Guiding Principles for Promoting Racial Equity in Family Engagement

Positive connections between families and education programs and institutions have been linked to increased academic motivation, grade promotion and social-emotional skills across all students, particularly those from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.\(^1\)

However, the continuing impact of implicit bias, institutional racism and structural racialization threaten the often-fragile trust between families and education programs and institutions. If efforts to authentically engage families are to have a transformative impact on the education system, then approaches to family engagement must take deliberate action to counteract racial inequities at the individual, institutional and structural levels.

The following Racial Equity Principles represent key concepts and practices that guide authentic and equitable family engagement, as evidenced through both research and the most promising and successful programs.

### Racial Equity Principles for Family Engagement

1. **Apply a Racial Equity Lens**
2. **Demonstrate Regard for Other Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being**
3. **Diminish Social and Cultural Isolation**
4. **Build Mutually Respectful and Collaborative Relationships**
5. **Model Two-Way Communication**
6. **Build Capacity of Families to be Self-Determining**
7. **Commit to Co-Governance and Shared Leadership**

### Key Racial Equity Terms

**Implicit Bias**
Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold regarding another's identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, etc.). These biases are expressed automatically through attitudes and actions without conscious awareness.

**Institutional Racism**
Biases are institutionalized through policies and practices that create racialized outcomes - different outcomes for different racial groups. The policies and practices may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantage for white people by maintaining the status quo while disadvantaging people from other racial groups.

**Structural Racialization**
The ways in which inter-institutional arrangements and interactions produce racialized outcomes. History, ideology, public policies, institutional practices and culture interact to maintain a racial hierarchy that allows the privileges associated with whiteness and the disadvantages associated with color to endure and adapt over time.

1. Apply a Racial Equity Lens

- Identify, name and commit to addressing racial equity challenges while setting clear and universal goals
- Target strategies and resources to benefit students furthest from opportunity
- Understand the historical, social and political context of implicit bias, institutional racism and structural racialization
- Offer structures and practices that give people time and space to heal from the lasting effects of oppression
- Regard family members as "experts" in their child's needs and life experience and integrate that knowledge into curriculum and practice
- Utilize collaborative problem-solving structures that encourage questions and meaningful debate and allow for productive conflicts and disagreements

2. Demonstrate Regard for Other Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being

- Provide family-focused programming that validates and integrates families' cultural values, norms, language and contexts
- Operate from an awareness of dominant culture (behaviors, language, attitudes, values and presentation of knowledge) and consciously work to mitigate the negative effects of this for families
- Understand the wide range of influencers and interactions (ecological systems theory) that affect all people and impact how we see and understand the world

3. Diminish Social and Cultural Isolation

- Facilitate and support peer networks that increase families' access to information and resources to support family and child well-being
- Individualize opportunities for peer connections for specific groups of parents (i.e., grandparents, fathers, young mothers, etc.)
- Promote parent and family skill development, resource generation or other needs as determined by families
- Strengthen partnerships through family-centered programming (i.e., home visits, community meetings in home languages and in neutral locations)
- Leverage the technological and social media competences of younger parents and families in service of child learning outcomes and family well-being

4. Build Mutually Respectful and Collaborative Relationships

- Welcome parents, honor their participation and connect families to the school/program through a focus on their child's learning
- Listen to and acknowledge the values, culture, language, experience, knowledge, gifts and aspirations of diverse families
- Develop family-focused programming that validates and integrates families' cultural values, norms, language and contexts
- Operate from an awareness of dominant culture (behaviors, language, attitudes, values and presentation of knowledge) and consciously work to mitigate the negative effects of this for families
- Understand the wide range of influencers and interactions (ecological systems theory) that affect all people and impact how we see and understand the world

5. Model Two-Way Communication

- Communication practices (verbal and non-verbal) show respect for diverse languages and cultural backgrounds
- Translate communications into families' native languages and provide translators for face-to-face and phone communication
- Ask every family for their preferred method of communication
- Pay equal attention to soliciting families' ideas, questions, feedback and aspirations as to providing information
- Develop processes for school/program staff and families that encourage continuous communication, resolve problems and misunderstandings and provide timely and accurate information

6. Build Capacity of Families to be Self-Determining

- Co-create family-focused policy and programming that is purposefully designed to enhance family economic security and well-being
- Employ structures and processes that build and enhance the capabilities, connections, confidence and cognition of both families and school/program staff in service of child learning and development
- Provide training and professional development opportunities for school/program staff to increase their ability to build effective relationships
- Support and develop parents as leaders and validate their role as their child's first teacher

7. Commit to Co-Governance and Shared Leadership

- Invite the participation of parents in decision-making, program and policy development
- Build and maintain structures and processes for parents to develop as leaders and take formal leadership in the learning environment
- Share power: Encourage and support parent advocacy and organizing efforts
- Promote shared responsibility for child well-being and learning outcomes
- Co-design programs and policies with families that meaningfully explore their immediate concerns and interests

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Endnotes


10. NAEYC (2009)


14. NCPFCE (2011)