A new school year is a new beginning, and a new chance to forge positive relationships with the families in your community. In this toolkit we have listed tips and resources that will help you form powerful partnerships with your students’ families.

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT “DOs”**

- Adopt a partnership philosophy - Stress that you and the parent are partners and you will be looking to them for help teaching their child at home over the year.
- Map out an engagement strategy and incorporate it into your School Improvement Plan.
- Be sure to create a welcoming environment.
- Be relentless in your marketing of family events, especially those linked to learning. Send multiple reminders via text and phone calls home.
- Build the knowledge and skills of parents to empower them to support their child’s learning at home.
- Encourage the formation of a parent organization - let parents organize from the very beginning and include new parents.
- Give parents homework – what simple activities in math and science can they do with their kids.
- Make home visits to reach out to parents who did not attend your parent event or who are not responsive.
- Start a parent center.
- Respect parents and ask for their feedback and suggestions.

**CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT**

First impressions last a lifetime – and a single negative experience at your school could mean hard feelings for years. Follow the tips below to establish the “open door” school that every parent wants their child to attend.

**Get to Know Your School Community**

At the beginning of the year, conduct a survey of your families’ perceptions of your school. You can also conduct a school walkthrough to see firsthand your stakeholders’ impressions of your school and get immediate feedback on your school environment. A community walkthrough is also helpful for your school staff to get to know the neighborhood their students live in and acquaint themselves with local businesses and resources. You can find templates for surveying your school community and guides on how to conduct both a school and community walkthrough at [houstonisd.org/facetoools](https://houstonisd.org/facetoools) under the Evaluate section.
Adapt an Attitude of Customer Service

Adapt an attitude of customer service for your students’ families, and make sure that all of your staff is on board. This especially applies to staff that have the most contact with parents, like office staff, registrars, clerks, and counselors. Make the effort to attend to parents promptly and with a smile. Give them the feeling that you are glad they are there.

Be transparent and clearly communicate the steps to resolve an issue with school administration. Parents should know what the procedures are for asking a question or filing a complaint. Parents should feel respected and valued in every interaction you have with them. Be sure to respond to queries and follow-up on requests.

Establish a Family Center

Family Centers provide forums for parents and community members to meet, organize, and learn. Designate one staff member to oversee activities and survey parents on what they would like to see offered in the Family Center. Recruit local organizations to offer classes and workshops for your parents that are related to student learning. Launch the family center with a celebration and make sure to keep adding workshops for parents on how to help their child learn at home, which can be developed by your teaching staff. Please see our online presentation and tools on how to successfully start a Family Center.

Make Home Visits

Identify your students that are most in need of academic support, and then make their parents your best friends! If they do not respond to emails and phone calls home, stop by their homes and introduce yourself. You can find a Home Visit Protocol to guide you at houstonisd.org/facetools under the Plan section.

Make Your Building Available

Open up your building for parent and community meetings. You can also offer times when parents can come in and use your computer labs and check out books from your school library.

OPEN HOUSE IDEAS

Below are some tips to make sure your open house lays the foundation for building effective family engagement for the entire year.

• Organize Open House nights by separately grade level to give parents more personalized attention.

• Steer away from using these nights to complete paperwork and touring classrooms. Rather, the focus should be on learning objectives for the year and what parents can start doing immediately to help their students learn. You can find the HISD Curriculum Department’s Literacy and Numeracy Blueprints online at houstonisd.org/Page/62391. These blueprints provide foundational skills and corresponding at-home activities for parents that you can introduce at your open house and other academic family events.
• Share Your Voice data results with your students’ families and help them interpret the results. Then, ask for their collaboration in brainstorming ways to improve. You can find the Your Voice Principal’s Toolkit at houstonisd.org/yourvoice.
• Break down the event into a smaller and more intimate gathering where everyone can contribute.
• Make sure there is two-way communication – assign a teacher or administrator to small groups to discuss parents’ questions or concerns, and bring questions back to big group if necessary.
• For more ideas for Open Houses, view FACE’s workshop and accompanying materials at houstonisd.org/Page/104471.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

HISD is implementing the Academic Parent-Teacher Team (APTT) program, a model for restructuring parent-teacher conferences to get the most out of meetings with parents. APTT will be in 30 HISD elementary schools for the 2014-2015 school year. You can learn more about APTT at houstonisd.org/aptt. Here are some of the main elements of APTT meetings that you can incorporate in your parent-teacher conferences:

**Introduction of a Foundational Skill**
- Choose one or two foundational skills to explain to parents in simple terms.
- It is important for parents to understand what their children need to learn if they are going to practice with their kids or monitor their progress.

**Data Review**
- Show parents the result of an assessment or assignment. Protect confidentiality assigning students a number and showing them where their child stands in comparison to the rest of the class is powerful.

**Demonstration of Home Activities and Practice**
- Clearly model a simple activity that can easily be done at home that supports learning.
- Be sure the activity uses household items (deck of cards, magazines, junk mail, action figures). When possible, purchase these items for parents.
- Have parents practice the activity with each other.

**Set Academic Goals**
- Show data graph again so parents can have a visual.
- Give parents guidance on what is attainable and set reasonable high expectations.
- Show them a sample of how a goal is written.

Find more resources for executing effective Parent-Teacher Conferences at the following link: edutopia.org/blog/parent-teacher-conference-resources-matt-davis

LITERACY EVENTS

Literacy Events can be scheduled throughout the year to give parents instruction on how they can help their children learn to read and develop analytical skills at home. For comprehensive information on hosting a successful literacy event,
please see the Partnering with Parents to Build Literacy PowerPoint and Guide to Family Literacy at the following link: www.houstonisd.org/Page/112163.

What does an EFFECTIVE literacy event look like?

- All activities are Linked to Learning
  - Activities connect directly to what students are learning.
  - Parents and teachers look at student work and test results together.
- Teachers and parents review targeted foundational skills Parents learn simple corresponding activities or games that could be used in the classroom. Parents can then use these same simple teaching techniques with their children at home. Parents should walk away with skills to help their children at home.
- Parents should get an idea of what good teaching looks like so that they can replicate it at home.
- Teachers and parents should discuss how to improve student progress.
- Teachers should showcase student work.
- Childcare should be provided to make sure children are not distracting adults.
- Facilitators must be comfortable engaging adults.
- Meeting should be offered in all languages relevant to the school community.
- School should provide a warm and inviting environment.

BUILDING A PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA) OR PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATION (PTO)

Every school should invest time and energy into building a parent organization on their campus. These organizations can help administrators and teachers by volunteering, raising money, and, most importantly, advocating for their children and boosting learning at home. Visit houstonisd.org/FACEworkshops and scroll down to the Get Organized section for workshop presentations and supporting materials that can walk you through choosing which type of parent organization is best for your school and how to get started building one.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Don’t underestimate the power of your surrounding community! Businesses around your school can donate anything from computers to food and non-profit organizations can offer courses, workshops, and print resources to aid you in engaging your families. Start with your local library – they offer an array of courses and resources. To find out what organizations can help in your specific area, you can use the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Community Guide at bit.ly/1s6R3Cr or the United Way of Greater Houston Community Resource Directory at referral.unitedwayhouston.org.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

Please visit the Family and Community Engagement website at www.houstonisd.org/face for more tools and resources to help you develop an effective FACE program for your school community. Workshop PowerPoints and notes (houstonisd.org/faceworkshops) and tools and templates (houstonisd.org/facetools) are available for download.