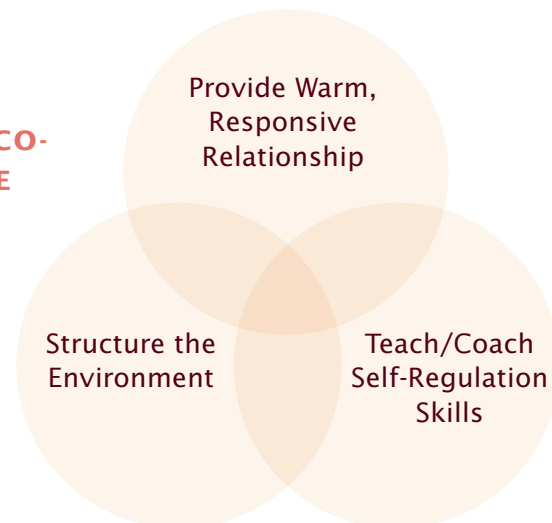
Pediatricians describe the importance of co-regulation early in life:

*The simplest example of co-regulation is when you have an anxious child sitting on your lap; taking a deep breath soothes them and you at the same time. Your calm engenders their calm.*

- Vince Gowmon, *Healing for a New World*

By using their voice, movements, affects, gestures, and intonations, parents and primary caregivers can help infants and young children. When babies grow up with co-regulation during moments of stress, such as when they are struggling with strong feelings, they begin to internalize and understand strategies for self-regulation and self-soothing—in their brains and in their minds.

## HOW TO CO- REGULATE





Teaching adults in caregiving roles how to promote self-regulation can have powerful positive impacts. A research brief on co-regulation explained:

Co-regulation involves three types of caregiver support: a **warm relationship, environmental structure,** and **skills instruction and coaching.** These components will look different at different ages as child capacity for self-regulation grows, but co-regulation remains a critical resource for well-being into young adulthood.

Training and interventions to promote co-regulation can produce significant and meaningful changes in parent-child relationships, parenting skills, classroom climate, and caregivers' own self-regulation. Expansion of effective and consistent co-regulation across child, youth, and young adult settings may form a foundation for strong self-regulation development at a community level.<sup>6</sup>

## CO-REGULATION IS A SKILL – IT CAN BE LEARNED

Researchers have found significant benefits from supportive caregivers, such as parents, teachers, coaches, and other mentors or family members, in interventions that support co-regulation. Using a control group for comparison, co-regulation interventions were found to have significant positive effects in the following ways:

- Parents improved their co-regulation skills and/or relationship with their children.
- Parents improved their positive behavioral management skills and knowledge of appropriate expectations for their children.
- Parents reported improvement in their own well-being.
- Teachers show similar improvements in their classroom climate and their own co-regulation and self-regulation skills.<sup>7</sup>



*We are always co-regulating throughout the day based on how we are interacting with each other. Anytime you share an emotional energy exchange with another, it is co-regulation. Anytime you find genuine joy with someone or laugh at something funny with them, for example, you're really co-regulating.*

*- Katie Crosby,  
pediatric occupational therapist*

## Co-Regulation in Action: Finding Ways Forward Together



Tyson, a high school teacher in Alaska, had a student, Carla, with a history of not turning in assignments. Carla had been diagnosed with major executive functioning disorder a few years earlier and had trouble starting and completing tasks. Tyson observed that her stress would increase with new study plans meant to help her. Her anxiety made it harder for her to complete assignments. Eventually, she became overwhelmed with the amount of work she hadn't turned in.

Tyson recognized that Carla needed help not just in managing her work, but in managing her emotions about her work. Tyson began checking in with Carla before class, popping in on small group discussions with her, and then checking in with her again after class. He helped her see where she was making progress and contributing, and he helped her see that the gap between where she was and what she needed to do was not insurmountable.

Tyson also learned through this process that there were other factors contributing to Carla's low level of participation in class. He noticed other students made fun of her for "not being smart." Understanding the social aspect of her stress changed Tyson's check-in conversations. He focused on helping Carla get past the anxieties preventing her from participating. He helped her name her anxieties and explained that others, including

himself, often experience the same emotions. Having a voice of support and understanding helped Carla manage her negative emotions, and she began to approach her work with a sense of possibility. As her participation increased, her confidence slowly grew, and she learned to better manage and overcome negative emotions that were blocking her success.

In conversations with Carla's family, Tyson shared what was working and asked Carla's parents what strategies they found successful. This exchange of ideas helped build trust and magnified the positive impact on Carla. Carla completed the semester project for the course, which had seemed unlikely earlier in the semester. Completing the project further boosted her confidence that she could manage her anxiety, organize her time effectively, and succeed in school.

*Use language that everyone will understand,  
that the community will understand and  
connect with.*

*- Alaskan educator*

# Analysis: Finding Ways Forward Together

## WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

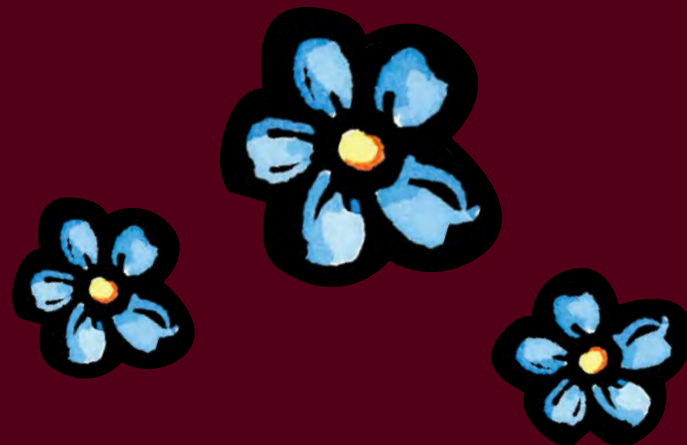
- What does Tyson recognize about Carla's struggle?
- How does Tyson work to support Carla in understanding and overcoming her struggles?
- How do Tyson and Carla's family work together to support Carla's emotional development?
- How does Carla's growing ability to regulate her emotions impact her school performance?

## WHAT ELSE COULD TYSON DO?

- How might Tyson approach the issue of students mocking Carla?
- How else might Tyson help Carla's family learn to support Carla?
- What could Tyson learn from Carla's family?

## PERSONAL EXTENSION:

- How do you recognize when students need emotional co-regulation?
- How do you co-regulate with students? Do you sometimes co-regulate without realizing that is what you are doing?
- What habits and instincts do you have that are helpful for co-regulation, and what habits might hinder co-regulation?



