

School Leader Toolkit: Authentic Family and Community Engagement to Support Continuous Improvement

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Module 1 Laying the Foundation: Building a Shared Vision for Diverse Stakeholder Engagement

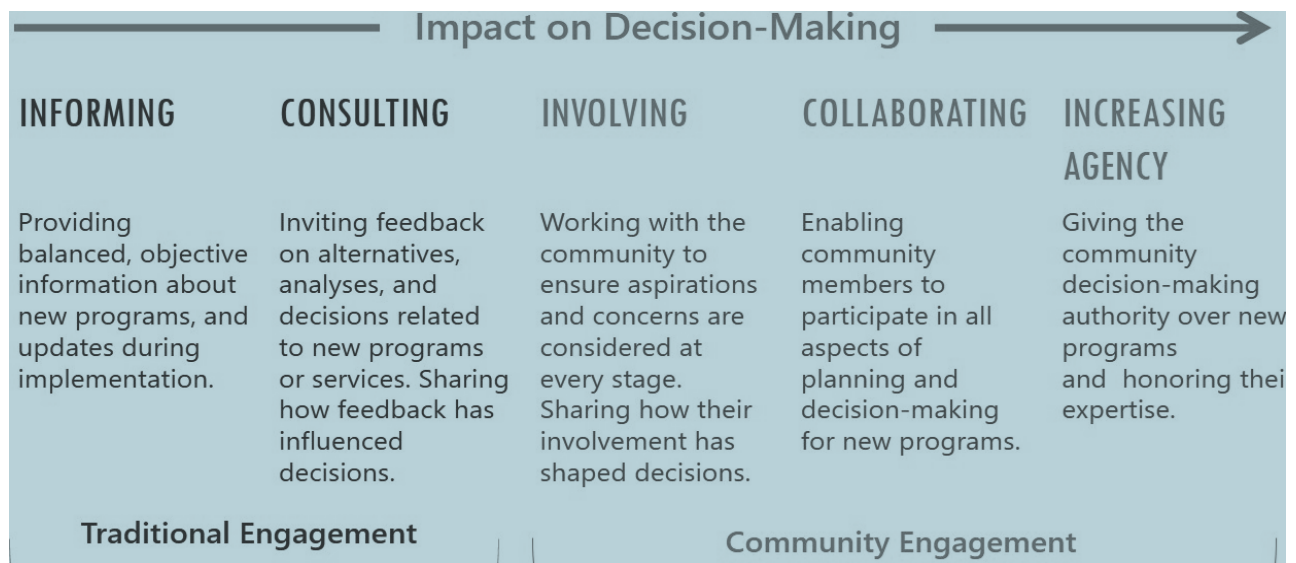
Objectives

- Articulate your 'why' for engagement
- Reframe what authentic engagement is and is not
- Assess your school's current level of engagement
- Begin to build a school-wide vision for authentic family and community engagement

Big Ideas:

- Family and community engagement can have a major payoff for schools' and students' success.
- On the Involvement to Engagement Continuum, involvement implies *doing to* while engagement implies *doing with*.
- Moving from involvement to authentic engagement begins with mindset shifts.

Warm-Up Activity



- Where would you currently place your school on the above Involvement to Engagement Continuum?
- What evidence supports your placement?
- Have there been times where your school operated toward either end of the continuum? What was the outcome?



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GUIDED ACTIVITY: Draft your school's engagement vision statement.

As a leadership team, begin to draft your school's engagement vision statement, considering the involvement to engagement continuum. Your school will likely have an engagement plan and vision statement already. In that case, this exercise is an opportunity to revise it and make it even more actionable.

Don't worry about drafting a perfect statement now – this step is just the beginning. For now, work within your school-based team to compose a first draft. As the modules progress, we'll share tools that will help you build on this vision statement in partnership with families, caregivers, and community members.

Guiding question:

- When our school has outstanding family and community engagement, what will it look, sound, and feel like?

