Families and Schools Partnering for Children’s Literacy Success
School Track Facilitator’s Guide: Talk and Interact Often

For more information: https://improvliteracy.org/kit/

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Note: Greet participants and begin workshop with introductions as needed. Follow the facilitation procedure notes appropriate for the workshop session.

For the traditional blended and virtual dissemination models, activate the tutorial link and start with the introduction slide and then continue to the next slide.

For the flipped blended dissemination model, ask participants in they have any questions about the purpose of NCIL’s tutorial on Families and Schools Partnering for Children’s Literacy Success.

Overview of The National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL)
The NCIL’s mission is to increase access to, and use of, evidence-based approaches to screen, identify, and teach pre-K to grade 12 students with literacy-related disabilities, including dyslexia.
Note: This slide explains why the topic is important/the session big ideas.

Learning to read can be joyful and fun, but it can also be upsetting and hard for many children. Some children may need extra help learning the skills needed to read and write well. This is common since learning to read is complicated. You and families can work together to support children’s academic and emotional well being to help him or her thrive.

Trust is the primary ingredient for strong home-school relationships. If you and families haven’t developed trust, you probably don’t communicate openly with one another. If you don’t communicate openly with one another, then it’s difficult to partner well. It can take time to build trust, but when space is given for all voices – including those of children - to be heard, acknowledged, and understood, it is a good start. Building trust over time can help break down assumptions and misunderstandings among you, children, and families and result in better relationships.
Learning Objectives

• To learn the characteristics of family engagement and the conditions that support effective home-school partnerships for literacy
• To learn what family engagement may look like in a system of literacy support and services, like a Multi-tiered System of Support for Reading (MTSS-R)

Note: Participant learning objectives to display and communicate when the workshop begins.
The first step in partnering with families for children’s literacy success is for you and families to have common agreement on what family engagement means. A shared understanding sets the stage for the type of partnership that will support children’s literacy learning.

What is family engagement? First, family engagement is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement. This means it relies on open communication, joint learning, and mutual decision-making among families, schools, and communities. When you pair your knowledge of children with that of families, children’s learning improves. Second, family engagement is continuous from birth to young adulthood; it is not just something that happens when children are very young. Third, family engagement occurs across multiple settings - like school, home, and community - where children learn. When you prioritize family engagement, students’ self-confidence, motivation, attendance, grades, and test scores improve.

Equitable family engagement focuses on meaningful engagement activities and systems between schools and families that do not characterize or treat specific parent groups as deficient in their level of engagement or approach to education. This includes specific practices or approaches that reflect the values of a general group of families, as well as systems that foster tailored supports, flexible engagement options, and coordination between families and schools. Click Watch Video to hear Dr. Karen Mapp share tips for educators on partnering with families. Click Learn More for six shifts needed for better family engagement.

**Video: Play Watch Video** Scholastic (2:03):
So my three tips for educators would be one, that when you are trying to improve your practice
when it comes to family engagement you have to really examine your core beliefs about your families - how you see the families in the community - do you look at them through a deficit lens that perhaps you don’t see them having strengths, or do you look at them as assets, people who have knowledge and skills that you really need to help you be an effective educator. The second tip would be to change the communication from being about negative news or bad news to positive news. And so I always say to teachers, especially make those first phone calls home especially at the beginning of the year about positive information or text things about what the child is doing that’s good. Families tell me that the only time they hear from schools is when it’s bad news. I think the third piece would be to really think about making those communications be about academics and not about discipline. So it sort of goes with number two, but more specifically when you’re talking to families, let them know what their children should know and be able to do. Families really want to know that information. They don’t want to just know that Johnny’s been a good boy or that Suzie is nice, because a lot of my families say that’s the kind of feedback we get; well, your child is nice. They want to know what their child should know and be able to do in October and in January and in June and they want to help you get there. So, those would be the three tidbits that I’d like to share with educators of how they can do something different with their families.

Guiding question to check for understanding: What tip resonates most with you and why?

Resource: Distribute, review, and discuss Six Shifts Needed for Better Family Engagement with participants. Tell participants they can refer to this infographic for current research-based ideas on how to engage families as partners.
Since family engagement is a shared responsibility across multiple settings, then you and families have important roles in a system of literacy services and support for children’s literacy learning. A system of literacy services and support is the combination of activities that happen during and outside school. Importantly, these responsibilities are shared across both sides, especially in a remote learning situation. This system builds on the strengths of both school and home to help children succeed. When the focus is only on what happens in or out of school, instead of across the two, children may miss important learning opportunities.

A system of literacy services and support works best when in and out of school activities are coordinated and aligned. For example, you can provide families with home activities that reinforce literacy skills previously learned at school or extra practice opportunities for skills currently being learned. To do this, there must be regular occasions for you and families to communicate and interact. This involves the children too. Regular and positive communication and interaction between you and families make partnering to support children’s literacy learning possible. This is especially important in remote learning, which may not resemble a traditional school day. Click Learn More for information to share with families on why family engagement matters for school success.

**Resource:** Distribute, review, and discuss Why Family Engagement Matters for School Success with participants, focusing on the 5 Ways Families, Teachers, Schools and Communities Can Work Together to Support Children’s Learning and School Success with
participants. Tell participants they can use the document back at their school to reflect on what they are doing now and what they could do in the future to promote student success in partnership for literacy with your families and community. If time permits, see activity below.

**Activity:** Provide time for participants to use the document to discuss what they are doing now and what they could do in the future to promote student success in partnership for literacy with their families and community. Encourage participants from the same setting to discuss and record their reflections on the document and use it to engage others back at school.
How can regular and positive communication and interactions between you and families be strengthened? By focusing on four A’s:

Approach. Approach is the way you and families structure home-school interactions and relationships, like expectations for involvement and recognizing what each of you know about your children. For example, has a shared goal for children’s literacy success been set across home and school?

Attitudes. Attitudes are the values and views you and families hold about home-school relationships and the commitment to family engagement as a key way to improve literacy learning. For example, is there a willingness to share views of children’s literacy performance across home and school?

Atmosphere. Atmosphere is the climate for the interactions between you and families. Is it welcoming and respectful? Are there ways to communicate about children’s literacy learning? Is families and the school’s input used to shape children’s literacy learning?

Action. Action is the joint activities you and families take part in to support literacy learning and the strategies for building shared responsibility for children’s literacy progress and success. For example, are ways to partner with families to help children succeed in literacy provided schoolwide?
The approach, attitudes, and atmosphere usually need to be addressed first before taking action. This is so the home-school relationships can work smoothly to support children’s literacy development, especially if children are having difficulty reading. In remote learning, it is likely that you will need to consider new or refined strategies for the approach and action since remote learning will not look the same for every family. Because communication is innately tied to cultural backgrounds, using communication practices that are sensitive to families’ language and cultural backgrounds encourages engagement and set’s the stage for literacy partnerships. For more information on how to do this, click “Learn More Communication.” For more information on tapping the strengths of families by building a cultural bridge, Click “Learn More Family Strengths.”

**Note:** Click each Learn More to show participants the toolkits and recommend that they review them back at school with their leadership team and complete the activities.

**Resource: Distribute, review, and discuss** Route to Reading: Check the Road Conditions with participants. Have participants share their perspectives on the approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions of their school as it related to families.
During the school day, the system of services and support for children’s literacy development is often called a multi-tiered systems of support for reading or MTSS-R. MTSS-R is a school-wide framework for instruction and intervention so all children meet essential literacy goals. In MTSS—R, multiple tiers of instruction and intervention are linked together and get increasingly more intensive so all children get the knowledge and skills they need to reach grade-level literacy goals. Assessments and data are used at all tiers to guide decisions about children’s response to instruction and intervention.

In MTSS-R, schools first identify what children need to know and do to succeed in each grade. Then, schools often screen all children to identify who may be at risk for reading difficulties. Next, schools teach and assess children so they meet literacy goals. Tier one is high-quality classroom literacy instruction for all children in each grade. Children who need only this support read and write well and are on track to meet grade level literacy goals. Tier two is additional small group instruction for some children in each grade. These children need a boost with extra instruction in targeted skills to be on track to meet grade level literacy goals. Tier three is specialized small group instruction for fewer children in each grade. These children need intensive, individualized instruction or intervention to be on track to meet grade level literacy goals. Click Learn More for information to share with families on screening and assessment.

**Resource:** Distribute, review, and discuss Understanding Screening: Overall Screening and Assessment with participants. Have participants share how they would use this resource.
with families and what they would say.
Be sure to provide ways for families to learn about your school’s MTSS–R, why it is being used, and how their children are being supported within the system. When doing so, carefully explain academic or technical jargon or limit its use. Families are important to the MTSS-R problem-solving process. Together with families, review data and make data-based decisions for children’s literacy learning. If your school does not have a MTSS-R, then explain to families your process to identify and provide support for children off-track for meeting grade-level literacy goals. Offer regular occasions for families to share their interests or needs with you so opportunities can be better matched to the learning wishes of families.

There are many ways that families can participate in MTSS-R to support their children in all tiers. The key is for families to have opportunities to do so. For example, families can help the school understand their background, culture, and goals for their children. They can also provide you with information to address the needs and interests of other families like theirs. Perhaps families are seeking information or training offered by the school on specific literacy topics or want to know how to best support their children’s literacy development at home. Or, maybe families are interested in volunteering at the school or organizing help and support from other families. Families can help make school literacy decisions that benefit all children by participating on school improvement teams, committees, or in other groups. Or, perhaps they want help develop home literacy lending kits, afterschool literacy programs, or link families to community resources to support literacy learning. Families are key decision-makers in their children’s literacy learning. Think
about the various ways families can give feedback on their children’s literacy goals, instruction, and support.

**Activity:** Provide time for participants to think about the various ways families can give feedback on their children’s literacy goals, instruction, and support in their setting. Ask for a few volunteers to share their ideas with all.
What might family engagement look like in each tier of MTSS-R? It will likely depend on the setting within your school and the needs of families. Since each tier involves a greater intensity of services and support for children, a greater intensity of communication and collaboration is also needed between families and schools. For example:

In tier 1, families may receive information, materials, and announcements about events that focus on your approach to literacy teaching and learning, literacy curricula, literacy goals, screening data, and ways that families can support their children’s literacy development at home. For instance, family literacy nights, group literacy discussions, and guest speakers on family requested literacy topics.

In tier 2, families may receive information, materials, progress monitoring data, and announcements about events matched to the literacy needs of their children and ways for families to specifically support literacy needs at home. Engagement at this tier is meant to prevent further literacy difficulties by coordinating and aligning activities between home and school.

In tier 3, families may receive information, materials, progress monitoring data, and training matched to the individual literacy needs of their children, including ways to intensify support of their children’s literacy needs at home. You can help families learn intervention strategies and activities that they can do and practice at home that are linked to their child’s literacy goals. Click Learn More for strategizes on how you can partner with
families of English language learners.

**Resource:** Distribute, review, and discuss 6 Strategies for Partnering with Families of English Language Learners with participants. Have participants share other strategies they’ve used that have been successful.
Schools can create meaningful family engagement when they take time to get to know their families so they can be culturally responsive to student and family needs. Equitable family engagement practices in MTSS-R include:

- Considering the features of MTSS-R that may have cultural implications;
- Consulting with cultural stakeholders in the community;
- Facilitating family access to information about the MTSS-R;
- Having representation on the MTSS-R/leadership team that reflects the diversity of experiences and perspectives in the school community;
- Making materials available in all languages represented within the school community;
- Providing staff training in culturally appropriate practices; and
- Disaggregating data to assess disproportionality to see if certain student populations are being overidentified for reading disabilities.

**Activity:** Distribute Creating Authentic Partnerships with Historically Marginalized Families and Other Stakeholders: Embracing an Equity Mindset to participants. Have participants discuss and use this continuum to assess the cultural norms that currently exist and to think about what changes are needed to create authentic opportunities for partnership.
To start talking and interacting often with families, think about and prepare responses to these questions:

What are your language and literacy goals for children and families?
What are the ways families can share information with you about their children’s language and literacy learning?
How do you partner with families when developing language and literacy goals for students?
How can families support children’s language and literacy goals?
How do families learn about what children need to know and be able to do in language and literacy?

Be sure to ask families what their language and literacy goals are for their children. Guide families in goal setting if needed. Families often wonder first how their individual child is doing. When answering, think about the objective data you can share with families about how their child is progressing. Responses should build common understanding and promote joint action between home and school.

**Resource:** Distribute, review, and discuss **Route to Reading:** Schedule Regular Maintenance with participants. Tell participants they can use the infographic back at their school to think about and prepare responses to the questions. If time permits, see activity below.
**Activity:** Provide time for participants to use the infographic to think about and prepare responses to the questions. Encourage participants from the same setting to discuss and record their responses and use them to confer and reach consensus with others back at school.
Summarize for participants the big ideas:

- Family engagement for children’s literacy learning and achievement is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities.
- Trust is the primary ingredient for strong home-school relationships for children’s literacy learning and achievement. Strong home-school relationships rely on open, two-way communication.
- An effective system of support and services for children’s literacy learning involves home and school partnering together.

You have now completed the section on talking and interacting often. Click on the bar to continue.

**Note:** This completes Session 1: Talk and Interact Often.
Slide to use for soliciting questions from participants and discussing answers on session content and related information at the end of the workshop. Review the big ideas from all three sessions and clarify as needed.

**Activity:** Distribute to participants the Families & Schools Partnering for Children’s Literacy Success Checklist and have them reflect on the item statements related to the session learning objectives, including identifying a next step they will take after the workshop to further action on the item.
Thank You!

• [insert contact information]

Slide for inserting contact information so participants can communicate with you after the workshop.