# Tools and Strategies

**There is a wide range of ways to build confidence of skills in families and school staff.**

**AGILE APPROACH.**<sup>8</sup> To help families learn to support their children's emotional development, early childhood experts developed an acronym called AGILE. The AGILE Approach to Co-Regulating Responses advises families to pay close attention to these concepts:

- **A - Affect:** How your tone and expressions convey your emotions. In times of stress, is your affect loving, supportive, and soothing?
- **G - Gesture:** Facial expressions, hand gestures, body moment, posturing, and pacing all reflect your emotions and are felt by a child during your interactions.
- **I - Intonation:** Modulating the tone of your voice helps convey affect and social and emotional meaning. This is “felt” and “understood” long before words, and even after language develops, affect, gestures, and intonation convey the genuine meaning of the interpersonal exchange. This communication is stronger than words.
- **L - Latency** (Wait): Wait and give the child time to take in your gestures and intonations. Co-regulation requires patience.
- **E - Engagement:** Before you continue, be sure you have engaged the child.

## CO-REGULATION IN THE ALASKAN CONTEXT.

Alaska communities have long-standing cultural practices to support co-regulation and self-regulation of emotions. These tools and practices can be an opportunity for the community, school, and families to share common language and practice. A key to success is recognizing culturally embedded practices as important forms of co-regulation. For example:

- Singing and dancing are forms of emotional self-regulation and co-regulation in many communities and cultures in Alaska.
- Many traditional arts and subsistence practices allow students to practice, teach, and model emotional self-regulation skills.
- Without naming it as “co-regulation,” many students co-regulate with a respected Elder, aunt, or uncle who may share a story or provide advice that helps students learn and practice new ways of coping.
- Cooking or baking together is a form of emotional self-regulation and co-regulation for many families.
- Many communities have protocols, ceremonies, and processes to help communities better understand expectations, rites of passage, grief, or each individual's role in the community.



Recognizing that these activities and practices are important forms of co-regulation helps school staff support students and families in culturally responsive ways.

**OTHER RESEARCH-BASED GUIDANCE.** The following guidance for helping families learn about co-regulation is adapted from a report by Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and the federal government. The report also provides a list of existing training programs and interventions for educators and staff that address co-regulation topics.<sup>9</sup>

1. **Provide easily-accessible information to families and guardians about self-regulation development and caregiver co-regulation specific to each developmental stage from birth through young adulthood.** This information could be shared through tip sheets, informal discussion, or informational seminars in family-friendly settings. Information could highlight the three key components of co-regulation:
  - A warm, responsive relationship where children, youth, and young adults feel secure and cared for.
  - Environmental structure that makes self-regulation manageable and buffers against excessive stress.
  - Skill instruction and coaching in self-regulation.
2. **For families in high-stress situations and environments, provide interventions with demonstrated effects on parental self-regulation and co-regulation.** In families with risk factors, including teen parents, poverty, and mental health or substance use concerns, targeted interventions show promise for increasing parents' or caregivers' co-regulation capacity and skills.<sup>10</sup>

3. **For educators and other mentors, provide training in effective co-regulation skills.** Once staff have been trained in co-regulation, they can serve as coaches and role models of co-regulation for parents and guardians, expanding the impact. Training can address topics including:
  - Building a positive relationship with each child, youth, or young adult.
  - Structuring the environment to reduce regulatory demands and support skill enactment.
  - Communicating clear rules, expectations, and consequences.
  - Instructing, monitoring, and coaching specific, age-appropriate self-regulation skills.
  - Incorporating activities to practice self-regulation skills.
4. **Support educators and staff in their own self-regulation capacity.** Educators and caregivers will only be effective at co-regulation if they can successfully self-regulate. Staff supports may include mindfulness instruction, reflective supervision, and opportunities for personal "time-outs" when needed.

*Co-regulation is being an extra brain, an extra calming center, for [a] child.*

*- Libby Bergman, Family Enhancement Center*

## Signs of Success and Growth

**The following beliefs and strategies indicate growth in families' and educators' capacity and skills for co-regulation:**

- Teachers and other school staff believe they have the capacity to support students through emotionally challenging moments.
- Teachers and other school staff recognize and identify local or cultural practices that support self-regulation and co-regulation.
- School staff understand the role adults have in modeling and supporting students' emotional well-being.
- School staff understand the role of emotional self-regulation in success in school and in life.
- School staff and families work together to develop common language around social and emotional values and skills.
- Families and school staff begin to develop a shared understanding of co-regulation and improve their skills together.
- Families and school staff believe their own capacity for emotional self-regulation is vital to supporting their students' emotional growth.
- Schools provide training for staff and families in emotional co-regulation.
- Schools reach out in multiple ways to help families understand and improve their capacity for co-regulation.
- Schools understand that Elders and "aunties" often support students' co-regulation and self-regulation.
- Teachers and families can describe emotional self-regulation and co-regulation in their own words.

## Reflection Questions

**Consider your school and community. You may want to discuss these questions with a colleague or community member, reflect on them on your own, or journal about them.**

- How do I define co-regulation?
- How have I benefited from co-regulation from a colleague, friend, or parent?
- What do I want to learn about emotional self-regulation and co-regulation?
- Can I describe co-regulation in simple terms?
- How do families in my community co-regulate? What words do families use to describe this kind of support?
- In what ways do my students demonstrate emotional self-regulation?
- In what ways do my students need to grow in their ability to self-regulate?
- How can I continue to grow in my own ability to self-regulate?
- How can I make these skills more concrete for students and their families?
- What cultural practices can I build on?
- What are local ways of talking about self-regulation skills?
- Where are these skills already being practiced at home and in the community?

# VISIONING

*System-wide change is more durable  
and more strategic for families.*

*- Alaska Principal*





# BUILDING BLOCK 7: VISIONING

## *Moving From Mindset to Action*

**This chapter describes what successful family partnership looks like and lays out a path for schools and communities to create or deepen their own family partnership plans.**

## What Does Success Look Like?

**Spoken and unspoken communication deeply impacts the ability to build, maintain, or restore relationships with families. Here are some communication milestones to consider:**

- **WELCOMING EVERY FAMILY:** All families coming into the school or interacting with school personnel feel welcome. This is communicated by greetings, visual representation of families, roles, and policies.
- **TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION:** Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning. Successful two-way communication can happen through texts, PowerSchool posts or interactions, video chat, social media, phone calls, Facebook Live, and other classroom engagement.
- **SHARING POWER:** Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and work together to create policies, practices, and

programs. Meetings have shared leadership and are designed for consensus building when creating plans and policies.

- **SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS:** Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development, both at home and at school. Student plans are designed as a team and updated together.
- **COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY:** Families and school staff are connected to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation. Schools are working closely with partners to get families and students connected to play, learning resources, and memorable moments in the community.
- **SPEAKING FOR EVERY CHILD:** Families are prepared to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success. Workshops and opportunities are offered to families to better understand how to affect change within the school.



## What Do I Need to Get Started?

Partnership can happen in many ways. The list below can help...