Reflection questions (to evaluate and workshop your draft statement):

- Does this statement resonate with families and caregivers of all student groups?
- Does this statement include a role for school staff? Community partners?
- Will this statement inspire the entire school community?

Samples:

Birmingham City Schools Family Involvement Program believes parent engagement is an ongoing process and that it should increase active participation, communication and collaboration between parents and schools. It believes that parents, schools, families and communities working together will create meaningful partnerships that lead to gains in student achievement.

The Family Engagement Department will be an innovative leader to ensure that all families, educators, and community members become partners in the life-long success of all students by empowering all participants and giving them the skills and knowledge to be active, well-informed contributors in our students' education.



Module 2 Systemic Engagement: How are we using 360-degree communication to learn from our families, caregivers, and community?

Objectives

- Understand three components of effective engagement
- Discuss communication best practices
- Develop a strategic communications plan for your community engagement vision statement

Big Ideas:

- In a **360-degree communication** model, a school creates space for family, caregivers, and community discussions; listens intentionally, seeking to understand perspectives; and engages them in building solutions. Next, the school implements strategies based on what they learned, and monitors the impact of those strategies.
- Effective 360-degree communication requires a few key shifts in communication methods: (1) a move from reactive to proactive communication; (2) a move from compliance driven, top-down communication toward an ongoing dialogue with a **clear feedback loop**; and (3) move from anecdotal information about family and community perception to regular use of student, teacher, family, and community surveys to track stakeholder perception.

Critical Shifts

Reactive public relations (i.e., crisis communications)



Building a strategic plan for proactive communications with all stakeholders

Compliance-driven, top-down communications



Ongoing dialogue with a clear feedback loop

Limited or anecdotal information about stakeholder perception



Regular use of family, teacher, student, and community surveys to track stakeholder perception





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Self-Assess:

Channel	Frequency	One-way, Two-way, or 360-degree
Website		
Direct Email		
Robocalls		
Text Messages		
Morning Messages		
Direct Mail		
Focus Groups		
Family/Caregiver Surveys		
Board Meeting		
Other		

- Which are your school's most used communication channels? To what extent do these lean toward one-way, two-way, or 360-degree communication?
- How does your engagement reflect the preference of different stakeholders (for example, families and caregivers of older children vs. younger children, community organizations, or households with intermittent access to technology?) How do you know your community's communication preferences?
- What steps would you need to take to transition a one- or two-way channel into an opportunity for 360-degree communication?
- How will these transitions support more engagement (vs. involvement)?

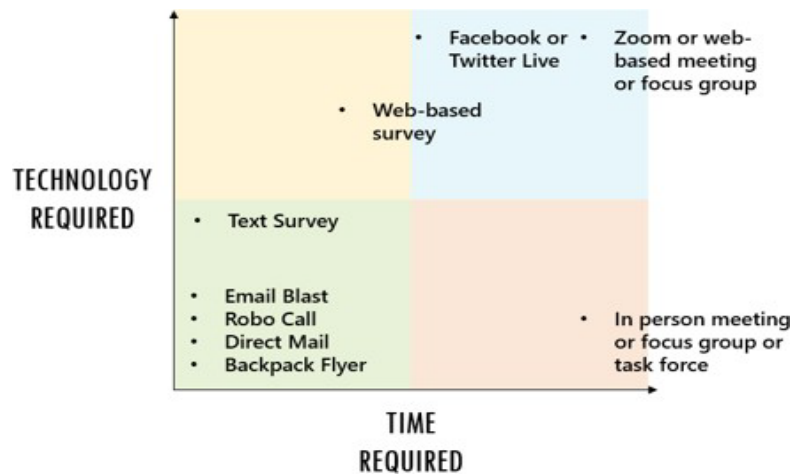


GUIDED ACTIVITY: Develop a communication strategy for your vision statement

In Module 1, you began drafting your engagement vision statement. Now, you'll develop a strategy to share that statement with families, caregivers, and community partners. This exercise is designed to incorporate 360-degree communication on a micro level to become familiar with the process.

