

Dos and Don'ts



Framing strategies to adopt

DO focus on the need to create the conditions that promote engagement rather than an individual's responsibility to engage:

Explaining how breaking down the barriers (socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, etc.) to family engagement and instituting policies that support equitable practices helps position family engagement as a systemic issue, not an individual behavior.

DO foreground the importance of engagement by addressing equity:

Appealing to the value of Opportunity for All—the shared belief that everyone deserves the same opportunities to succeed—engages people in the issue by tapping into their deeply held belief that high-quality educational opportunities should be available for all children and in all communities.

DO use the Space Launch metaphor to explain how engagement works: Engagement launches children's learning, everyone has an important role, and teamwork and consistent communication are key to the mission.

Strategies to avoid

DON'T reinforce people's belief that engagement is dependent on a caring adult. Doing so limits the way people consider family engagement as only a result of that individual's behavior: Avoid focusing on caring teachers or solely on motivated parents.

DON'T assume people understand what equity means or that they understand engagement as an equity issue: Neglecting to connect the dots leaves people unsure why engagement matters.

DON'T leave out the benefits of family engagement: Understanding the benefits for students, parents, teachers, and the community helps people embrace family engagement's value and importance.



Framing strategies to adopt

DO provide concrete examples of equitable engagement practices that include examples of the barriers families may face and systemic solutions to overcome them: This makes the problem and solutions easier to see and understand.

DO frame family engagement as an *Interdependent Partnership* between schools, communities, and families when communicating with educators: This helps educators see how engagement lightens their load, rather than creating an extra burden, and how it depends on policies, not just parents.

DO underscore that family engagement involves regular, ongoing interaction: This broadens understanding of what family engagement can and should be.

DO emphasize the benefits to students and teachers: Spelling out the specific benefits to both groups boosts people's support for sound engagement policies.

DO use parents to talk about how they benefit from family engagement: Parents are the best messengers for explaining what engagement offers parents.

Strategies to avoid

DON'T gloss over the specifics—details matter when building understanding of engagement: Be clear, specific, plainspoken, and visual when helping audiences envision feasible solutions.

DON'T focus on personal relationships: Highlighting individual actors invites people to point fingers at parents or teachers for failing to be good partners, instead of joining hands to change systems.

DON'T feed people's belief that family engagement is limited to individual events or addressing behavioral or academic problems: Avoid focusing on episodic interactions at the expense of systemic programs.

DON'T put parental benefits above those of students and teachers: It's important to show how everyone benefits.

DON'T ignore the good stuff: Skipping over the collective rewards of family engagement is a missed opportunity to expand people's understanding of its impact.