1. Schools and staff understand the importance of partnerships and are ready to be **intentional** in nurturing these partnerships.
2. School's leadership provides a **clear vision and expectation** for family partnership.
3. Staff are **confident and trained** in family partnership and relationship-building.
4. Schools **shift from monologue to dialogue** as families and school staff see each other as partners and resources for students.

Like most relationships, family partnerships take work, trust, and practice, but the benefits are worth it. When working together, families and schools can transform students' learning experience.

## What Strategies Can I Use for Getting Started?

### UNDERSTAND PLACE AND PEOPLE

**Each community and family is unique.** Therefore, each requires a unique approach. As an analogy, consider fishing. There is no one tool that is suitable for all types of fishing. Salmon, herring, and halibut, for example, are very different, and river fishing differs from ocean fishing. Each circumstance calls for a different set of tools. It is the same when partnering with families within each distinctive community. With this in mind, this framework offers foundational building blocks and an array of strategies to choose from. Each section offers questions to help identify the unique strengths, needs, and wishes of your families when developing partnerships.

### IDENTIFY ASSETS

**Systems don't change. People change systems.**

It takes many people playing a variety of roles to make real and lasting change. In strengthening family partnerships throughout your school or system, it can help to understand who plays these roles, and who can be drafted to help in any of these roles:

- **allies** – they may have aligned interests, such as businesses that have an interest in an educated workforce
- **supporters** – they help move the work forward
- **cheerleaders or champions** – they rally support and provide positive feedback



- **decision makers** – they can directly change policy or practice and include school superintendents, principals, and school board members
- **influencers** – their words and opinions carry weight in the community or among segments

of the community and include community or business leaders

- **naysayers or resisters** – they can help supporters distill the case for change and can force more thoughtful and inclusive approaches, and they may come from within or outside the system

It can help for leadership – that is, decision makers – to meet one-on-one with potential champions, influencers, allies, supporters, and naysayers. Listen to them and learn about their work. What is their self-interest? What advice does each have about this work? Then, find areas where the work of family partnership intersects with their (our) self-interests.

- Build up allies, cheerleaders, and supporters.
- Understand and leverage key influencers.
- Ensure decision makers listen and learn.
- Consider how you listen to and communicate with naysayers.
- Most importantly, **model these bedrock principles while you are doing the work:** equity, inclusion, respect, two-way communication, and a shared commitment to student success.

## Reflections on Assets:

- What skills and capabilities do staff and families already have to partner?
- What social networks are in place to build relationships?
- What connections have already been established?
- How confident are families and staff to build relationships and support student success?

### EMBED PARTNERSHIP THROUGHOUT

Education initiatives are most effective when they are *embedded* throughout a school, and ideally the district, and are part of the culture and fabric of the community. For families to feel truly valued as partners in their child's education, they need to receive consistent messages about their role from school leaders, teachers, counselors, and other staff. When we send consistent messages through our words, actions, and opportunities, students and families gain trust and feel comfortable defining their own roles as partners.

### WHAT ARE KEY AREAS IN WHICH TO EMBED FAMILY PARTNERSHIP?

- **Leadership:** Staff, students, families, and community members must see and feel that school and district leadership places a high value on family partnership. School leaders make a firm commitment to treat families as genuine partners and experts in their children's strengths and needs.

- **Planning and vision:** A vision and planning process developed with families (see “shared power,” below) outlines the opportunities for families to participate in their students’ education. This may result in a family partnership plan that identifies ways to help school staff partner with families as well as how families can be positive changemakers.
- **Shared power:** Effective family engagement makes families vital partners in their schools and in their students’ learning. Families can define their roles and are an integral part of leadership teams and decision processes. There are open two-way channels of communication with teachers and staff.



## AN ALASKA PRINCIPAL REFLECTS

“At some point, I realized that a critical part of my job is making sure that both school staff and families have the support they need for coordinated schoolwide effort. I wanted to make sure both families and school staff are supported to authentically partner. As the building and instructional leader, I wanted to have a team to make sure that school staff and families work together for student outcomes. This needed to have school staff and family members represented.

“The first thing I had to do was decide how to communicate clearly and consistently about the vision. ‘Partnering with families makes a big impact on students, and we want the best for our students. This is just what we do at our school.’ Some school staff understood right away. They were natural champions and had great strategies to suggest. They helped talk to other staff and key influencers. Others really needed to know how it links to other priorities and their goals. I had to get better at talking about this work. There were the naysayers, but through one-on-one conversations, we were able to find ways to align their interests with this work. As with all initiatives, they came along once they saw how it could help their goals.

“For families, it was not only important to communicate the vision, but to hold ourselves accountable for bringing in their expertise and ideas every step of the way. It was about sharing space together and building trust early in our visioning process that brought families to the table. We also went out of our way to ask them and ourselves, ‘Who is not here at the table, and how do we close that gap?’ It led to meaningful discussions and one-on-one outreach (sometimes from one family to another) to close the gap. Family support and partnership is essential to our school community; they guide us through when we are doing well and help steer us back when something is not working. When you open the gate to partnering and communicating in a real way with families, expect feedback and wake up calls, but also expect better student outcomes, because they go hand in hand when you have trust and you set your goals together.”

- **Resources and infrastructure:** Schools commit resources to support family engagement and ensure that physical spaces and systems are welcoming to all. This may mean establishing a family partnership position to coach and support school staff, to serve as a consistent point of contact for families, and to champion removal of schoolwide barriers for families or community members.
- **Values:** Schools champion the values of respect, humility, and collaboration as well as commit to viewing families as true partners, experts, and vital advocates in the success of their children. Staff understand that families share the same fundamental goals and hopes for their students.
- **Commitment:** Successful family partnership requires sustained effort and a willingness to keep trying when an idea or effort seems to fall flat. Instead of saying, “these families don’t care,” schools committed to meaningful partnership make extra effort to connect with families deemed hard-to-reach and whose students often stand to gain the most from family engagement.

### IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

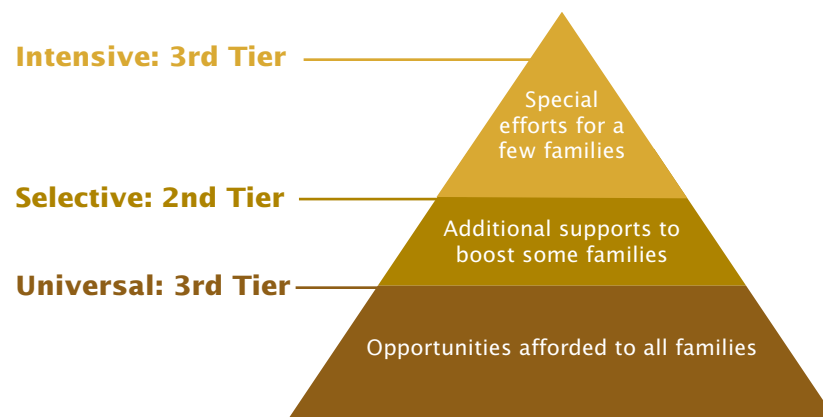
Because some families feel alienated, shy, or unsure about how to interact with the school system, responsibility for initiating partnerships with families rests primarily with the school system and staff. The six building blocks described in this framework – Mindset, Relationships, Cultural Responsiveness, Links to Learning, Skills and Confidence, and Co-Regulation – can help create these conditions and improve both staff and student success.