1. **Seek feedback:** Identify engaged families, caregivers, and community members and set up focus groups, surveys, and interviews to collect input on how to share the school's engagement plan.

- Who will you contact?
- Do those most affected by your vision currently have a chance to weigh in?
- Are they currently represented at the decision-making table?
- How could you prioritize intentional culture and diversity to ensure you are hearing from voices who are missing?
- How will you ensure that you have a variety of channels for folks to participate across the continuum of time and tech described in the image below?



2. **Listen and learn:** Listen to learn. Review and analyze the feedback with curiosity. Share trends as a team. Group your data to formulate a set of requirements and goals that must be met to be sure that family, caregiver, and community needs and preferences for communication are met.

- What trends did you uncover?
- How do those trends translate to strategic goals?

3. **Take action:** Turn your goals into direct action.

4. **Share back:** After implementing your goals, share with families, caregivers, and community partners who provided feedback. Explain how you incorporated their feedback and the results.

5. **Cultivate strong relationships and build trust:** Engaging in 360-degree communication isn't just about executing a great plan. By putting families, caregivers, and community partners in the spotlight, the school demonstrates its motivations and intentions. You're communicating that you understand what the community wants and are prioritizing their needs. This approach builds trust and leads to higher engagement.



Module 3 Removing Barriers and Building Bridges

Objectives

- Identify strategies to diagnose barriers impacting student, family, and community engagement
- Identify ways to create a tiered approach to engagement

Big Ideas:

- The **first step** to reducing barriers to family and community engagement is to understand the obstacles and challenges so that a school's own biases and misconceptions do not cause it to misidentify barriers, and thus misidentify the most impactful solutions.
- **Step 2** - Review the data and identify high priority groups to engage families in need of additional outreach and support.
- **Step 3** - Craft engagement strategies using a tiered approach: Tier 1: inform; Tier 2: involve; and Tier 3: engage.
- **Step 4** - Reflect, learn, and apply. After implementing engagement strategies, step back and take stock of what went well and what could be improved.

Self-Assess:

How does your school assess barriers to engagement?

- Does your school have methods to collect data from families and caregivers? From community organizations?
- Is the data representative of the full population?
- Does the data authentically capture barriers to engagement?
- Does your school use the data to diagnose obstacles, and create targeted plans for reducing and removing them?



GUIDED ACTIVITY:

Develop a tiered engagement strategy to reach all families and community partners.

Map out the methods and timeline you'll use to collect data from families, caregivers, and community partners.

	Method of Data Collection (ex. Text surveys, focus groups, Q&A)	Timeline for Data Collection
Families/Caregivers		
Community Partners		

What trends emerged from the data?

- What obstacles do families and caregivers face to school engagement?
- What obstacles do community partners face to school engagement?
- What are the high priority subgroups?

Then, begin to build out tiers of engagement specific to your school.



Tier	Explanation	School Plan (In response to trends from data)
Tier 3: Engage	Tier 3 is about engagement in school governance. It's a shift from involvement to engagement with shared decision making and can include practices such as families, caregivers, and community partners: • Helping to set and monitor budget priorities or • Evaluating impact	
Tier 2: Involve	In Tier 2, the emphasis is on involvement to help the school improve. For example, the school can create opportunities for families, caregivers and community partners to: • Engage in learning and volunteering • Provide opportunities to offer input on school policy and practice and feedback for school staff	
Tier 1: Inform	Tier 1 is a baseline information stage. This Tier can include activities like: • Creating a welcoming school environment • Back-to-school nights • Family/caregiver workshops • School newsletters • Community fairs	



Module 4 Increasing Agency of Stakeholders and Integrating with the Academic Vision (Part 1)

Objectives

- Understand key ideas of TNTP's The Opportunity Myth, and make connections to authentic family and community engagement
- Investigate organizations that have shifted their approaches to sharing students' academic progress with families, caregivers, and the community

Big Idea:

Families, caregivers, and students often have an inaccurate picture of the progress they are making towards their goals. Providing readily accessible, easily digestible, and actionable data can support more authentic engagement in schools.

Self-Assess:

- Do families and caregivers have access to data in real-time and is it relevant to their unique context? How do you know?
- Is the data easily accessed? Is it presented in a manner that diverse families and caregivers in your school community can understand and act on it? How do you know?
- Does the data facilitate connections to actionable tools that can be used outside of the classroom? How do you know?

Warm-Up Activity

Reflect on a key learning or celebration in service of enlisting families and caregivers as co-decision makers. What was it? What made your approach successful?

Communicating Academic Progress

YES Prep Family Portal App

Video Link: [Announcing the YES Prep Family Portal Mobile App](#)

- How could this be useful for helping students, families, and caregivers have a correct picture of student progress?
- How could something like this be used to empower students, families, and caregivers to realize their aspirations?

Metro Nashville Data Chats:

Video Link: [Data Chats](#)

- How could you more authentically involve students, families, and caregivers using data chats?



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GUIDED ACTIVITY: Revise your school's engagement vision statement.

As a leadership team, revisit your engagement vision statement, keeping in mind the importance of communicating academic progress to students, families, and caregivers. Your school will likely have an engagement plan and vision statement already. In that case, this exercise is an opportunity to revise it and make it even more specific regarding communicating academic progress.

GUIDED ACTIVITY: Communication Plan

Date/Frequency	Purpose of Communication	Modality of Communication	Alternatives to Include More Stakeholders	Staff Member Responsible for Communication



Module 5 Increasing Agency of Stakeholders and Integrating with the Academic Vision (Part 2)

Objectives

- Commit to ways to share data with students, families, caregivers, and community partners

Big Ideas:

- Data is a powerful tool to build agency with families, caregivers, and community partners.
- Data is not limited to test scores or academic statistics. Schools can share data to highlight successes to stakeholders, to identify growth opportunities, and to equip them with tools to share in the school's decision making.
- When your school shares data, be sure stakeholders can find it, use it, and connect it.

Find It:

- Families, caregivers, and community partners have **access** to data in real-time
- Data is easily accessed by all families, caregivers, and community partners

Use It:

- Data is easy to **understand** (*lacking jargon, using colors, icons, etc.*)
- Data is available in all languages spoken at home
- Data includes targets, growth, and comparison groups
- Data references academic pathways (*i.e. on- or off-track for meeting various post-secondary requirements*)

Connect It:

- Data is linked to **actionable** tools that can be used at home or within the
- community organization
- The data is information that informs decision making

Warm-Up Activity

- Are you actively discussing data with families, caregivers, and community ensuring it is understandable? Are you partnering with community organizations to address any gaps in support?
- How does your level of data sharing affect stakeholders' decision-making?
- If you are asking families and communities to be partners in reaching the school's goals, what tools have you shared for their assessment of where the school is, any growth made, and areas that need more support?



GUIDED ACTIVITY: How Can Data Promote Engagement Among Stakeholders?

Brainstorm some opportunities for innovation for innovative data-sharing practices that would promote agency amongst students, families, caregivers, and community partners. Be sure to consider the full spectrum of engagement.

DATA

What data can you share with stakeholders? *Ex: Attendance*

FIND IT

How will stakeholders access this information? *Ex: Family/caregiver, dashboard, updated monthly; include updates in current communications*

USE IT

How will you make the data useful (easy to understand) to your diverse group of stakeholders? *Show overall average daily attendance (ADA) with definition of ADA; show line graph with ADA over course of the year*

CONNECT IT

How will the school connect the information to actionable items or decisions? What essential question(s) might the data answer? *When in the school year is our ADA highest? When is it lowest? Explain how this connects to our school budget and staffing process.*

Next Steps

Have a brief conversation with one of your stakeholders (colleague, parent, caregiver, community member), asking them to review a data set used in your work and share their perspective. Does their thinking align with yours? What strengths do they highlight? What are areas for improvement?