## Tools for Getting Started

### MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

MTSS is a framework that many schools already use, and it can be a helpful model for considering family partnership. This model recognizes that different families need different types of opportunities. Some families will require more effort to reach. Families who may need more intensive efforts may include those with a history of negative experiences with the school system, families recently experiencing loss or trauma, families of children in foster care, or homeless families. Strategies can be tailored to families’ unique needs, which may include additional partners and supports. Below is an example of how family partnership work may be incorporated into your MTSS planning.

### 3-TIER MODEL TO MAXIMIZE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



Adapted from Huff Osher Consulting



### **TIER 1 (UNIVERSAL): OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED TO ALL FAMILIES, SUCH AS:**

- Create a welcoming environment for family partners.
- Provide interactive and partner-minded orientation to programs or projects.
- Ask families what they need to participate in the students' learning.
- Establish family-friendly methods for ongoing communication.
- Sponsor social activities to encourage relationships.

### **TIER 2 (SELECTIVE): ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS TO BOOST SOME FAMILIES, SUCH AS:**

- Connect families with each other.
- Offer families education and training in partnership with school personnel.
- Translate materials and offer them in various formats.
- Recruit family members to serve on advisory groups.

### **TIER 3 (INTENSIVE): SPECIAL EFFORTS FOR A FEW FAMILIES, SUCH AS :**

- Tailor approaches to each family.
- Strengthen and repair relationships where necessary.
- Hire family liaisons to coach or support families.
- Work with school staff or community partners who have established relationships with families.

The appendix contains several simple tools and worksheets to help communities develop or deepen their family partnership efforts. These include the following:

- “One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships” adapted from

#### *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*

- “3-Tier Approach to Family Engagement Planning Guide,” based on multi-tiered systems of support
- “Planning for Family Engagement and Learning,” a worksheet that aligns with the graphic on page 67 of this chapter

## **What Else Does Success Look Like?**

There are many ways to describe the benefits of successful family partnership. Here are a few ideas from the literature and from Alaskans:

- School staff and families communicate about difficult issues with no fear of backlash.
- School staff and parents feel invested in what is happening at school. Ownership of success or disappointment in outcomes is accepted on both sides.
- Families feel welcomed and engaged in the school, leading to increased confidence in the school, in classrooms, and at home.
- There is a sense of unity; schools and families believe they have shared goals and engage in collaborative problem-solving.
- Families and staff have a high level of trust and confidence in each other and believe in best intentions, so they are less likely to jump to conclusions.
- Families and staff are in the role of lifelong learners and educators; they are engaged in learning and supporting key transitions for the student.
- Family partnership efforts and strategies are linked to learning objectives and student goals.

- Efforts feel inclusive and transparent to all school staff and community members.
- All community groups are represented in the school and engagement strategies.
- Families feel connected to each other and support each other for student success.
- Relationships occur organically around community milestones and calendar, such as through subsistence activities or harvests.
- Students achieve academically and socially and are supported by a home/school team.

## Reflection Questions

- What conditions for partnership are in place in your school? What conditions are needed?
- How can the school and community develop a shared vision and a set of core beliefs?
- Who is involved in family partnership work? Are there allies, cheerleaders, decision makers, influencers, or naysayers? Who are they?
- What expectations are there for family-school partnership? How does your school define family partnership success?
- What measurable goals for family partnership exist? Are they meaningful?
- How do you build your own capacity for this work? How can you support your colleagues as you do this work? What tools do you need to assess readiness/capacity of your school staff?
- Who is available in the district, at the school, and statewide to build capacity of school staff to partner with families?
- What do you need to get started or to move deeper?
- How can you build up your own team and build up parents together?
- What standards and policies provide guidance and expectations for family partnership?
- What policies and mandates drive the work or provide opportunity for alignment (e.g., Title I, evaluations, initiative incentives)?
- How does your family partnership work support your instructional goals? What standards will guide you for what effective engagement looks?
- How do family cultures, school climate, and community history affect relationships in your community?
- How do you make family partnership systemic and embedded to ensure a consistent experience for families?
- How do you use your classroom, school, or district's annual data to set new goals and plans?
- What resources exist to support families? Can resources be shifted? Who else can contribute resources?

# PARTNERING AT A DISTANCE:

## Reducing the Distance During Covid-19

*The coronavirus crisis has pushed schooling onto remote platforms. It's an opportunity to rethink how education should work.*

*- Education Nonprofit Leader*



# BUILDING BLOCK 8: PARTNERING AT A DISTANCE

## *Reducing the Distance During Covid-19*

**The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way school staff and families think about student learning and the roles of teachers and families in education. With much learning happening outside of the school building, there is still a lot that can be done to reduce the distance between school and families. In these times, it can be helpful to remember less can be more. Play, downtime, and family time can be essential learning time. While these practices are helpful during Covid 19, similar adaptations are helpful in times of trauma, stress or change (like to distance learning) in the community or school**

## Key Concepts

Schools' staff are working hard to support families and students in a distance learning environment. This includes working with students on a variety of platforms through activities, learning guides, asynchronous learning (i.e., learning at their own pace and time), and online connections. Many schools are also providing food services, mental health services, and links to services for housing and financial needs.

Some administrators and school staff say it is more difficult to partner with families from a distance, while others report that partnership feels more natural as families are serving as the primary support for learning in the home. Families are able to see firsthand their students working on learning, and relationships built

during this period can benefit families and school staff well beyond Covid-19.

The following core family partnership **building blocks** can inform and strengthen our practices during Covid-19:

1. **MINDSET:** Partnership is possible online, over the phone, through social distancing, and in an asynchronous way. Families know their own children's strengths and can be a tremendous resource to their children. We must approach each family with the belief that they want the best for their child and with the understanding that there are often extended family members and parents with assets to contribute to students' learning and a virtual classroom.<sup>1</sup>



2. **RELATIONSHIPS:** Relationships are at the core of our success. Key relationships include relationships between school staff and family, school staff and student, and student and family.

Covid-19 offers new opportunities for school staff to connect with families that may feel safer, more personalized, and more authentic than our customary practices. For some families, the resources schools are providing during this time include food, internet service, and devices that help level the playing field.