Module 6 Improving Communication Structures

Objectives

- Explore various ways of communicating with families, caregivers, and the community, with a specific focus on selecting the right medium for the message and ensuring two-way communication channels are in place.
- Reflect on past communication strategies and discuss best practices for sharing fluid and/or difficult information.
- Explore new engagement strategies to connect with families, caregivers, and the community.

Big Ideas:

- To improve communication, we must critically evaluate the mediums we use to communicate.
- Considering the dimensions of diversity in the groups we serve can improve effectiveness of communication.

Self-Assess:

Generate a list of communication channels your district and/or school often uses and why.

Channel	Audience	Frequency of Use	Reason for Use	Last Communication
<i>Ex. Website</i>	<i>Parents, Community</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Organizing information, updates</i>	<i>Schedule update</i>



Effective Communication “Dos” and “Don’ts”

Strategies to Implement	Strategies to Avoid
Consistency	Punitive language
Timeliness	“Ed speak”
Action-oriented	Bias and Assumption
	Waiting until the end

GUIDED ACTIVITY

Consider the dimensions of diversity in the table below. How might different groups be experiencing your communication efforts? Create a list of stakeholders who haven’t engaged with your outreach efforts the past few months. Are these stakeholders who...

Relational - Family status - Personal behavior - Parental - Habits - Marital - Generation - Recreation - Partner	Cognitive - Thinking - Learning - Interpersonal - Communication - Introvert - Extrovert - IQ - EQ	Occupational - Occupation - Work experience - Department - Industry - Role/Function - Tenure - Affiliation - Status/Level
Physical - Age - Gender Identity - Race - Physical Abilities - Sexual Orientation - Mental Abilities - Appearance	Societal - Economic - Political - Social - Language - Origin - Education - Geographical - Social Class	Values - Beliefs - Practices - Convictions - Attitudes - Personality - Religion - Spirituality - Culture

- Have limited access to resources and/or technology?
- Have competing priorities or family obligations?
- Are not sure how or who to call?
- Have language barriers?
- What are the key dimensions of the group of families or students in focus?

Next Steps

Use your learning from this module to:

1. Revise your Caregiver and Community communication plan
2. Communicate plans related to the vision setting process at your school
3. Share your plan with at least one caregiver/parent in your school for feedback
4. Revise your draft family and community engagement vision statement



Module 7 Intentional Culture and Diversity Inclusivity

Objectives

- Reflect on how identity and lived experiences can impact interactions with students, families, caregivers, and the community.
- Identify how implicit and explicit biases influence our ability to effectively engage all stakeholders.
- Apply knowledge of identity, perceptions, and biases to discuss a case study.

Big Ideas:

- Everyone has bias and unconscious bias. However, to authentically engage families, caregivers, and the community, we have to intentionally build and maintain awareness of these biases.
- As leaders, it is important to make time for strategic equity pauses to identify and address blind spots due to unconscious bias.

Warm-Up:

- Consider what caregivers, families and community members from our listening tour see as challenges and opportunities. What are the challenges and opportunities at your school?
- What did you hear in Alfonso López's reflections that resonates with your personal and professional experience?

Strategic Equity Pause Questions:

- As a school community, have you been hearing from all families, caregivers, and community members? Who is missing? Based on this, who still needs to be included in the process of creating your school-wide vision for family and community engagement?
- What blind spots – behaviors that you might not be aware of – are contributing to who is and isn't being heard? Because we may not be aware of our blind spots, this might be a great opportunity to reach out to a family member, caregiver, or community member for their feedback.
- Does your draft vision for family, caregiver, and community engagement perpetuate biases or unconscious biases? If so, how can you revise your draft to, for example, explicitly recognize the many ways that families, caregivers, and community members support their children's education?
- Re-read your draft vision for family, caregiver, and community engagement perpetuate biases or unconscious biases? Does it perpetuate biases or unconscious biases? If so, how can you revise your draft to, for example, recognize the many ways that families, caregivers, and community members support their children's education?
- Where else in your practice or school-wide systems can you integrate strategic equity pauses?



Module 8 Embedded Engagement Part 1: Leveraging all staff in authentic family engagement

Objectives

- Explore the unique role staff and teachers play in engagement efforts and how each of these roles can collaborate effectively.
- Identify opportunities to establish authentic engagement as a priority across all departments.

Big Ideas:

- Prioritizing family engagement and making it sustainable is the work of the entire school, not just leadership or the designated family engagement coordinator.
- Schools can embed engagement into goals, meetings, and protocols so that engagement becomes routine and predictable and a living and breathing part of the structure of the school.

Warm-Up:

- How would you describe the unique role of the principal, teachers, and school-wide support staff? each group within your district?
- What does collaboration between the three look like in the best case?
- What does it look like when it is not happening?



Six Connections to Build Embedded Family Engagement

Connection	Sample Actions
1. Connect family engagement to schoolwide goals.	• Set explicit and differentiated engagement goals for all staff. • Consider different goals for teachers, front office staff, counselors, security, etc.
2. Connect family engagement to staff roles and responsibilities.	• Onboard staff to the schoolwide family engagement approach. • Include engagement on performance plans.
3. Connect family engagement to schoolwide systems and structures.	• Name families and caregivers as critical partners to student success in handbooks, websites, master calendars, and other external facing communications.
	• Allow family engagement dialogue in routine structures like staff meetings, professional development, board meetings and data reflections.
4. Connect family engagement to staff beliefs and biases.	• Allow time as a staff to discuss new engagement resources to staff and to reflect on bias and beliefs and build skills around family engagement.
5. Connect family engagement to data-informed priorities.	• Use engagement data from families and staff to inform school wide decisions and ensure that staff know how to access the data to inform their action steps.
6. Connect family engagement to broad but dedicated leadership.	• Delegate engagement leadership to multiple staff roles; it cannot and should not be a single person's job. • Demonstrate that engagement is prioritized through staffing, planning, and budgeting.



GUIDED ACTIVITY

Complete the internal stakeholder mapping below, keeping in mind the six connections of embedded engagement. What skill building would you need to take place to deepen collaboration amongst various staff roles? What steps can you take to help strengthen internal partnerships to better serve families and collaborate with the community?

	How often do we Partner?	How have we worked together in the past?	How aware are they of our family and engagement efforts?	How can they make family engagement stronger?	What skill building needs to take place?	Who in my network can help me strengthen this partnership?
Finance						
Operations (transportation, food, facilities)						
Academics/ Curriculum						
Early Childhood						
After school/ extracurricular						
Counseling						
Teachers						

- Re-read your draft vision for family, caregiver, and community engagement. Does it include a whole-staff commitment? If not, how can you revise your draft to reflect a philosophy that engagement is routine, predictable, and embedded in the school's life and culture?



Module 9 Embedded Engagement Part 2: Leveraging all staff in authentic community engagement

Objectives

- Explore the unique role staff and teachers play in engagement efforts and how each of these roles can collaborate effectively.
- Identify opportunities to establish authentic engagement as a priority across all departments.

Six Connections to Build Embedded Family Engagement

Big Idea:

- To get the most for students, school staff at all levels need to shift from isolated community engagement efforts to integrating engagement with the community into planning efforts at all levels in the school.

Connection	Sample Actions
Connect community engagement to schoolwide goals.	Seek out community-based organizations and community leaders whose priorities align with schoolwide goals. Invite community organizations to provide input on school-wide goals.
Connect community engagement to staff roles and responsibilities.	Leverage staff roles on various committees by including community-based organization and volunteer liaison roles within teams.
Connect community engagement to schoolwide systems and structures.	Explicitly name community-based organizations as critical partners to student success in handbooks, website, master calendar, and other external facing communication. Create regular space in school-wide structures like staff meetings, professional development, and school committees for community organizations to engage in the work of the school. Dedicate on-campus space for community organizations to operate within (ensuring proper protocols like background checks, etc. are in place).
Connect community engagement to staff beliefs and biases	Give voice to community-based organizations and community members in PTA and staff meetings. Facilitate productive discussions on differences in opinions and priorities in school-based staff and the community.