Many schools are connecting one-on-one with families to better understand what supports families need, who else is a resource for their students, and to listen to family members' hopes and fears for their children. Additionally, some school staff during Covid-19 have even used the opportunity to better understand family goals by asking questions, such as, "Is their goal to help their child graduate? Is it effective for their student to be learning in the outdoors and with family? What are family and student priorities? How does this align and influence the family-school staff partnership?"

Repetition is important in relationship-building. It's important to understand it may take repeated efforts and multiple means to connect and build trust with some families, particularly those who have not experienced positive relationship-building efforts from school staff before or who build on their own negative memories or biases. Working consistently to understand and connect with families can help overcome these biases and create stronger relationships among stakeholders.<sup>2</sup>

3. **CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS:** For many students, being in their own home provides a culturally safe environment where they can apply their learning to "sticky" and familiar concepts. Being outside the traditional classroom environment can open up opportunities to explore place-based education and culture more deeply. For example, during Covid-19, some school districts are sending home learning kits that allow families to do activities while making dinner, sharing family stories, or exploring outside. Families can also use culturally responsive approaches to dealing with difficult situations, such as social isolation.
4. **SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE:** This distance learning model is new terrain for most school staff, students, and families. All individuals are building skills and confidence in their new roles and relationships. Like any new skill, it takes practice, and the more you do it, the better you get. Families and caregivers do not need special knowledge and do not need to take the place of teachers. Schools can help families understand that relationships are at the core of their student's success and that the family's main job is to be a warm and loving family member. With this relationship as the foundation, family members can step into the "warm demander" role, setting expectations in a loving but firm way for their student.

Families already have experience helping their child work through challenges, and they typically know their child's strengths and interests. Families can use this knowledge to provide great at-home support. School staff may also be more important than ever to families. They can serve as a lifeline, a link to other

students and human contact, a learning advisor, a link to resources, a coach for students, and a meaningful partner to families. Some of these roles are familiar, and some are new. The ways of providing support may look and feel very different, but comfort and expertise takes practice.

The Alaska Family Partnership Framework and formative work done by Dr. Karen Mapp and Joyce Epstein make clear that family partnership is born from the idea that families feel they belong to the school and the school belongs to them. This motivates families to take an active role in their child's learning and in turn has a positive impact on student outcomes. In the time of Covid-19, families can help to co-create, design, and provide input to school staff about the new shape of their students' learning environment.

5. **LINKS TO LEARNING:** Effective family partnerships are linked to student learning, and distance learning offers real opportunity for families and school staff to be on the same page about their students' learning objectives. Remote schooling offers opportunities to apply and enhance learning through home-based and place-based activities. Even if a family member feels they cannot help with specific math, science, or other content needs, families report that it is helpful to understand the broader learning goals. When they understand what students are trying to learn, they can provide better support.
6. **CO-REGULATION:** Families are experiencing Covid-19-related stress due to food insecurity, financial insecurity, new routines and structures, a lack of time

and physical space from each other, and competing demands at home. These situations can cause tension or increase stress. At the same time, many families are unable to visit their grandparents or extended family, key sources of advice and support. Co-regulation, or learning to support each other's emotional well-being through supportive interactions, is more important than ever.

School staff can provide co-regulation by helping students and families express and manage emotions, breaking down social isolation, and supporting families in navigating challenging moments. Co-regulation can mean helping families access key supports during this time and fostering connectivity. It is also important to provide families with resources for developing emotional self-regulation and co-regulation skills.

**As a teacher or family member, it can be difficult to strike the right balance between encouragement and help.** It can be hard to watch students struggle through work or content. On one end of the spectrum, some staff or family members may set such high expectations that it can feel like the relationship itself is no longer a priority. [Zaretta Hammond and other experts encourage school staff and caregivers to become “warm demanders.”](#) The warm demander values the relationship and supports students in challenging themselves.



## Additional Considerations

**INITIATING THE CONNECTION:** “Home visits” may become easier as phone and video chat become the norm for communications. With school staff and families each in their own homes, there are natural opportunities to share a bit of oneself while in a comfortable, familiar space. How can home visits help your family partnership efforts? What key skills are needed for successful home visits? How can relationship-building skills nurture these connections into natural and authentic partnerships? What questions and concerns need to be addressed? Are there opportunities for these conversations to be student-led?

**SHARED VISION:** Do each of the partners have a clear idea of the growth and learning goals for their child? Do these include academic, career, social and emotional, and physical goals?

**KEY ROLES:** The key participants are the same (student, family, instructors, and peers), but with new learning approaches, each partner may be unclear about shifting expectations and roles. What will each partner focus on? How do you tap into each person’s strengths and knowledge?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Research shows that families who understand what students are working toward will be more likely to provide the encouragement

and support needed for learning. What information would be helpful for families to know as they support their student? What real-life applications of the content are there that can provide an opportunity for families to ask and explore content with students? What are the best ways to communicate learning objectives?

**KEY TECHNOLOGIES:** Some learning may include the internet (Zoom, Google Meet, GoToMeeting, Schoology, Google Classroom, ClassDojo, etc.).

**KEY RESOURCES:** Some learning may include worksheets, home exploration kits, and asynchronous content preloaded onto devices. Research shows that even with families dedicating equal amounts of family time toward learning, families who have more books, games, and tools can help their students learn more effectively.

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS:** It is important to remember this is new for almost everyone. It may be helpful for staff or teachers to keep a reflection log of what worked well and what could be better next time.

Family Log: Keep a log of how this is working for each student or family.

Lesson Log: Track lesson approaches and their effectiveness.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Note what worked for the majority of students, what supplements or supports worked for the next layer of students and families, and what fully personalized interventions are needed to reach the remaining students and families.

**KEY OPPORTUNITIES:** Breaking down isolation and enhancing learning is important during these times. Learning happens in a school community. How do you create a space for families and students to learn, play together, and get support from one another?

### USING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGIES AND

**DELIVERY:** Like any class content or meeting, we choose the right approach for the right activity. Family partnership work is similar. Our choice of how we communicate (email, text, one-on-one meetings, or group conversations) or what we say during these times can deeply impact our success. Ask lots of questions to find out the best way to communicate with families and what the priorities of your families are right now.

## Tools and Strategies

**There is a wide range of ways to build confidence of skills in families and school staff.**

### RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING EXAMPLES

- Home visiting prompts
- Feedback from families on relationship-building
- Covid-19 communication strategies

### VISIONING TOOLS AND EXAMPLES:

- Shared visioning activity
- Student-led parent meetings

### BUILDING CONFIDENCE:

- Routines and shared expectations (family-driven)
- Stories and solutions  
Families share that they are having to help their child get online and access some of the tools they need for activities. Do families need tutorials, information, and/or tangible supplies to carry out the assignments? Do the requests align with a family's style of teaching and cultural ways of knowing?

### LINK TO LEARNING

- [Facebook Live – weekly mini-lesson \(Jessica Solano\)](#)
- Example lessons designed for student and family
- Google site
- Recording of Zoom classroom

### PLACE-BASED EXAMPLES

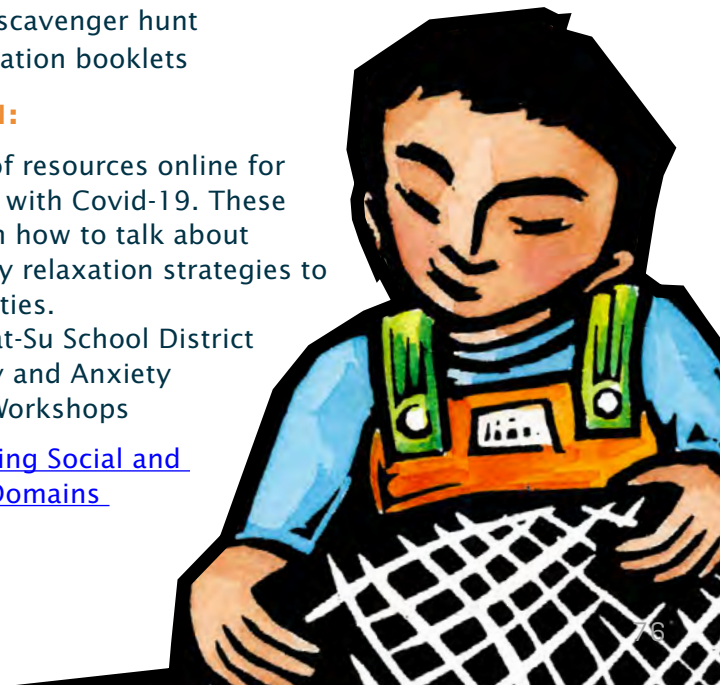
- Alaska outdoor scavenger hunt
- Yakutat identification booklets

### CO-REGULATION:

- There are a lot of resources online for families to cope with Covid-19. These tools range from how to talk about Covid-19 to daily relaxation strategies to fun online activities.

Example Mat-Su School District  
Online Body and Anxiety  
Reduction Workshops

[Understanding Social and Emotional Domains](#)





## Signs of Success and Growth

- Families feel that school staff understand competing demands within the household.
- Families know how they can support their child and communicate with school staff.
- Students, key family members, and school staff understand their roles in learning and supporting each student.
- Families feel linked to learning, learning objectives, and learning strategies.
- Staff feel confident building lessons that can incorporate family interests and areas of expertise.
- Students and families do not feel “burnt out” on technology.
- Families and school staff have new appreciation for the roles each plays in educating their student.
- Families and school staff believe they have joint responsibility for their student’s education.
- Students, families, and staff feel they are growing in their skills and confidence to teach and learn under new protocols and systems.

## Reflection Questions

**For each building block, several reflection questions are suggested.**

### MINDSET

- How do you approach partnership with families during Covid-19?
- What potential benefits of Covid-19 can you identify for your students and families?
- How can you maximize partnership opportunities?
- What are your beliefs about families’ roles in education during Covid-19?

### RELATIONSHIPS

- Where were your relationships prior to Covid-19? Where would you like them to be after Covid-19?
- Do you know what methods of communication are available and preferred for your families and students?
- Who else is a supportive adult for your students (e.g., caregivers, grandparents, and aunts/uncles)?
- Do some family members have more stable phone numbers or connectivity than others? How does this inform the relationship-building plan?
- If you are having a hard time reaching out to families or getting a response, are there other families, organizations, or staff who might have a better connection?
- Who will be the most effective in contacting the family at first? On-going?

- How do you set up conversations that allow you to learn from families and cocreate the direction of the conversation? How do you build trust with one another?
- What have you learned about the hopes, dreams, and challenges for your families' children? Who can help address these hopes and challenges?
- What nonacademic supports can you provide families (e.g., connectivity, devices, stress management, and well-being resources)?
- What questions work best when making connections with families?
- What are you learning through Covid-19 about building relationships with families?

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND PLACE-

### BASED APPROACHES

- What Alaska resources can your lessons build on that are available?
- What social networks and extended family members can students include in their lessons?
- What suggested activities can be done on a walk, bicycle ride, or with partners in the community?
- What interests, chores, hobbies, or activities does the family pursue together (e.g., subsistence, cooking, building, cleaning, reading, crafts, movies, and visiting with family members)? How can these be applied to learning?

### LINKS TO LEARNING

- What online and offline examples are you providing for families to support learning?
- How do you create opportunities for families to engage in content? What additional resources would support families to help with learning?
- What opportunities are there for families to make decisions about learning and provide feedback about how learning is working for their student and family?

- What can families do to model learning strategies and ask students to teach them about what they are learning?

## BUILDING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

- What daily routines can support learning? What does this look like for each family?
- What questions can families ask to help students reflect on their learning?
- How can families connect with each other or other peers to stay connected and learn together?
- What questions and conversation prompts have been helpful to build confidence of families?
- What tools help you listen effectively and keep track of ideas shared?

### CO-REGULATION

- What are you doing to take care of yourself?
- What routines can help you to manage stress and emotions during Covid-19?
- Who are your go-to people for support and connection? How are you connecting with them?
- What tools can you offer families?
- What tools can families offer each other and you?
- How can you help establish a common language about emotional self-care and co-regulation?

## Overarching considerations for creating a shared vision

### with families:

- How do families share their priorities for their child and family during this time?
- Are there any areas that they are excited for and concerned about during this time?
- What priorities and structures are the same, and what is changing for families?

## END NOTES

### Introduction

#### Page 04

1. Association of Alaska School Boards, [School Climate and Connectedness Survey](#).
2. Berg, A., Melaville, A. & Blank, M. (2006). Community and family engagement: Principals share what works. Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.
3. National PTA. (2000). Building successful partnerships: A guide for developing parent and family involvement programs. (p. 11-12). Bloomington, Indiana.
4. Wood, L., & Bauman, E. (2017). [How family, school, and community engagement can improve student achievement and influence school reform: Literature review](#). American Institutes for Research and Nellie Mae Foundation; and Sheldon, S. B., & Jung, S. B. (2015). [The Family Engagement Partnership Student Outcome Evaluation](#), Johns Hopkins University School of Education.
5. Association of Alaska School Boards. (2019). [Transforming schools: A framework for trauma-engaged practice in Alaska](#).
6. Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development. (2011, January). [Alaska Family Engagement Action Plan](#).
7. Gaitan, C. D. (2012). [Culture, literacy, and power in family-community-school-relationships](#). Theory Into Practice, 51(4), 305-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2012.726060>.
8. Many formative concepts have been adapted from Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. SEDL.

### Building Block 1: Mindset

#### Page 12

1. GaDoe Family-School Partnership Program. (2014, October 31). Parent engagement – Principal's perspective [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0k3kiBE2Wc&feature=youtu>

### Building Block 2: Relationships

#### Page 19

1. Payne, C., & Kaba, M. (2001). So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform (IPR Working Paper 98-26). Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. Available at <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/workingpapers/wpabstracts98/wp9826.html>
2. Pekel, K., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Syvertsen, A. K., & Scales, P. C. (2015). Don't forget the families: The missing piece in America's effort to help children succeed. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.
3. Fletman, C. (2009). The thin book of trust: An essential primer for building trust at work. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing Co.
4. Pekel, K. et al. (2015). Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Effort to Help Children Succeed. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.
5. Spielberg, L. (2011). Successful family engagement in the classroom: What teachers need to know and be able to do to engage families in raising student achievement. Flamboyant Foundation and Harvard Family Research Project; and Flamboyant Foundation's Classroom Family Engagement Rubric.

### Building block 3: cultural responsiveness

#### Page 27

1. Hammond, Z. (2014). [Culturally responsive teaching and the brain](#). Corwin.
2. Saifer, S., Edwards, K., Ellis, D., Ko, L., & Stuczynski, A. (2011). [Culturally responsive standards-based teaching: Classroom to community and back](#). Corwin and Education Northwest.
3. Smoker Broadbuss, M. (2018, November 27). [Ways to become more culturally responsive in engaging American Indian and Alaska Native families](#). Education Northwest.
4. Region X Equity Assistance Center. (2016). Culturally responsive teaching: A guide to evidence-based practices for teaching all students equitably. Education Northwest. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/culturally-responsive-teaching-508.pdf>
5. Hanlon, T. (2019, April 27). [Anchorage students can wear tribal regalia at graduation](#). Anchorage Daily News (via Associated Press).
6. Deberry, R. (n.d.). [Traditional regalia debuts at 2019 graduations](#). Family Partnership Charter School, Anchorage School District.
7. Available at [https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP\\_Culturally\\_Responsive\\_Schools\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP_Culturally_Responsive_Schools_Guide.pdf)

## Building Block 4: Links to Learning

### Page 36

1. Melhuish, E., Phan, M., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj, I., & Taggart, B. (2008). Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in early primary school. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), 95-114. <http://193.61.4.246/web-files/our-staff/academic/edward-melhuish/documents/JSI2008.pdf>; Harris, A. & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*, 50(3), 277-289; Sheldon, S. B. (2009). In School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action. (3rd ed.). USA: Corwin Press; Zhang, D., Hsu, H. Y., Kwok, O. M., Benz, M., & Bowman-Perrott, L. (2011). The impact of basic-level parent engagements on student achievement: Patterns associated with race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 22, 28-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207310394447>.
2. Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2017, September 27). Education inequalities at the school starting gate: Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/education-inequalities-at-the-school-starting-gate/#epi-toc-13>
3. Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development, [Title I-A: Parent and Family Engagement](#).
4. National Education Association, [Quick Brief on Family Engagement in Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) of 2015](#).
5. Texas Education Agency, [Five Steps to Success for Developing School-Parent Compacts](#).

6. Harvard Family Engagement Institute, [Linking to Learning with School-Family Compacts](#).
7. Walsh, B. (2014). [Link It to Learning: Concrete Tips for Making Family Engagement Happen](#), Harvard Graduate School of Education.

## Building Block 5: Skills and Confidence

### Page 44

1. Mapp, K., & Kuttner, P. (2013). [Partners in education: A dual-capacity framework for home-school partnerships](#). SEDL and U.S. Department of Education.
2. [Parents As Teachers](#), Kids' Corps, Inc., Alaska.
3. [Right Question Institute: A Catalyst for Microdemocracy](#).
4. The World Café Community Foundation (2015). [Café to Go: A Quick Reference Guide for Hosting World Café](#).

## Building Block 6: Co-Regulation

### Page 53

1. Cuncic, A. (2020, January 20). How to develop and practice self-regulation. VeryWell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-you-can-practice-self-regulation-4163536>
2. Murray, D. W., Rosanbalm, K., & Christopoulos, C. (2016). Self-Regulation and toxic stress report 4: Implications for programs and practice, OPRE Report # 2016-97. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

3. Cuncic, A. (2020)
4. Murray, D.W., et al. (2016).
5. Rosanbalm, K. D., & Murray, D. W. (2017). OPRE Brief #2017-80. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US. Department of Health and Human Services.
6. Rosanbalm, K. D., & Murray, D. W. (2017).
7. Rosanbalm, K. D., & Murray, D. W. (2017).
8. National Institute for Children's Health Quality. (n.d.). Children's social and emotional development starts with co-regulation. <https://www.nichq.org/insight/childrens-social-and-emotional-development-starts-co-regulation>
9. National Institute for Children's Health Quality. (n.d.). Children's social and emotional development starts with co-regulation.
10. A list of interventions by age group is found in Appendix 3 of OPRE Brief #2017-80: Effect size outcomes by intervention and developmental groups. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/appendix\\_c\\_final\\_b508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/appendix_c_final_b508.pdf)

## Partnering At a Distance

### Page 71

1. Hammond, Z., & Jackson, Y. (2015). Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students.
2. Hammond, Z., & Jackson, Y. (2015). Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students.



# MORE RESOURCES

- 82 Resources for Partnering, Family Partnership – Reducing the Distance During Covid-19
- 86 Planning and Visioning Resources

# Resources for Partnering

**COMMUNICATION WHEN PARTNERING AT A DISTANCE**  
**ROUTINES FOR FAMILIES**  
**ROUTINES FOR SCHOOL STAFF**  
**TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES AND ONLINE PLATFORMS**  
**OTHER IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES**

## COMMUNICATION WHEN PARTNERING AT A DISTANCE

### 1. **Send updates to families and receive communications through multiple channels.**

Determine what channels are the best with the family. Check those channels at set times in the day. Research indicates sending information out daily or two times a week can be effective. Using clear, concise, and descriptive subject lines is also helpful (i.e., “Resources for Mental Health Services,” rather than, “March 3 Message to Parents”).

Families may be requesting information on the following:

- Food services and access to food
- Mental health services
- Community resources and programs
- School schedules and content
- Extracurricular opportunities
- School and staff contacts
- How to connect with other families
- How to get access to or device support for connectivity
- How to get a homework tutor or learning support
- Support for special education and special learning needs

2. **Keep centralized websites and platforms up-to-date and include archives.** Include sections such as the following:
  - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
  - Updates
  - Contacts

Tips for creating a welcoming website that invites partnership:

- Incorporate two-way communication methods, such as opportunities for families to submit questions or live chat during certain hours.
3. **Build two-way communication in classroom and online platforms.** In addition to the tips above for centralized websites, these may also prove helpful:
    - \*Provide opportunities for families to share pictures of what they did each day and to share lessons learned with other parents.
    - \*Provide opportunities to share feedback about how things are going and areas where support or further guidance would be helpful.
  4. **Use technology to amplify and enhance relationships.** Be aware that many families still struggle with internet access. Effective communication may require phone calls and creative use of other opportunities. For example, teachers or staff may be able to send information with food deliveries. One-on-one communication is the best avenue for personalizing support and building relationships, especially for families preparing for significant transitions, such as graduation or starting kindergarten.

## ROUTINES FOR FAMILIES:

The following questions or prompts may help families create and carry out routines that work for them:

- How many hours do you think your child should focus on their schoolwork?
- What time of day does your student focus best?
- What time of day would work best for a daily check-in with your child? With family?
- What other routines help your children be their best selves (e.g., bedtime, breaks, and movement)?
- What physical space is available for your child to do schoolwork? (An ideal space is quiet but not isolated.)
- What way do you want to be connected to your school's teacher (e.g., Schoology, ClassDojo, or other technology platform; phone calls)?
- What do you want to know about how students are getting their information, learning activities, and assignments?
- How do you help your student when they are struggling? What tools would be helpful to support your student and help them problem solve?
- Which of these (or other) physical activities might be helpful to your child?
  - walk around the neighborhood
  - exercise video
  - yoga and exercises downloaded onto devices
  - doing physical chores
  - dancing
  - other
- Which of these outlets and activities help reduce your child's stress?
  - talking to you
  - talking to other family members
  - talking to a school counselor
  - talking to friends
  - grounding visualizations
  - listening to music
  - singing
  - drumming
  - crafts, such as beading or carving
  - games
  - other
- Do you know how much time your child is spending online? Does this exceed seven hours a day?
- How much time do you think your child should spend studying?
- How much time is ok for watching or surfing activities?
- How much time should be reserved for connecting with peers?



## SOME IDEAS TO INCORPORATE INTO THE DAY:

- Read for fun. Have your children read to each other or to a family member, and ask questions about the story. There are many online recordings that can be downloaded and used offline.
- Family projects. What are your children interested in? Explore this topic online, in person, or through stories.
- Social time. Try social distance meet-ups, Facebook Chat, or other platforms.
- Family time. Prepare a meal, play a game, take a walk, or work on an art project together. Family time is reassuring to students of all ages.
- Chores and contribution. Most children can help with chores or can think of way to provide a kind act for someone else. What are some things you could do?
- Exercise. This is important for adults as well as students. Ideas include a short walk, dancing, or a video workout.
- Sleep. Getting sleep is more important now than ever. To help get good sleep, make sure all screens are turned off two hours prior to bedtime. Have set times for bed and waking up, even if these times differ from your normal routines. Try to be consistent.
- Art/coloring or quiet time. Coloring can be calming for students and adults. Other creative activities include drawing, beading, carving, or crafting.





## SHARE LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PARENTING SUPPORT AND COVID-19 RESOURCES:

### Stay up-to-date on resources available in state or nationally:

<https://aasb.org/resources-for-parents-and-educators-with-students-at-home/>

### Alaska mental health and at-home support resources:

<https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/college-of-arts-and-sciences/departments/psychology/psychological-services-center/>

<https://www.stonesoupgroup.org/resources-for-families/>

### *or national resources:*

<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

### Technology resources for Covid-19:

#### One-on-one conversations and group discussions

- Technology: Zoom, Skype, Facebook Chat, Google Meet, GoToMeeting.
- Capabilities: Some of these platforms have breakout rooms, screen sharing, and chat capabilities.

#### For school or class coordination

- Technology: Class Dojo, Schoology, Remind, Seesaw
- Capabilities: These range from integrated systems to ways to send text messages, videos, photos, class notes, etc.

#### Sites and coursework

- Technology: Google sites, Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Schoology, Wakelet, and Slack.
- Capabilities: Most include sharing documents, videos and templates, uploading and commenting on work, and texting and chatting.

#### Group work, planning, and storyboarding

- Technology: Shared Google Documents, Wakelet, Padlet, Jamboard
- Capabilities: These platforms generally enable shared content creation and editing.

#### Sharing live lessons and videos

- Technology: Facebook Live, Zoom meetings, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.
- Capabilities: Most of these platforms allow live sharing as well as recording for future use.

#### Organizing support services

- Technology: Meal train, Helping Hands, SignUp Genius
- Capabilities: Organizing volunteers, scheduling slots, and soliciting help.

#### Creating Digital Student Portfolios:

Below are some resources to share student learning with families. These are platforms that push content out rather than require families to check information. Here are three articles about the impact of digital portfolios for students and families:

- <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2017/08/engaging-parents-to-engage-learners-digital-portfolios-can-make-it-happen/>
- <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/01/10-tools-to-create-online-student-portfolios/>
- <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2017/05/3-lessons-learned-with-digital-portfolios/>

For families who do not have internet access, there are many creative ways to download recordings and content onto school-distributed devices. These may include activities, videos, and Zoom meeting recordings.

# Planning and Visioning Resources

VISIONING AND PLANNING TEMPLATE

SCHOOL WIDE ONE YEAR ACTION PLAN FOR FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

SCHOOL WIDE ACTIVITIES PLAN TO SUPPORT GOALS

# Planning for Family Engagement and Early Learning



**Know where  
you're going.**

Define your vision  
for family engage-  
ment.

- What does the School Climate and Connectedness Survey tell you about family engagement?
- What other information is available about family involvement in your schools?
- What do you hope to have happen as a result of family engagement?

**NEXT STEPS:**

**Think  
school readiness.**

Connect your vision  
for family engage-  
ment to early learn-  
ing and preparing  
children for school.

- What early learning supports does your district offer?
- What do parents of pre-K students need to feel comfortable bringing their children to school for the first time?
- How can you link the events to the learning skills kids need?

**NEXT STEPS:**

**Share leadership.**

Build partnerships  
and shared leader-  
ship with community  
organizations and  
resources.

- Who has a good mission match in your community for family engagement work?
- What voices need to be represented at the table?
- How will you communicate with partners and bring them to the table?

**NEXT STEPS:**



**Engage families.**

Develop family engagement strategies that meet families where they are and that welcome families in school.

- How will your engagement activities build the 6 Cs?
- Which of the 6 Cs do you think are the most important to focus on?
- Which of the 6 Cs are current activities supporting, and where are there gaps?
- What do parents think is the most important to address?

**NEXT STEPS:****Evaluate your success and tell the story.**

Communicate with families and the community about the importance of family engagement, early learning, and the progress you have made.

- How do you know you have been successful? Which strategies worked best? What gaps need to be addressed?
- How will you follow up with families and the school after the event? How will you ask them what they thought about the event?
- How will you tell the community about your family engagement activities?

**NEXT STEPS:**