Connect community engagement to data-informed priorities.	Dedicate data analysis and action planning time with school staff and community-based organizations, focused on identifying areas for collaboration, and tracking progress towards goals.
Connect community engagement to broad but dedicated leadership.	Delegate engagement leadership to multiple staff roles. Leverage specialists in roles that connect to community organizations and priorities, like food service, the arts, coaches, school counselors and psychologists, etc. Explicitly allocate funds to support the work of local community-based organizations in meeting the needs of the school community.

GUIDED ACTIVITY

Revise the internal stakeholder mapping you did in Module 8, with the principles for engaging community-based organizations and individuals in mind. What structures and supports would need to be in place to deepen collaboration between various staff roles and community-based organizations? What steps can you take to help strengthen partnerships to better serve families? Then revise your vision statement to reflect a whole school culture of embedded engagement with the community.



	How often do we Partner?	How have we worked together in the past?	How aware are they of our family and engagement efforts?	How can they make family engagement stronger?	What skill building needs to take place?	Who in my network can help me strengthen this partnership?
Finance						
Operations (transportation, food, facilities)						
Academics/ Curriculum						
Early Childhood						
After school/ extracurricular						
Counseling						
Teachers						

- Re-read your draft vision for family, caregiver, and community engagement. Does it include a whole-staff commitment? If not, how can you revise your draft to reflect a philosophy that engagement is routine, predictable, and embedded in the school's life and culture?



Module 10 Long Term and Sustained Authentic Engagement: Planning Ahead

Objectives

- Review key takeaways from previous sessions.
- Identify authentic engagement practices in a sample Family and Community Engagement Plan.
- Reimagine a process, piece of work, or event with authentic engagement practice.

Warm-Up:

- What learning are you taking away from the previous nine modules?
- What additional learnings do you want to capture?

Guided Activity

Document link: [Hartford Public Schools: Engaging Families and Community Partners for Equity and Excellence](#)

- With your team, pause and read this plan, noting any strong practices that you'd like to consider for your family and community engagement vision statement or your school's practice.
- With your team, plan to gather families, caregivers, and community members to discuss, revise, and enact your draft vision statement for family and community engagement. A sample protocol for your discussion and sample action plan for enacting your vision is below.

Action	Person Responsible	Timeline



Sample protocol for your discussion:

1. **10 minutes:** Individually, list non-negotiables for family and community engagement at your school on post-it notes. Write each non-negotiable in the form of a concise present-tense statement such as "At X school, families, caregivers, and community partners are invited to share decision-making as full members of key committees", "Data is accessible to families, caregivers, and community partners, and they know how to interpret and act on it," or "Barriers to engagement are identified and removed." Write one statement per Padlet note.
2. **20 minutes:** As a team, review the statements, grouping similar statements together. Draft one present-tense statement that best summarizes each group.
3. **10 minutes:** Identify any non-negotiables that are missing and as a team, draft a present-tense statement for each one.
4. **Post-discussion:**
 - As a team, use the statements you collected from the discussion to revise your draft vision statement.
 - Solicit feedback on the statement from other families, caregivers, community partners, and students. As needed, revise it and solicit additional feedback. Questions might include: *What is clear? What is unclear? What is missing? Do you believe in this vision?*
 - When complete, review and fine-tune your statement. Share the final statement with your school community and begin creating an action plan to ensure its implementation.

Sample action plan template:

Vision:

Priority #1:
Goal:
Measures of success and benchmarks:
Strategy #1: <i>Time, tools, and support:</i>
Strategy #2: <i>Time, tools, and support:</i>



Strategy #4:

Strategy #3:

Time, tools, and support:

Strategy #4:

Time, tools, and support:

Priority #2:

Goal:

Measures of success and benchmarks:

Strategy #1:

Time, tools, and support:

Strategy #2:

Time, tools, and support:

Strategy #3:

Time, tools, and support:

Strategy #4:

Time, tools, and support: