



LIVE UNITED

THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS TOOLKIT:

Planning and implementing an initiative to support the pathway to graduation for at-risk students

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of a tool this complex requires the hard work and contributions of a number of collaborators. Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), AT&T, and United Way Worldwide supported this work in many ways.

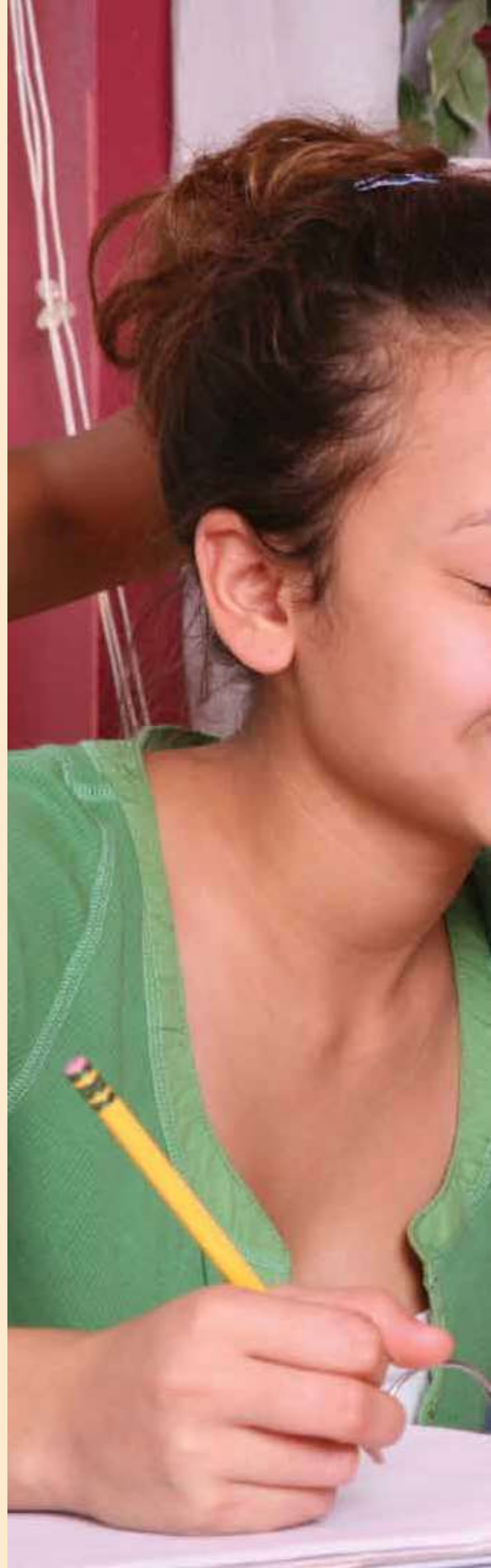
HFRP's Dr. Heather Weiss, Dr. M. Elena Lopez, Heidi Rosenberg, Evelyn Brosi, and Diana Lee were the primary authors of this toolkit. Erin Harris and Priscilla Little participated in the evaluation of the *Family Engagement for High School Success* initiative on which this toolkit relied for documentation. Carly Bourne led the editorial process at HFRP, and the toolkit has benefited greatly from her input and expertise. We are also appreciative of Dr. Nancy Hill of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who provided expert guidance.

AT&T and United Way Worldwide provided funding for the development of this toolkit. Samantha Wigand and Meg Plantz at United Way Worldwide provided invaluable guidance and feedback that strengthened every aspect of this project. Mariana Florit designed the toolkit to make it easily useable. A special thanks to Alison Fisher, Sharon Hall, Lisa Brodsky and Jennifer Enderlin of AT&T, as well as Sandy Kress and Beth Ann Bryan of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, LLC for their partnership and guidance on this project.

We would like to thank the 15 local United Ways that were part of the *Family Engagement for High School Success* initiative: United Way of Greater Lima (OH); United Way of North Central Florida (Gainesville, FL); United Way of the Capital Area (Jackson, MS); United Way of Pitt County (Greenville, NC); United Way of Lake County (Gurnee, IL); United Way of Southern Nevada (Las Vegas, NV); United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (Reno, NV); United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (TX); United Way of the Bay Area (San Francisco, CA); United Way of Southeast Missouri (Cape Girardeau, MO); United Way of Southern Cameron County (Brownsville, TX); United Way of York County (York, PA); United Way of Metropolitan Nashville (TN); United Way of Forsyth County (Winston-Salem, NC); and United Way of Broward County (Fort Lauderdale, FL). Their dedication to families and commitment to developing and carrying out comprehensive family engagement strategies to promote high school graduation provided the inspiration for this toolkit. Their experiences and the lessons they shared about the planning and implementation processes provide the basis for the guidance contained within.

We also thank Angela Davis of the American Association of School Administrators; Leslie Smith of the Boys and Girls Club of America; Patti Aldaz-Carrasco and Louis Moser of Communities in Schools; Sharon Deich of Cross & Jofthus; Maame Ameyaw, Kevin Foster, Gary Goosman, Lori Milstein, S. Kwesi Rollin and Shital Shah of the Institute for Educational Leadership; Barbara Taveras and Sugeni Perez-Sadler of New Visions for Public Schools; and Sheri Johnson and Bryce Jacobs of the National Parent Teacher Association; for their contributions as external reviewers of initial proposals and the final toolkit. They enabled us to take into consideration and reconcile the different perspectives of schools and community-based organizations in partnering on a joint initiative.

**Harvard Family Research Project
United Way Worldwide**



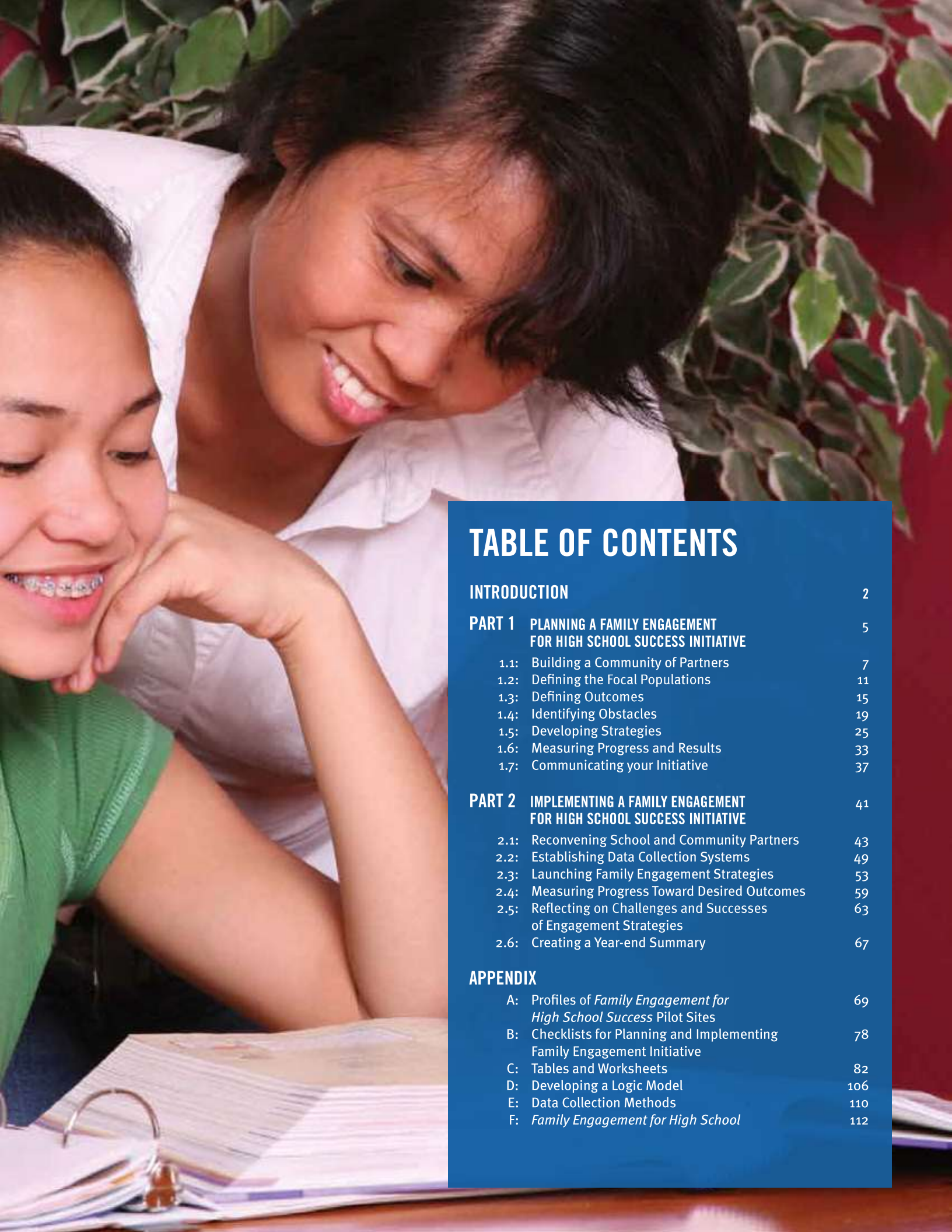


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
PART 1 PLANNING A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS INITIATIVE	5
1.1: Building a Community of Partners	7
1.2: Defining the Focal Populations	11
1.3: Defining Outcomes	15
1.4: Identifying Obstacles	19
1.5: Developing Strategies	25
1.6: Measuring Progress and Results	33
1.7: Communicating your Initiative	37
PART 2 IMPLEMENTING A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS INITIATIVE	41
2.1: Reconvening School and Community Partners	43
2.2: Establishing Data Collection Systems	49
2.3: Launching Family Engagement Strategies	53
2.4: Measuring Progress Toward Desired Outcomes	59
2.5: Reflecting on Challenges and Successes of Engagement Strategies	63
2.6: Creating a Year-end Summary	67
APPENDIX	
A: Profiles of <i>Family Engagement for High School Success</i> Pilot Sites	69
B: Checklists for Planning and Implementing Family Engagement Initiative	78
C: Tables and Worksheets	82
D: Developing a Logic Model	106
E: Data Collection Methods	110
F: <i>Family Engagement for High School</i>	112



INTRODUCTION

One-fourth of all ninth graders in the United States will not graduate from high school within four years,¹ despite the fact that the 21st Century workplace requires more advanced knowledge and skills than ever before. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive strategy to keep teens in school and ensure that they graduate prepared for the future, AT&T awarded United Way Worldwide a contribution to start a new initiative – Family Engagement for High School Success (FEHS). This AT&T-supported initiative offered an invaluable opportunity to pioneer strategies for bringing families, school leaders, community partners, and students together to build a network of supports to keep students on the path to high school graduation, college or advanced training, and successful lives beyond.

Through this initiative, United Way Worldwide supported 15 local United Way pilot sites in a planning process through which stakeholders worked together to create action plans to guide their initiatives' implementation. The planning process adopted an outcome-focused approach with the aim of designing family engagement strategies that would remove obstacles and build stronger connections between families and schools.

The process engaged school and community partners to ensure they were invested in the initiative, and empowered parents and students to take an active role in planning so that the strategies would address families' actual wants and needs. From this careful planning process the United Way pilot sites and their community partners developed implementation plans with strong potential for success.

Culled from the lessons learned throughout this process, the Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit is designed to help those seeking to develop an informed and targeted family engagement project for high school students. It is important to note that this toolkit is based on an initiative that deliberately focused on improving academic outcomes for students at high risk of not graduating from high school. While not designed to provide guidance for the development of general family engagement strategies, the planning and implementation principles contained in the toolkit can be applied to a wide range of family engagement initiatives that focus on a broader range of student groups. It should also be noted that use of the toolkit is best suited for larger community organizations such as local

¹ Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Moore, L., & Horning Fox, J. (2010). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenges in ending the high school dropout epidemic*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at John Hopkins University, & America's Promise Alliance.

United Ways, which have longstanding community connections and resources that facilitate the start-up of initiatives such as the ones profiled here. However, schools and smaller non-profits will find the planning and implementation guidance useful as they look to connect with other organizations that can contribute resources to the development of a comprehensive family engagement initiative.

The toolkit is comprised of two parts: Part I focuses on the comprehensive planning that goes into the development of a family engagement initiative, and Part II focuses on the early implementation process.

BENEFITS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Research shows that family engagement in education is directly related to a range of benefits for students, including improved school readiness, higher academic achievement, better social skills and behavior, and increased likelihood of high school graduation. In particular, students from low-income families, who often live in under-resourced areas, benefit when an array of integrated school and community supports are available to help families support their children's learning and development from birth to young adulthood. Effective family engagement has the following characteristics:

- First, effective family engagement is a shared responsibility – this means that schools and other community organizations are committed to engaging families in meaningful ways and families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.
- Second, family engagement is continuous throughout a child's life and entails enduring commitment yet changing parental roles as children mature into young adulthood.
- Third, effective family engagement spans across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn – at home, in school, in afterschool and summer programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

These characteristics mean that the family is involved in children's learning in a variety of settings – not just in school – and reflect the many different ways in which families, schools, and communities engage with and support one another.

At the moment, however, very few communities are using research-informed practices to successfully engage the families of students at risk of not completing high school. Most communities also lack a comprehensive strategy to guide efforts, and fail to target families most in need or to use available resources efficiently. Instead, communities tend to rely on disconnected approaches to family engagement, with few utilizing local data to determine why students are dropping out or why families are not engaging. Rarely are students and families involved in developing programs and strategies, despite the fact the research indicates that having parents and students participate in the planning and implementation of family engagement efforts increases the likelihood that schools and communities will develop strong strategies and that families will become meaningfully engaged in student success.

To truly have an impact on high school success, family engagement efforts need to focus on student outcomes and become a core part of school and community efforts promoting graduation and college- and career-readiness. Successful family engagement efforts also need to be multi-faceted – engaging students, families, and communities in an inclusive process; adapting to the social and cultural contexts of families; and leveraging community resources.

An effective Family Engagement for High School Success initiative should possess a set of guiding principles:

- Family engagement is fully integrated into dropout prevention and high school graduation efforts.
- Family engagement is shared and co-constructed, necessitating the participation of students and families in designing family engagement strategies.
- Communities are committed to a data-driven process and to evaluation for learning and accountability.
- Schools and communities are working to address the obstacles to family engagement – including those related to social disadvantage and cultural differences – and providing meaningful opportunities for families to take action.



PART 1

Planning a Family Engagement for High School Success Initiative

To have an impact, a planning process should provide focus, emphasize the use of local data, align strategies with desired outcomes, and engage multiple partners (each of whom will play an active role). It is through this process that families, schools, and students come to understand and remove the obstacles to family engagement, families are connected to knowledge and resources, parent-to-parent relationships are built, and communities are engaged to take responsibility for student success. Effective planning by communities results in a network of strategies that have much greater potential to change the lives of high school students – putting them on the path to graduation and careers, and, more importantly, helping them stay on that path. Successful planning also enables communities to rethink and rework relationships, not only between schools and families, but also between community organizations that might otherwise operate independent of schools and of each other.

An effective planning process reflects the following principles:

- Base decisions on facts (using local data when available).
- Engage the right people for the purpose at hand.
- Be specific about desired outcomes.
- Uncover underlying issues.
- Aim for lasting community change.
- Measure, learn, improve, communicate.

Part 1 of this toolkit focuses on planning, and is based on the experiences of 15 local United Way pilot sites who participated in a yearlong planning process as part of the AT&T-supported *Family Engagement for High School Success (FEHS)* initiative.² It will help you think carefully about how to utilize the essential components of a successful family engagement initiative within your own strategies, ensuring that they are based on relevant data and truly address the needs of the students and families you seek to serve.

The planning process illustrated in this toolkit is outcome-focused to create a successful and targeted family engagement implementation plan. The process is also organic: As you learn more at later stages of planning, you may find that you need to go back and revise earlier work. Thus, while the toolkit is divided into sections that each focus on a specific part of the planning or implementation phases, these steps do not occur in a fixed sequence. Rather, they represent critical components of planning and implementation, and each section informs the others; you will find yourself circling back to previous sections and moving between various parts of the process as needed.

² To learn more about the FEHS pilot sites, see the site profiles in Appendix A.



PART 1 Outline

Each section of Part 1 includes case examples from the FEHS pilot sites to illustrate how that component of the planning process looks in practice. The seven major components of the planning process, with the central questions that guide each section, are:

SECTION 1.1: Building a Community of Partners

- What constitutes inclusive and strategic partnerships between students, families, schools, and communities?

SECTION 1.2: Defining the Focal Populations

- How do you select the risk factors that will determine which populations to serve?
- What data will you use to guide your decisions?

SECTION 1.3: Defining Outcomes

- How do you determine the desired outcomes for your focal populations?

SECTION 1.4: Identifying Obstacles

- How do you uncover the obstacles to family engagement that are currently preventing families from reaching their desired outcomes?

SECTION 1.5: Developing Strategies

- How do you design strategies that help overcome these obstacles to family engagement?

SECTION 1.6: Measuring Progress and Results

- How do you select indicators of success to help you determine whether your strategies are effective?
- Who will collect and analyze these data?

SECTION 1.7: Communicating Your Initiative

- How do you create a coherent summary of your initiative to communicate your plan to others?

In Appendix B you will find a checklist for each section of the planning phase to help guide you through the process.

SECTION 1.1: Building a Community of Partners

Families, schools, and community organizations all contribute to student achievement, and the best results occur when all three parties work together in a mutually collaborative partnership. When that happens, students have an extensive support network with multiple parties engaged in their success, ensuring students have the guidance and resources they need to stay on the pathway to graduation, college or advanced training, and beyond.

In this stage, you will identify and begin to work with a community of partners who have a shared stake in the goals of your project, and you will establish clear roles and responsibilities for each partner.

WHAT YOU DO

- Choose specific partners within the community who share a common goal.
- Foster a solid relationship with schools and/or the school district.
- Include relevant community organizations.
- Incorporate student, family, and community partner voices in the planning process.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for all partners.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- School and community resources – such as experience, expertise, connections, services, and funding – to support the project.
- Valuable insights from families and students.
- Collective ownership for the project.

An inclusive partnership is one that involves families, schools, students, and community leaders in the planning process. This encourages all partners to become invested in and take ownership of their contribution to the initiative. It also increases the likelihood of developing a high-quality, effective implementation plan. In a successful partnership, partners have shared aspirations and specific desired outcomes, a willingness to be flexible as an initiative evolves and new learning takes place, and a commitment to sharing resources, such as personnel, time, money, meeting space, or others. Forming strategic alliances with various organizations and people in the community can result in stronger implementation plans and increase the likelihood of producing good results.

The FEHS initiative in York, PA, targets 100 ninth grade students at risk of dropping out of high school because of truancy and other risk factors. To reduce the number of dropouts, United Way of York County built on the foundation of a pre-existing community-wide dropout prevention program. The planning process included families and school personnel as well as the executive directors of three major community service organizations, a judge who created a county truancy prevention initiative, the director of county social services, and community religious leaders. These community partners were chosen based on the number of students and families they already served, the success and variety of their programs and services, the work they were already doing on truancy and dropout prevention, the resources they could bring to the table, and the connections they had with families who may not have been connected to other resources in the community.

In Las Vegas, NV, United Way of Southern Nevada partnered with the Clark County School District to identify five high schools to participate in the project. These schools were selected based on the school leadership's level of commitment to the project, and level of need for improving graduation rates. Also important in the selection criteria was the school's willingness to collaborate with other schools and community funders and partners. This was essential to ensure sustainability of project results over time.

CHOOSE SPECIFIC PARTNERS THAT SHARE A COMMON GOAL.

A strong planning process begins with a group of people invested in a common goal – such as increasing high school graduation rates or preparing students for college and a career – coming together to determine how they will achieve it. The partners you choose will become members of your planning team and participate in the planning process. Members of a planning team study a problem and use a combination of information from research studies, local data, and stakeholder input, to inform their planning discussions. The local data should go beyond just statistics to reveal more nuanced details about the school and community context that will affect the design of the initiative. The team uses all of this information to identify the students and families to be served, discover obstacles to success, and determine the outcomes it commits to achieve over a particular period of time. Team members also help identify how each partner can contribute to the initiative and the ways to measure progress along the way.

It is important not to fall into the common trap of simply partnering with organizations with whom you have a long-standing history of partnership, but who do not necessarily have the expertise or resources needed to serve the purpose of your initiative. Doing this can divert time and energy away from forming more strategic partnerships that focus on the specific outcomes you wish to achieve. Be sure to research other organizations in the community and consult with potential partners to identify and invite those who have expertise and capacity needed to help serve your targeted population – families of students at high risk of not graduating from high school. Also consider partners who can help mobilize needed resources, such as people, technology, or money.

Table 1.1 in Appendix C can help guide you through the process of choosing the right partners for your initiative.

FOSTER A SOLID RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS AND/OR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

One critically important partner to consider in this process is the school district or school(s) that the students you want to serve attend. (See Section 1.2 for more about determining your focal population.) Teachers, administrators, and other school staff often have valuable background information on the students who are at risk of not graduating on time, and their insights will help strengthen your understanding of the most salient risk factors that affect graduation rates. Take time to build a relationship with the school leadership and show how your work with families aligns with school goals. Identify the key personnel in the school who work to integrate family and community engagement in their work, and then engage them in the planning process. Many of your family engagement strategies will be based out of the school(s) and/or involve school staff, which makes it important that you cultivate respectful and productive partnerships with the schools to ensure buy-in and elicit the staff's enthusiastic cooperation for your initiative.

INCLUDE RELEVANT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

United Ways have a wide network of relationships and partnerships that can be leveraged for family engagement in students' high school success. Identifying appropriate community resources is a crucial part of developing a comprehensive approach to family engagement. These community members and agencies can help broaden the scope of your initiative by providing extensive communication channels for outreach and information dissemination, and can also help provide information on the issues that students and families face that impact school achievement.

INCORPORATE STUDENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNER VOICES IN PLANNING.

Plan from the beginning to engage families and students in your work. As you identify your focal student population and focal families (discussed in Section 1.2), you can begin to engage them through listening sessions, interviews, focus groups, surveys, roundtable discussions, and other means to inform your planning process. They will provide valuable information – such as what they see as the biggest obstacles to family engagement in education – and can help come up with insights or suggestions about various ways to address obstacles that may not be immediately apparent from a service provider's perspective.

When preparing for family and student participation in planning, remember that some obstacles to participation can stem from parents' or students' prior negative experiences with schools – being uncomfortable in a school setting can dissuade students and parents from participating in the planning process if many of the meetings are school-based. In order to be as inclusive as possible, consider such details as the location of meetings (for example, consider non-school meeting spaces in the community), the layout of chairs in a room, the ratio and seating locations of school staff vs. community members, etc. Working with families and students to address some of these potential meeting-site barriers is one way to engage families and students in the planning process.

Table 1.2 in Appendix C provides a few ideas about how to engage students and families. It provides specific examples to help you develop targeted ideas for the types of feedback to seek from families and students, as well as specific methods you can use to solicit this input.

In San Francisco, CA, United Way of the Bay Area's FEHS initiative established strong partnerships with the Beacon Schools program and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). This pilot site chose the Beacon program because it already offered a rich range of programs for students and families at the project high school, which the United Way planned to build on. GEAR UP, meanwhile, provided college and career education and support for 9th- and 10th-grade students and parents, and trained parent liaisons to deliver college readiness information to families, all of which the pilot site could leverage to carry out the initiative's family engagement activities.

In Gurnee, IL, the FEHS initiative at United Way of Lake County involved over 140 parents, students, educators, and community leaders in their initial planning to increase family involvement and academic success for their students. Through focus groups, interviews, and surveys with the families themselves, the pilot site discovered that some of the biggest obstacles to families' engagement in their children's education were a lack of information regarding high school graduation requirements, confusion about the best ways to support their teens' academic progress through high school, and in many cases, a significant language barrier that led to parents having to rely heavily upon their children as information brokers.

TIP: You should also plan to talk to community leaders about their perspectives on how best to encourage family and student participation in your initiative. Keep in mind that the goal is not to solve all of your community's complex problems (e.g., poverty, race relations), but rather to gain useful insights as to how these and other issues affect some of your targeted population, and to collectively brainstorm about significant ways in which you can start to address the obstacles to family engagement.

TIP: Consider these other factors as you put together planning meetings:

Are all stakeholders participating in the same meeting? If there are separate meetings, consider carefully which stakeholders attend which meetings, why they are separate, and how meeting content and conclusions will be communicated across groups.

Who will be responsible for monitoring the work plan that details action items and deadlines for progress to be reported back at future meetings?

ESTABLISH CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ALL PARTNERS.

A strong planning process includes clear communication and concrete roles and responsibilities agreed upon by all partners involved. Initial planning steps should include:

- Scheduling planning meetings with all community partners, including family and student representation if possible, to set out a detailed plan with timelines and a clear sense of who will be responsible for doing what, how they intend to do it, and when the information will be shared with the larger group.
- Identifying key contact people for each partner organization and maintaining a system for clear, consistent communication.
- Allowing for flexibility and course corrections as the group comes together to assess progress and make relevant changes, but also sticking to holding each other accountable for the agreed-upon roles and responsibilities and benchmarks of progress.

A simple master work plan and timeline can help coordinate and clearly lay out the plans.

As you connect with partners and begin to meet and start planning, you can use Table 1.3 in Appendix C to help keep track of community partner roles and engagement over time during planning meetings.

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES:

Examples of Involving Students and Families in a Planning Process

- One pilot site created a Family Engagement Team comprised of teachers, school support staff, students, parents, and community partners. The team met every other week throughout the winter and spring. Through a carefully laid-out planning framework, the team completed its process of analyzing students' and families' situations and needs, selecting key outcomes based on data, and identifying the steps that various stakeholders would take to achieve them. The team engaged in vigorous debate, thoughtful discussion of data, and negotiation between competing experiences and worldviews. This open and deep dialogue was necessary in order to understand the issues and come to a plan that all stakeholders could support.
- One pilot site planned to use existing student groups to begin to engage students in the planning process. Students would participate in focus groups and serve on a student board to advise the planning process. They would also serve on the planning committee.
- In one community, parents from each of five high schools working with the FEHS pilot site were invited and involved in the planning process. These family members helped to develop the goals, objectives, and strategies in this plan. At the first planning meeting, parents identified that middle schools should also be engaged in the planning process and, as a result, middle school personnel joined the planning team as well.
- One pilot site shared information regarding their planning grant's activities with parents at workshops held at the Family Resource Center each Monday night during the month of March. The meetings were designed to encourage parents to attend and participate in activities related to this grant.

SECTION 1.2: Defining the Focal Populations

It is of utmost importance to be explicit about the student population towards which you will direct your efforts and what specific results you want your efforts to have for those students (Section 1.3). The more specific you are in identifying the factors that put these students at risk for not graduating from high school, the better able you will be to identify appropriate outcomes and develop effective strategies to address these risk factors.

In this stage of the planning process, you will examine local data to determine which students and families should be the focus of your project's efforts. The data will also provide a baseline snapshot of where your students stand at the beginning of the initiative and will allow you to measure their progress over time.

WHAT YOU DO

- Use local data to identify risk factors and select your focal population(s).
- Decide which schools will participate in your initiative.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A clear identification of focal students and families.
- Data that clearly identify risk factors for not graduating and make the case for focusing on specific students and families.

USE LOCAL DATA TO IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS AND SELECT YOUR FOCAL STUDENT POPULATION(S).

While national data can provide some directions to explore in selecting the risk factors on which you will concentrate, be sure to examine local data carefully – you may find new and unexpected information.

The student data that guide your selection process also become the baseline data for your initiative. These data provide a snapshot of where your focal students stand at the beginning of your work. The data will be critical later in the initiative as you measure focal students' progress over time.

The size of focal populations at the FEHS pilot sites varied from as small as 15 students, to as large as 1,300 students, with most of the pilot sites focusing on fewer than 200 students. Some examples of how pilot sites defined their focal populations (and the source of the data used) are:



When the CEO of United Way of Southern Cameron County in Brownsville, TX, asked the high school for help in identifying the students at risk of not graduating from high school, she was told that they were low-income, with limited English proficiency and behavioral problems. However, eighth and ninth grade records for students who were seniors in 2010 showed that these characteristics did not necessarily predict high school dropouts. Looking more closely at the data revealed that the actual predictors turned out to be low attendance (specifically, more than seven absences during eighth grade) and failing two or more sections of the state-mandated eighth grade assessment test. As a result, students with these characteristics became the focal student population for this FEHS initiative.³ If the partnership had not carefully examined the data, it would have focused its efforts on the wrong students.

³ Benefits of examining data can be immediate. In Brownsville, after seeing the data, the principal assigned 30 failing ninth grade students to an intensive remediation program so that they could complete the year with credits in four core subjects. These “quietly failing” students are now on their way to overcoming the barriers to on-time graduation.



TIP: Avoid a focus on all students or the overall goal of on-time high school graduation. Instead, concentrate on:

- Specific “at-risk” students
- Specific changes or results that will move them closer to the goal of high school graduation

Remember, *specificity is key.*

United Way of York County in York, PA, identified 100 families of focal students that will receive information and support so that they can help their children successfully complete ninth grade and be on the pathway toward graduation. These focal families tend to be low-income, families of ESL/ELL students, families for whom the student would be the first to graduate high school, and families with students receiving special education services.

- **Ninth graders with absences that exceeded seven days during the school year.** *Data gathered from the school district system.*
- **Ninth graders who fail to pass standardized tests administered in eighth grade.** *Data gathered from school district state test scores.*
- **Ninth graders who are failing one or more core courses.** *Data gathered from official transcripts.*
- **Incoming ninth graders on an academic high-risk “watch list” created by teacher, counselor and/or administrator.** *Data gathered from the school district system.*
- **Tenth graders enrolled in the “School within a School” program.** *Data gathered from school.*
- **Students in ninth through twelfth grade on an academic “watch list.”** *Data gathered from the school district system.*

Table 1.2 in Appendix C can help you to identify students at risk of not graduating on time and explain the rationale for selecting them to participate in the project.

Focal families are the families of the focal student population. Your outreach and communication activities will concentrate on the focal families, in addition to the focal students. Note, however, that a larger pool of families is likely to benefit from your family engagement initiative. For example, if you learn that focal families need clearer information about high school graduation requirements and school and community partners begin to provide this information in a more effective way, many families beyond your focal group are likely to receive this information.

DECIDE WHICH SCHOOLS WILL PARTICIPATE IN YOUR INITIATIVE.

Once you have identified the specific students on which you will focus your initiative’s efforts, you will know how those students are distributed across the schools in the district(s) in your area. Whether you choose to work within one school or across several, be mindful of the resources (including personnel time) you have to devote to the project. It might be tempting to try to reach as many high-risk students as possible, but it is often better to focus on a smaller sample of students who meet your risk criteria and create a multi-tiered plan to serve them, rather than spreading resources too thin across a larger number of school locations.

Other factors to consider when choosing school partners are the level of interest, commitment, and activities in the schools to support the goals of your initiative. You should engage in conversations with district and school staff early on to discuss the initiative’s goals and how you envision partnering with the school to achieve your vision. Build a school team that will be able to implement the initiative even if there is turnover in key leadership positions. Remember that your goal is to develop an active *partnership* with school and community members, which involves seeking and using their input throughout the planning process.

SETTING UP SYSTEMS FOR GATHERING TIMELY DATA

It is important to plan ahead for collecting the data you will need during the implementation phase of the initiative. Privacy concerns can slow down this process, so make sure you know, in advance, how you will obtain a list of which students are in your focal population and data on how they are doing in school. Through this list you will be able to identify and recruit the parents and family members that will participate in your initiative.

Tips to help achieve this:

- Build a strong working relationship with school or district personnel who are invested in your initiative and have the knowledge and access to obtain student-level data. In some instances school staff may be able to act as intermediaries who analyze and filter confidential student-level data.
- Make an agreement with the schools or district about what student data you will get from them, including *when* (e.g., at what intervals during the year) and *how* (e.g., direct access, going through an intermediary) you will get it.
- Make an agreement with the schools or district and community partners about collecting data that you will need to track outcomes for focal parents and families (e.g. participation in activities, changes in knowledge about high school graduation requirements, access to student performance data).

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES: Examples of Well-defined Focal Student Populations

- Students who fail to meet one or more of the following requirements in the first semester of ninth grade: at least 92 percent attendance; no suspensions; or accumulation of 5.5 credits.
- Students in grades nine through twelve who are on the school's Academic Watch List (tracked by number of credits earned).
- Incoming ninth grade students who have been identified by the district's risk index as being in danger of not graduating from high school. The risk index is developed using state reading and math assessment results, student retention, student mobility, and student attendance data.
- Students in ninth and tenth grades who are either at high risk of truancy court involvement (i.e., student's attendance and tardiness violates district's minimum requirement) or who are already mandated for corrective action.

ENCOURAGE STUDENT/FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN DEFINING FOCAL POPULATIONS

It is important to include students and families in every step of the planning process, even if you think you can get the information needed from other sources. Below are some examples of the types of information on which students and families may be able to provide a unique perspective.

Input sought from students:

Why do you think students drop out of school? What are the most important risk factors to focus on in order to prevent this?

Methods to solicit input:

Classroom focus group with students.

Input sought from families:

What risk factors can you identify and prioritize as most related to students dropping out of school?

Methods to solicit input:

Planning team meetings that include project coordinator, school staff, and families.



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SECTION 1.3: Defining Outcomes

An outcome includes both the “who” (the focal population) and the “what” (the intended change or result for that population) of an intervention. Just as it is important to have a well-defined focal student and family populations, it is crucial to establish intended outcomes that are aligned with the risk factors and needs of those focal populations.

In this stage, you will identify intended student outcomes that target the factors that predict failing to graduate on time. You will also identify family outcomes – actions you want students’ families to take that will support the achievement of your student outcomes.

WHAT YOU DO

- Identify desired student outcomes that target the indicators that these students are not on track to graduate.
- Identify family outcomes, or actions, that will support achievement of your intended student outcomes.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A clear understanding of the changes that you would like to see among specific populations of students and families.
- A basis for aligning school and community resources with the outcomes you seek to achieve.

IDENTIFY DESIRED STUDENT OUTCOMES THAT TARGET THE INDICATORS THAT THESE STUDENTS ARE NOT ON TRACK TO GRADUATE.

You selected your focal student populations based on data showing that they are at risk of not graduating on time because of one or more factors – inadequate grades, low standardized test scores, poor attendance, behavioral suspensions, etc. To increase the likelihood that these students graduate on time, you want the students to improve whatever factors are standing in their way. Your intended outcomes, therefore, are the changes you want to see in student performance as related to the identified risk factors. For example, if you selected one of your focal student populations because their attendance in eighth grade fell below district requirements, your intended outcome for this population may be that they meet or exceed attendance requirements in ninth grade.

Keep in mind, though, that you will need to be flexible and that target outcomes might need to be modified down the line to address any changes in your initiative’s environment or as you gain additional information.



ENCOURAGE STUDENT/FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN DEFINING OUTCOMES

It is important to include students and families in every step of the planning process, even if you think you can get the information needed from other sources. Below are some examples of the types of information on which students and families may be able to provide a unique perspective.

Input sought from students:

What are appropriate student outcomes, given the risk factors for dropping out of school?

Methods to solicit input:

Planning meetings with students, school staff, and community partners.

Input sought from families:

What are appropriate actions for families to take to address students' risk factors for dropping out?

Methods to solicit input:

Use "Community Cafés" (a series of guided conversations that are held in a welcoming place in the community) to allow families to brainstorm ideas.

In addition, do not worry about specifying arbitrary percentage increases or decreases for an outcome at this time – instead, the focus should be on simply identifying outcomes for your target student population that are meaningfully linked to the likelihood of on-time graduation.

Some examples of specific student outcomes:

- Students in ninth grade who were retained a grade in middle school will pass to tenth grade by earning six credits and maintaining a cumulative GPA greater than 2.0.
- Ninth grade students with more than one suspension from school in the first semester of the 2010–2011 school year will not have out of school suspensions or expulsions in the 2011–2012 school year.
- Students who were habitually truant in ninth grade will meet district attendance requirements in tenth grade.

Table 1.3a in Appendix C will help you define your student outcomes and document the current status of the population.

IDENTIFY FAMILY OUTCOMES, OR ACTIONS, THAT WILL SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT OF YOUR INTENDED STUDENT OUTCOMES.

In the same way that you define specific outcomes for students, you need to establish specific outcomes for families. Your family outcomes should be actions families will take that will support the achievement of your intended student outcomes. For example, if you want to improve student attendance, then your family outcome should focus on actions that families can take to improve their student's attendance.

Some examples of specific family outcomes:

- Families will use the district's online reporting system to access grades, attendance, and discipline referrals.
- Families will communicate clear expectations regarding their students' behavior in school.
- Families will communicate clear expectations regarding preparation for state tests.
- Families will communicate clear expectations regarding school attendance.
- Families will enroll their students in community programs (e.g., homework help) and ensure that students actively participate.

Table 1.3b in Appendix C can help you align your family outcomes with student outcomes.

As you select outcomes for your focal students and families, be sure to identify indicators of progress that will let you know whether you are on track to achieve your desired outcomes. Indicators are measurable characteristics, behaviors, or milestones that can show how fully an outcome is being achieved or an action is being implemented. Section 1.6 provides detailed guidance for selecting appropriate indicators of progress for the outcomes you have chosen.

TIP: Consider creating a logic model to help guide your planning process. A logic model is a visual representation of how you intend to achieve your outcomes with the strategies you will develop. Defining outcomes is the first step in developing a logic model. Appendix D contains guidance for developing a logic model.

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES:

Examples of Alignment of Student and Family Outcomes

Student Outcome	Aligned Family Outcome
Ninth graders whose eighth grade absences exceeded seven days will not be absent more than five times in ninth grade.	Families will (1) understand the relationship between attendance and school success, (2) understand school district policies about school attendance, and (3) ensure that their child attends school every day.
Ninth grade students who scored below proficient on reading and mathematics tests in eighth grade will earn a score of 3 or higher on the state reading and mathematics test.	Families will (1) understand the link between earning a 3 on the state test and district/state grade promotion policies and graduation requirements, (2) work with school and/or community organizations to ensure that students attend tutoring sessions designed to support performance on state tests, and (3) ensure that students receive proper rest and nutrition during the testing periods.
Ninth grade students who had below a C average in math and English in eighth grade will make a C or above.	Families will (1) set clear expectations about passing all courses with grades of a C or above, (2) ensure that their teen has all instructional materials and completes homework, and (3) have a conversation with a teacher or counselor if academic concerns arise.



SECTION 1.4: Identifying Obstacles

Before developing strategies to help focal families take the desired actions outlined in your family outcomes, it is important to understand why they aren't already taking those actions and what may be standing in their way. By understanding what these obstacles are, you can work with families and community partners to design the strategies that will address them.

In this stage, you will work together with families, schools, and community partners to identify the specific obstacles that are preventing your focal families from taking necessary steps to support their students' academic success.

WHAT YOU DO

- Develop an understanding of common obstacles to family engagement.
- Ask focal families and students to identify obstacles families face in supporting high school graduation/success.
- Ask school personnel and community partners who interact with focal families to help identify the obstacles families face in supporting high school graduation/success.
- Set priorities and determine which obstacles are the most critical to address.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A better understanding of the obstacles that impede the achievement of your family outcomes.
- Knowledge of where to target your strategies for maximum impact.

DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF COMMON OBSTACLES TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.

National research has identified several obstacles that stand in the way of family engagement in education. Among them are:

- Families not understanding the important roles they play in ensuring their students' academic success.
- Families feeling uncomfortable communicating with school staff about the performance of their student.
- Families not understanding the importance of regular school attendance, consistent credit accumulation, and other indicators of progress for on-time graduation.
- Families not knowing how to access or interpret student data systems that provide information about their students' progress.

ENCOURAGE STUDENT/FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES

It is important to include students and families in every step of the planning process, even if you think you can get the information needed from other sources. Below are some examples of the types of information on which students and families may be able to provide a unique perspective.

Input sought from students:

What challenges does your family face that make it hard for them to get involved in your education?

Methods to solicit input:

Focus group with students at risk of not graduating.

Input sought from families:

What challenges do you face that make it difficult to take active steps to support your child's education?

Methods to solicit input:

Family engagement team planning meetings.

Before simply creating strategies to address these predetermined common obstacles, find out the extent to which these obstacles are challenges for your focal families in particular.



Before simply creating strategies to address these predetermined common obstacles, find out the extent to which these obstacles are challenges for your focal families in particular. Creating strategies that, for example, stress how much influence families can have on their students' success will not make a difference if a parent knows this already but does not have information about how his or her child's progress aligns with school district requirements. It is also important to identify any additional obstacles they may face. Likewise, setting up multiple ways for families to access such information will not make a difference if they already have the information but do not know how to act on it.

Take note of any specific characteristics of your focal family population that might be contributing to families' difficulties to effectively support their students' education and discuss these with families to determine whether they are in fact obstacles. Language barriers, low levels of functional literacy, immigrant status, demanding work schedules, and other related issues can impede families' abilities to understand and engage with the educational system in ways that benefit their student. But remember to ask students and families whether such characteristics are indeed problematic, rather than simply assuming that they are because you know they exist. This moves the process from a *deficit-model* analysis of family characteristics to a *strength-based approach*,⁴ in which families are involved in identifying whether a perceived disadvantage is an actual impediment to supporting their students' learning.

ASK FOCAL FAMILIES AND STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY THE OBSTACLES FAMILIES FACE IN SUPPORTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION/SUCCESS.

Parents and students are an important source of information about obstacles to family engagement in education. A planning process that involves students and families can obtain first-hand information about obstacles to family engagement, and can solicit students' and families' ideas on how to address these challenges. These first-hand perspectives, along with those gathered from school staff and other community members, can provide unique insights into the personal realities of the focal families. These perspectives will help you build a more cohesive plan for how to address obstacles to participation.

Some examples of how the pilot sites gained the perspectives of families and students in understanding obstacles to family engagement include:

- One pilot site established a Family Engagement Team, comprised of teachers, school support staff, students, parents, and community partners, who met every other week to discuss families' situations and needs.

⁴ A deficit model approach focuses on what is wrong with, or deficient in, clients (such as students or families) and views clients as the source of their own problems. A strength-based approach, in contrast, focuses on clients' positive attributes and resources and seeks to empower clients by increasing their capacity to take action to improve their lives.

- Several pilot sites set up Community Cafés, in which parents and community members engaged in a series of guided conversations designed to help identify ways to support and strengthen children’s learning and growth.
- Other pilot sites used family outreach coordinators to conduct home visits to discuss family needs with regard to information about school attendance, performance, and expectations.
- Some pilot sites surveyed families to assess their expectations of the high school staff, their students, and the community organizations involved in the initiative.
- A few of the pilot sites held focus groups with the families of targeted students to determine the types of resources they most need to help get their children on track for on-time graduation, find out how much they know about current available resources, and identify how schools and communities can do a better job of reaching out to them and making them aware of such resources. The findings were then used to inform work with school and community partners to ensure they created outreach strategies and guidance tools that met the needs of the families they serve.

ASK SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS WHO INTERACT WITH FOCAL FAMILIES TO IDENTIFY OBSTACLES FAMILIES FACE IN SUPPORTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION/SUCCESS.

Teachers interact with students on a daily basis and many are deeply knowledgeable about the challenges faced by their students’ families. Support staff, such as guidance counselors, often have detailed information about the needs of families and can help identify issues that affect families’ abilities to actively support their students’ education. Likewise, community partners are often deeply engaged in the communities they serve and have good insights regarding the issues affecting focal families. These partners can use their relationships with families to help uncover obstacles to engagement and help you understand some of the underlying factors that give rise to those obstacles.

School personnel and community partners can also help you gain a sense of how many of your focal families are affected by a given obstacle, as well as how multiple obstacles interact with one another. This can then help you understand how to prioritize which obstacles to tackle first.

Obstacles to engagement often stem from larger societal issues in the community (e.g., poverty). While the goal of your project cannot be to “solve” such immense and wide-reaching issues, it is important to learn as much as you can about how the families in your focal population deal with these larger issues so that you and your community partners understand the forces that create, or exacerbate, the challenges your families face.

*By intentionally creating a diverse FEHS planning team that included the voices of the various cultures and perspectives of their focal families, school staff, and community partners, **United Way of the Bay Area in San Francisco, CA** uncovered several serious and interconnected obstacles to family engagement. They reported the following challenges:*

- *Families do not understand the important role they play in helping their teenage children to organize their time and arrive at school every day ready to learn.*
- *Families are hesitant to actively engage with students’ learning because of overt and implied messages that they must remain on the sidelines to foster a teenager’s growing independence.*
- *Families who are recent immigrants don’t know how to navigate American school systems or communicate with teachers about questions and concerns. They also find high school graduation and college application requirements confusing.*
- *Families often lack access to the technology required to use the school’s online student data sharing systems and other communication tools.*



United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra in Reno, NV, found that many of its focal families were primarily Spanish-speaking and comprised of first-generation Americans with little or no formal education experience in the U.S. These families faced a number of language and logistical barriers to communication, and, when surveyed, indicated that their children generally controlled the flow of information from school to home, and they were therefore disconnected from direct communication with school staff. This impacted the families' ability to receive accurate, timely, and actionable information about their students' performance.

Following are several types of obstacles that the pilot sites reported from their planning discussions and focus groups with parents and students. The list is not exhaustive and each category may not be applicable to every population, but it suggests potential areas to consider as you investigate conditions in your community.

School climate – The school climate can play a large role in the degree to which parents feel comfortable communicating with school staff and participating in school activities as they relate to the academic successes of their youth. Parents and guardians often report that they do not feel welcome or respected, especially when they are low-income or do not speak English. Some schools tend to assume that families have an understanding of the education system and can navigate it without assistance, but many families need basic information about who to contact, what the school's expectations are regarding attendance and homework completion, how they can support their children, and where they can find help.

Communication – Active and multiple forms of two-way communication are imperative to engaging families effectively. Too often, communication between families and schools is only initiated by the school and is not consistent or timely. Whether due to lack of school resources, the school culture, or the preferences of individual educators, parents are often only contacted with negative news regarding their student's academic progress or behavior, and frequently only after a serious problem has already occurred. Parents are often unaware of any early academic issues or behavioral challenges, and thus cannot help change behaviors before they grow into problems.

Lack of information – Families often want to be more involved with their student's academics but may not know what family engagement at the high school level looks like, nor understand the connection between engagement and student success. Parents, especially immigrants, may be unfamiliar with the U.S. education system and the expected roles of parents and students in actively engaging in the educational process, or may not have advanced as far in school as their child.

Logistics – Work and financial responsibilities can hinder families' abilities to attend school events, allow their children to participate in after-school activities, or even follow up on homework assignments. Factors such as childcare and transportation logistics, legal and immigration issues, and lack of financial and social resources all play powerful roles in determining what families have time for. Families may also lack access to the technology needed to take advantage of the online data tracking systems and support services that may allow them to engage remotely.

SET PRIORITIES AND DETERMINE WHICH OBSTACLES ARE THE MOST CRITICAL TO ADDRESS.

Listening to and learning from families and students, school personnel, and community partners will uncover the many challenges that your focal families face. Hearing about the same obstacles from multiple sources strengthens the likelihood that they are real issues and not simply unfounded assumptions or generalizations.

Because you probably cannot address every obstacle that you uncover, you will need to set priorities. Further engagement with families, school personnel and community partners can help identify which obstacles are the biggest problems for the largest number of focal families. At least initially, you can focus your strategy-building efforts on these obstacles.

Many of the obstacles listed above relate to school and community factors that can be improved through well-designed interventions that enhance home-school communication and eliminate logistical hurdles to families' engagement efforts. After you have identified these obstacles, the next step involves thinking about specific strategies that will help address the obstacles and increase the likelihood of effectively engaging families.

Table 1.4 in Appendix C can help you document the obstacles you identify that often keep your focal families from achieving the desired outcomes. In the next stage of the process, you will build on this chart to incorporate strategies – including specific school and community partner actions – designed to address these obstacles.

Multiple FEHS pilot sites reported that online student data systems are important mediums for helping families track student progress, learn about graduation requirements, and communicate with teachers. However, many families do not have access to or do not understand how to use a computer to make use of these systems.

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES:

Examples of Desired Family Outcomes and the Related Obstacles that Pilot Sites Encountered

Family Outcome	Improve home-school communication to increase families' understanding of graduation requirements and ways to monitor and support their student's progress.
Obstacle	The lack of regular communication between school staff and families results in families not receiving information on graduation requirements, their students' progress, or support services that can help their students succeed.
Family Outcome	Increase families' awareness of steps they can take to help their students graduate high school ready for college.
Obstacle	Families don't understand how to actively support their students' education and prepare them to be college- and career-ready.



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SECTION 1.5: Developing Strategies

Strategy development calls for identifying actions that schools and community partners can take to promote family engagement in education to enhance the likelihood that families, and thus students, will reach their desired outcomes.

In this stage you will design strategies to address the family obstacles you identified in Section 1.4, and identify what actions schools and community partners will take to help families overcome these obstacles.

WHAT YOU DO

- Develop strategies to address obstacles.
- Identify school and community partner actions to implement the strategies.
- Ensure alignment among desired family outcomes, identified obstacles, and school/community partner actions.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- Effective approaches addressing obstacles to family engagement.
- Focused and intentional actions that will enable families to help keep students on track for high school graduation.
- Efficient use of school and community resources to achieve desired outcomes.

DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS OBSTACLES.

Once you have worked with school and community partners and representatives from your focal families to identify the obstacles families face, you can create strategies to address them. “Strategies” refers to the way an organization positions its family engagement efforts to achieve its desired outcomes. One way to think about strategy is in terms of a “value proposition” – how does the strategy create value for students and families?⁵ For example, one strategy could be having parent coordinators from both the middle and high school provide the families of rising ninth graders with information and encouragement about families’ roles in ensuring their students’ high school success. This would help prevent the sharp decrease in family engagement that often occurs as students move into the upper grades, and instead would promote continuous family engagement from middle to high school so that students reap the benefits of consistent home support toward graduation.

⁵ Adapted from: Porter, M. E. (2008). *What is strategy?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School. http://www.isc.hbs.edu/pdf/20080603_SBSCA_HBS_ExecEd_Strategy.pdf

United Way of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas, NV, is partnering with five high schools that are working to improve their outreach to families via various approaches. For example, school action plans include holding town hall meetings for parents to network and develop topics for discussion, recruiting parents at school sporting events, making multilingual phone calls to parents, and conducting parent-to-parent outreach. Through their outreach, the high schools plan to offer orientations for families of rising ninth graders to inform parents about credit and attendance requirements and resource programs for students.

Strategy development includes identifying the actions that schools and community partners need to take in order to help promote family engagement in students' education and enhance the likelihood that families and students will reach their desired outcomes. Strategies provide an overarching frame to addressing obstacles, while school and community partner actions are the specific activities that comprise those broader strategies.

The following examples illustrate the relationships between obstacles and broad strategies (examples of specific school and community partner actions appear later in this section):

Family Outcome	Become and/or remain involved in student's education as student transitions into high school.
Obstacle	Family engagement tends to drop off as teens enter high school because families are intimidated by the high school environment and feel less confident about supporting their teen's academic progress at that level.
Strategy	Create a more seamless family engagement pathway into and out of high school so families remain engaged throughout their teen's high school grades.

Family Outcome	Access relevant out-of-school support services, such as tutoring or mentoring, that can support their student's academic work.
Obstacle	Families are not aware of out-of-school support services that can help students who are struggling academically.
Strategy	Increase families' awareness of relevant support services for their students at both school and community partner settings.

Your development of strategies to address obstacles to family engagement should be informed by research on effective and promising practices for family involvement in student learning, as well as by your understanding of local factors so that the application of research findings is appropriately tailored to the needs of families in your community.

IDENTIFY SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNER ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIES.

Given the general strategies you have developed to address the obstacles families face, you will need to determine what actions schools and community partners will take in order to carry out these strategies and enable families to work towards their outcomes.

Often, schools and community partners already have a number of established programs for students and families that you can build on as you develop your specific strategies. Think about which existing school and community partner efforts are relevant to your project and how you can collaborate with those providers to build on their strategies, while ensuring that the resulting interventions are *specifically targeted* at the obstacles that prevent your focal families from effectively supporting their students' learning. You will want to be selective and ensure the relevance of these school and community partner activities to your specific outcomes, rather than just utilizing them out of convenience or because you have a long-standing partnership with those partners.

It is also a good idea to discuss strategy development with your focal families to ensure that they feel your proposed interventions are respectful, appropriate, and truly relevant to their needs.

Tables 1.5a–1.5c in Appendix C will help you identify the current relevant school and community partner activities and resources that relate to your outcomes and broad strategies.

As you identify school and community partner actions, think about how these actions will address the specific obstacles to family engagement that you uncovered, and how they will enhance the likelihood of increased family engagement. For example, if desired outcomes for families include greater understanding of course requirements and identified obstacles include families' lack of information about course requirements, your general strategy might include improved outreach and communication with families and better means of providing information about high school requirements and academic resources.

The specific actions schools and community partners might take include: summer orientation session for students and families to discuss course requirements, outreach by the family liaison to ensure families have information about academic supports, and (if necessary) translation of graduation requirement materials into languages focal families are comfortable with. These actions are aligned with the need for families to have a better understanding about requirements and how to access resources to help their student.

Community partners also have roles to play in implementing strategies that address obstacles impeding family engagement. Community partner actions might include helping families access mentoring and tutoring programs for their students and offering use of computers in community

*One of the desired student outcomes of **United Way of Southeast Missouri in Cape Girardeau, MO**, is improved reading and writing levels among ninth graders as measured by developmental reading and writing assessments. To meet this outcome, the school will promote family engagement through the use of the following resources: a web platform for parents to track student progress in reading, writing, and other subjects, and learn about resources available for students; extended school hours for families to use computers; and parent liaisons to meet with parents and students. As a complement to school resources, the public library will be used for computer training by both students and families.*

Many families at **United Way of Lake County in Gurnee, IL**, reported that they found it inconvenient or intimidating to meet with school personnel on school grounds. To address this obstacle, this pilot site is mobilizing community partners to work with the high school to organize parent-staff meetings at locations throughout the community where parents already gather. These meetings bring the school to the community, enable families to get to know their students' teachers, and inform parents of school requirements and their individual child's academic status.

spaces so that families can use online tools to track student progress. These efforts can complement school-related actions – in many cases, offering services that the schools do not have the resources or staffing to provide – in ways that are aligned with family outcomes.

- Community-sponsored efforts to provide college tours for students and families and give families information about scholarships for students.
- The use of community partners to create bilingual messaging programs to raise families' awareness of community resources that can support their children's academic growth.
- Outreach efforts to make families more aware of afterschool programs and other educational supports.
- Informational workshops for parents about the importance of regular attendance and maintaining passing grades.

The following examples revisit the obstacles and broad strategies listed in the beginning of this stage, and include the addition of specific school and community partner actions in service of those broader strategies:

Family Outcome	Become and/or remain involved in student's education as student transitions into high school.
Obstacle	Family engagement tends to drop off as teens enter high school because families are intimidated by the high school environment and feel less confident about supporting their teen's academic progress at that level.
Strategy	<p>Create a more seamless family engagement pathway into and out of high school so families remain engaged throughout their teen's high school grades.</p> <p>Specific school and community actions to carry out strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a summer freshman academy program involving students and families to support transition from eighth to ninth grade. ■ Engage in more proactive outreach efforts to make families aware of high school course-work requirements and what teens need to accomplish in order to graduate on time. ■ Hire parent liaisons to maintain ongoing communication with parents of at-risk ninth graders to help connect them to academic and other support services.

Family Outcome	Access relevant out-of-school support services, such as tutoring or mentoring, that can support their student's academic work.
Obstacle	Families are not aware of out-of-school support services that can help students who are struggling academically.
Strategy	<p>Increase families' awareness of relevant support services for their students at both school and community partner settings.</p> <p>Specific school and community activities to carry out strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide information about support services for students to youth-serving organizations, faith leaders, neighborhood leaders, libraries, and physicians. ■ Ensure that information and referral services, such as 2-1-1, have information about support services for students that indicate the specific challenges each service addresses – academic, behavioral, college or career preparation, etc. ■ Involve parent/community liaisons in reaching out to families to make them aware of out-of-school supports and learning opportunities.

ENSURE ALIGNMENT AMONG FAMILY OUTCOMES, IDENTIFIED OBSTACLES, AND SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNER ACTIONS.

As you plan your project, you need to ensure that there is a logical relationship between your activities and what you expect to change as a result of your work. For example, if your project wants to improve home-school communication about high school graduation requirements, you can work with the school to encourage and train teachers to make time to listen to families' aspirations for their students and then discuss expectations for credit accumulation, attendance, and coursework as steps toward meeting those goals.

Alignment also means ensuring that the intensity and duration of your activities are sufficient to produce the outcomes you expect. For example, a project that provides families with a one-time family engagement training session may reasonably expect an outcome of families becoming more aware of the importance of supporting their students' pathway to graduation. On the other hand, a project that provides family engagement training throughout the year may more realistically expect that families will actually change how they communicate and reinforce expectations about attendance, behavior, and grades with their teens.

By ensuring alignment among outcomes, obstacles, strategies, and school and community partner actions, your initiative will be focused and specific. Doing this will also help identify the roles and responsibilities of key personnel and the concrete steps that school and community partners must take in order to increase family engagement and promote student success.

For example, your **family outcomes** might include the following:

- Parents will communicate clear expectations to their student about passing all courses with grades of 80 or above.
- Parents will make sure student attends school every day.
- Parents will make sure student attends after-school tutoring.
- Parents will encourage student to participate in mentoring programs.
- Parents will increase their knowledge of high school graduation requirements.

Obstacles to families' ability to achieve their outcomes might include:

- Parents are unaware of how to monitor students' grades.
- Parents do not understand the importance of consistent, on-time attendance.
- Parents do not know about tutoring, mentoring, or other student support resources at school or in the community.
- Parents do not understand course requirements or how to monitor students' progress towards those requirements.

TIP:

As you plan your project, it is important to focus on strategies that:

- Align with your intended family outcomes.
- Address key obstacles or underlying issues.
- Can be broken down into specific action steps that schools and community partners can take to address these obstacles in service of these strategies.



TIP: If you are using a logic model to organize your work, you can now insert your strategies and school/community partner actions into the model. Appendix D contains guidance on how to create and use a logic model.

ENCOURAGE STUDENT/ FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

It is important to include students and families in every step of the planning process, even if you think you can get the information needed from other sources. Below are some examples of the types of information on which students and families may be able to provide a unique perspective.

Input sought from students:

What do you recommend as effective strategies to engage families in education?

Methods to solicit input:

Survey of students – Roundtable discussions with students at risk of not graduating.

Input sought from families:

What kind of supports do families need in order to engage in their children's education?

Methods to solicit input:

Focus groups with families of students at risk of not graduating.

Strategies to address these obstacles might include:

- Ensuring that parents understand how to use online databases to monitor grades, attendance, and other indicators of student progress.
- Increase parents' understanding of coursework requirements and the importance of attendance.
- Connect families to relevant student support services in and out of school.

Specific actions that **schools** can take to address these obstacles and thus increase the likelihood that families can achieve the intended outcomes might include:

- Teachers use conferences to provide parents with information about course requirements, grading criteria, credit accumulation, and student progress.
- Guidance counselors develop tools using student data to inform families about tracking attendance and academic performance.
- Parent coordinators offer workshops to inform families about specific action steps to improve attendance and performance, such as having students participate in after-school and mentoring programs.

Specific actions that **community partners** can take to address these obstacles and thus increase the likelihood that families can achieve the outcomes above might include:

- Focus information dissemination and outreach efforts for after-school tutoring and mentoring programs on the families of students most at risk of not graduating.
- Use multiple methods – such as home visits and information tables at food markets and drug stores – to make families aware of after-school tutoring and mentoring opportunities and ask business owners, such as owners of stores that sell lottery tickets, to hand out fliers about these opportunities to customers.
- Communicate with key school staff to ensure the school is aware of services and can help coordinate intake processes so that students and families can access necessary services without delay.

In selecting your strategies and school and community partner actions, consider that families, schools, and community partners need to work in a coordinated way, each bringing strengths to your overall initiative.

- **Engage families to engage families.** Use parent leaders and parent-to-parent relationships to encourage involvement, networking, and sharing of resources as they work towards supporting the academic success of their students. Word of mouth is a powerful motivator and parents with similar backgrounds and experiences are more likely to trust and share common understandings and perspectives with other parents about how to engage in their children’s educations.
- **Build on existing school resources.** Begin with an audit or inventory of school resources that can be mobilized. These can come in the form of school personnel, parent organizations, dropout prevention projects that will benefit from a strengthened family engagement component, meeting or classroom space, technology, transportation, and others. For example, many schools have parent liaisons that know the community and can help you reach the focal families. Schools may also have teacher teams that can come up with creative, sustainable activities to keep families informed about how to support student progress.
- **Assess the fit and effectiveness of your strategies.** Maintain communication with project partners as an ongoing process of improvement. Keep the conversation going by encouraging regular feedback from all partners involved. Involve families in the assessment and evaluation of progress and share project successes to foster the partnership with students and families. Not only will this promote a cohesive and continually improving project, but it will also encourage group ownership and responsibility for the success of the project and contribute to increased sustainability of your efforts.

Table 1.5d in Appendix C can help you map the alignment between your family outcomes, identified obstacles, general strategies to address the obstacles, and specific school and community partner actions.

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra in Reno, NV, and their school partners learned through feedback from families and teachers that school staff tended to only contact families when students were having academic or behavioral problems. In order to foster more positive home-school interaction, this United Way created a plan with schools to instead have parent involvement facilitators, teachers, or parent volunteers begin reaching out to families early in their students’ academic career through various communication strategies, including welcome orientations, personal phone calls, and home visits. One partner school recommended keeping a notebook of “positive traits” for each student so that in addition to reporting on areas that need help, school staff can use these notes to also provide parents with encouraging information about their child’s academic progress at school. To counter the practice that schools only contact parents when something is wrong, another school makes regular phone calls reporting positive news about students.

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES:

Examples of Strategies Used to Address Families' Obstacles and the Related School and Community Actions

Desired Family Outcome	Improve home-school communication to increase families' understanding of graduation requirements and ways to monitor and support their student's progress.
Obstacle	The lack of regular communication between school staff and families results in families not receiving information on graduation requirements, their students' progress, or support services that can help their students succeed.
Strategy	<p>Create regular two-way communication between schools and families.</p> <p><i>Specific school actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Include family engagement and diversity training for teachers and family resource coordinators to ensure teachers and coordinators have the tools needed to effectively communicate with families. ■ Use a range of methods (phone calls, email, post cards, etc.) in a variety of languages to educate families about academic issues, such as how successful credit accumulation is linked to the likelihood of on-time graduation and future success. ■ Increase distribution of information on affordable and accessible positive youth activities so families are more aware of opportunities. ■ Alert families in a timely manner about student attendance and performance issues using the communication medium and language preferred by parents.

Desired Family Outcome	Increase families' awareness of steps they can take to help their student graduate high school ready for college.
Obstacle	Families don't understand how to actively support their students' education and prepare them to be college- and career-ready.
Strategy	<p>Engage families in student academic success.</p> <p><i>Specific community partner actions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Host meetings at community venues to provide nonthreatening environments for parents to learn about graduation requirements. Community partners will provide transportation for focal families to attend these meetings. ■ Inform families who already participate in the community partner's programs about career- and college-readiness, and share with parents the same information and resources for college-going that they already provide to students. ■ Collaborate with the high school to have computer professionals provide computer training for families in order to ensure they are able to use the school's online data tracking system to monitor the progress of their children. Churches and other local businesses will offer public computer access for families to access these data systems to help monitor their children's performance. ■ Create a homework help and mentoring support program for youth to ensure families know about and are able to access academic help for their children.

SECTION 1.6: Measuring Progress and Results

Prior to implementing your initiative's strategies and activities, you will want to decide how you will assess their progress. Well-designed measurements of progress show a commitment to and capacity for continuous learning and improvement. This means using data to inform any necessary changes to program implementation, as well as demonstrating accountability to funders and other supporters. Specifically, these measurements will help you determine if your strategies are proceeding on track and if they are creating the changes that will lead to your desired family and student outcomes. Although the ultimate test will be your level of success in bringing about those outcomes, it also is important to pay attention to implementation processes and more immediate results along the way. That information can tell you whether or not your initiative is making progress toward desired outcomes.

In this stage you will develop a system to track your progress, including identifying indicators for your outcomes and selecting data collection methods. Tracking progress on an ongoing basis will help you determine whether you need to make changes to your initiative as you go.

WHAT YOU DO

- Identify indicators of progress towards your desired outcomes.
- Plan data collection methods.
- Set up a system for monitoring implementation of activities.
- Develop a schedule for regular data review and use.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A system to track progress and make adjustments if necessary.
- A means to learn whether the initiative is making a difference for families and meeting desired outcomes.

IDENTIFY INDICATORS OF PROGRESS TOWARDS YOUR DESIRED OUTCOMES.

An indicator is the specific characteristic, behavior, or milestone which can be used to measure how fully an outcome is being achieved or an action is being implemented. Indicators provide measurable evidence of the changes you wish to see in the focal families or students, as well as in school or community partner efforts to support those families and students.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING INDICATORS

To be useful, progress indicators should be:

- **Appropriate.** Indicators should capture the most important aspects of the outcome being measured. For example, if the outcome is that families know high school graduation requirements, an appropriate indicator would be families' knowledge of the school policies on graduation such as attendance, grades, and credit accumulation.
- **Consistent.** Indicators are only meaningful if they are consistent over time, which requires several conditions. First, the definition of an indicator must remain the same each time it is measured. Second, care must be taken to use the same protocols whenever data are collected. Lastly, those involved in collecting and using the data need to have a shared understanding of what these indicators are and what they are measuring.
- **Useful.** Indicators must provide information that will both help communicate the value of the project to various stakeholders and spot opportunities for course correction and improvement. To be useful for communication purposes, indicators need to be understandable and acceptable to important stakeholders and convincing to supporters and skeptics, alike.
- **Quantitative.** Numeric indicators generally provide the most useful and understandable information to decision-makers. However, qualitative information may be necessary to get a deeper understanding of the results and the contexts that influence them. If you do use qualitative indicators, be sure that they are clearly defined and do not leave room for ambiguity.

These guidelines were adapted from Horsch, K. (1997). *Indicators: Definition and use in a results-based accountability system*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/Indicators-DefinitionandUse>

Progress indicators for your initiative should include both indicators of the success of your *outreach strategies* and indicators of the success of your *family engagement activities*. Outreach strategies might include informational forums in the community, phone calls to families to invite them to participate in training workshops, and other methods of reaching out to families to let them know about the resources you have put in place. Appropriate indicators for outreach strategies include the number of families who attend information forums, the number of families with whom an outreach coordinator is able to connect, or the number of families who attend an event after receiving a flyer announcement.

Meaningful indicators of the success of the family engagement activities themselves, however, go beyond the counts of what was done or how many participants attended trainings, and measure changes in *knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and behaviors*. These indicators assess whether the implemented strategy had any effect. The indicator could be the amount of change or the attainment of a desired level, regardless of the starting point.

For example, if you were trying to understand the effects of a training session offered to families, to measure the amount of change, you could use pre- and post-training surveys to determine the change in families' sense of efficacy in motivating their teen to do well in school. Or, to measure the attainment of a certain level, you could use a one-time survey after the training session to, for example, ask if families felt they were being "successful" or "very successful" in communicating with teachers about their concerns about student math.

The indicators you select must be logically connected to the outcomes you hope to achieve in order for them to serve as accurate benchmarks of progress towards your initiative's specific goals.

Data from multiple sources help measure indicators from multiple perspectives. For instance, if a desired family outcome focuses on *families communicating clear expectations for student attendance*, consider collecting data not only from families, but also from students, who can report if their families have had conversations with them about their expectations for regular, on-time school attendance.

While the availability of the data should not be the primary consideration in selecting indicators, it is a practical concern. There is no use selecting indicators on which you will be unable to collect data. You should also weigh the costs and time that would be involved in obtaining the measures versus the benefit of the indicator (e.g., an in-depth qualitative survey administered to over 100 family members vs. a brief Likert scale⁶ survey that adequately captures the major issues the activity was designed to address).

Table 1.6a in Appendix C can be used to help you identify the ways you will assess progress towards your student and family outcomes.

⁶ A Likert scale allows you to quantify people's attitudes or opinions on a topic by asking them, for example, to rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how strongly they agree or disagree with relevant statements.

Some examples of outcomes and indicators from the reports of the pilot sites are summarized below:

Outcomes	Examples of Indicators of Progress
Focal Students will complete ninth grade and be on track for meeting high school graduation requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number and percentage of focal students who accumulate required credits for ninth grade. ■ Number and percentage of focal students who meet attendance requirements. ■ Number and percentage of focal students who do not receive serious disciplinary actions (i.e., suspensions).
Focal Families support and monitor their students' progress in ninth grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number and percentage of families that know about specific graduation requirements. ■ Number and percentage of families that track elements of student progress through online data systems. ■ Number and percentage of students reporting parent conversations about attendance, academics, behavior, and participation in extracurricular activities and mentoring programs. ■ Number and percentage of families who have a conversation with a teacher about student performance.

PLAN DATA COLLECTION METHODS.

Data collection methods refer to the system used to gather information about participants and the activities of a project. Consider the following pointers⁷ when developing data collection methods:

- Use multiple methods when possible to assess a particular outcome (e.g., surveys, focus groups, and parent participation data to measure the effect of parent training workshops) rather than relying on a single method; this will provide a more robust assessment of whether or not you are achieving your desired outcome.
- Take advantage of existing data sources, such as the data system used by schools and community partners; this can help reduce the data collection and analysis burden.

Ensure that your data collection methods are appropriate given the size of the sample you are studying. Some methods, such as focus groups and interviews, are better suited to smaller group settings, while others, such as surveys, can be easily used with larger groups. Keep in mind that data collection can require a significant amount of time and resources. Consider who is best suited to collect your data, in terms of their availability, knowledge, expertise, and impartiality. Establish a schedule for data collection, and identify which data you need to collect at different times in order to get ongoing information about whether your students and families are on track to achieve their outcomes.

TIP: You will need to ensure that you have the capability to follow through on longer-range data collection procedures (e.g., post-test assessments several months after an event) as well as the ability to appropriately analyze the data you receive. If your data analysis will require specialized methods or software, for instance, you will need to have access to that expertise/resource or secure a partnership with someone who does.

⁷ Guidelines adapted from Bouffard, S., & Little, P. M. D. (2004). *Detangling data collection: Methods for gathering data*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/DetanglingDataCollection>

United Way of the Bay Area in San Francisco is working with a high school's Family Engagement Team that has the on-site responsibility for managing and reporting on the initiative. The Family Engagement Team (FET) is composed of teachers and school staff, parents, students, and community partners, such as the Beacon program. Within this team, the Parent Liaison and Beacon Family Outreach Coordinator will manage the data collection. The Parent Liaison will collect data related to school site activities. The Beacon Family Outreach Coordinator will collect data related to family trainings and events that Beacon sponsors. The school district's Office of Family and School Partnership and Research Planning and Accountability office will provide support through a project manager who will advise on planning and implementation of data collection, management, and analysis. The project manager will also facilitate FET meetings to review and reflect on the data and plan improvements on family engagement activities.

Table 1.6b in Appendix C can be used to help you align your data collection methods with your family outcomes and implementation activities. The chart also asks you to think about who will collect and analyze the data you collect, and at what intervals you will measure progress.

SET UP A SYSTEM FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES.

In a community-wide effort, responsibilities are shared among partners. A leadership group monitors major milestones in project implementation while individual partners are responsible for specific tasks and deadlines.

Tables 1.6c and 1.6d in Appendix C can be used to help you identify how you will track the implementation of your strategies, or the actions that school and community partners will take in service of your family outcomes.

DEVELOP A SCHEDULE FOR REGULAR DATA REVIEW AND USE.

Data are useful only when used. As noted above, data are most often used to inform improvements to an initiative, for accountability to funders, to market the initiative, and to build a case for sustainability. Avoid overwhelming your stakeholders with too much data. Instead, identify the primary audiences for the data and the types of information that will be useful to each. For example, data presented to project partners should focus on data relevant to decision-making for initiative improvements. Funders tend to want fairly detailed data to show exactly how their money was used and the outcomes it generated. Parents and students will tend to be most interested in data that relate specifically to the initiative's benefits for them.

Your implementation plan should build in time to review the data, share and discuss the findings, and create action steps to further the initiative's improvement.

ENCOURAGE STUDENT/FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN DETERMINING HOW TO MEASURE PROGRESS AND RESULTS

It is important to include students and families in every step of the planning process, even if you think you can get the information needed from other sources. Below are some examples of the types of information on which students and families may be able to provide a unique perspective.

Input sought from students:

What indicators would demonstrate that you are invested in your academic future?

Methods to solicit input:

Focus groups with students.

Input sought from families:

What indicators would demonstrate how actively engaged you are in your child's education?

Methods to solicit input:

Planning team meetings with parents and project staff.

SECTION 1.7: Communicating Your Plan

Your partnership has brought together many community stakeholders, amassed a great deal of information, had many discussions, and reached many decisions about how you will engage a defined population of families to increase their students' capacity for high school success. Throughout this process, you have engaged students and families in informing and participating in decision making. You need to be able to share what you have done, learned, and decided with many other stakeholders. A clear and succinct description of your initiative's plans will enable you to do that.

In this stage you will distill all of the work from your planning process into a few compelling pages. Your initiative description highlights why this work is important, how the initiative was developed, your plans for engaging families, who will be involved, when and where the planned actions will occur, and how you will measure progress.

WHAT YOU DO

- Select and summarize key elements from the planning phase of your family engagement initiative.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A thorough, but concise, description of your family engagement project.
- A means of communicating your plan to partners, investors, and other stakeholders.

Here are a few critical elements to keep in mind as you complete the various components of your initiative's description:

- Make a list of the specific audiences with whom you intend to share the description of your initiative, such as officials and volunteers of the various partner organizations; community government, business, and nonprofit leaders not involved in the initiative; potential additional partners; and potential investors. Have their various perspectives in mind as you decide what information to provide and how to present it.
- Be thorough, but concise, in your narrative descriptions of outcomes, strategies, and the other elements of your initiative. Be mindful of how findings from various parts of your planning process fit together. Will a reader understand how your outcomes reflect the needs of your focal population(s), how your identified obstacles are standing in the way of those outcomes, and how your strategies will address those obstacles to increase the likelihood of success? Have you provided enough information to assure the reader that your goals and strategies are realistic?





- Think about whether your initiative’s description illustrates a comprehensive strategy to increase family engagement in support of students’ high school completion. Will a reader understand how your schools and community partners are working together in service of your student and family outcomes? Will the reader understand why the community partners and school efforts you’re working with represent strategic partnerships in this initiative?
- Be sure that readers will clearly understand how you intend to evaluate the initiative’s implementation and results. Is it clear how your indicators of progress are meaningfully linked to your chosen strategies and outcomes?

SELECT AND SUMMARIZE KEY ELEMENTS FROM THE PLANNING PHASE OF YOUR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE.

Your description of your initiative should tell a story that highlights the key elements of your planning process and provide a clear picture of what your family engagement initiative will look like in action. You may find it useful to include one or more of your planning charts to tailor your description for specific audiences (e.g., if presenting your work to an audience that focuses on evaluation, Table 1.6b can be useful to show how you plan to measure progress towards your outcomes.)

The following elements should be included in the description of your planned family engagement initiative:

Goals and Outcomes

- Your initiative’s overall goals, including the timeline for achieving them (e.g., is this a three-year initiative?).
- Descriptions of the focal student population(s) and your desired student outcomes.
- Descriptions of your desired family outcomes and how they are linked to student outcomes.

The Planning Process

- Key stakeholders/partners and why they were chosen.
- Descriptions of how you used data to select your focal populations and desired outcomes.
- Examples of the ways families and students participated in the planning process and how their participation affected the development of your implementation plan.

Focal Student Population

- The total number of focal students.
- If you are targeting students at multiple grade levels, indicate how many students are in each grade (note: a chart might be a useful way of presenting this information).
- The number of schools you are targeting to reach this population.
- Report the on-time graduation rate for each high school to help readers understand the need for intervention at that site.
- The data showing that these students are at high risk of not graduating from high school on time.

Focal Family Population

- A description of the obstacles and underlying issues that prevent families from taking the actions described in your family outcomes.

Strategies and Activities

- A description of the broad strategies you have designed to address identified obstacles to effective family engagement.
- The specific steps that school and community partners will take to carry out your strategies.
- The methods of outreach that school and community partners will use to connect with the families of students who are most at risk for academic failure.
- Any relevant information gathered from your planning meetings as well as focus groups, surveys, and other activities with families and students during the planning process that helped to inform the choice of activities to implement.

TIP: If your strategies involve the use of online data tools, text messaging, or other technology, be sure to provide sufficient information for the reader to understand what the technology is, how the tools will be used, and the purposes they will serve.

Evaluation

- Consider providing a logic model of your planned initiative, which will provide a visual representation of how your outcomes, strategies, and school/community partner actions are connected.
- A description of the indicators of progress you have chosen to show whether you are achieving your outcomes.
- A description of how you will manage data collection and analysis and your plan for reviewing evaluation findings to identify and implement necessary improvements.

Resources

- A list of the resources (e.g., knowledge, influence, technology, money) you will need to implement the project.
- Include a breakdown of how the resources will be used (e.g., implementation of school/community partner activities, program evaluation, general management of the initiative).



PART 2

Implementing a Family Engagement for High School Success Initiative

The second half of this toolkit focuses on the first year of implementing your family engagement initiative. It will help guide you through carrying out the strategies you developed during the planning process, as well as collecting and using information on the implementation of those strategies. While Part 2 of the toolkit is divided into distinct sections, the implementation process is dynamic: As you launch your strategies and gather information on your activities, you will find that you sometimes need to go back and modify your approach in order to address challenges or better meet the needs of your focal families and school and community partners.

As you begin the first year of strategy implementation, you will be taking steps to ensure your initiative's strategies are reaching the students and families most in need of assistance (your focal students and families) and are flexible, yet aligned with your desired student and family outcomes. The effort you spent during the planning phase – gathering information on the risk factors for failing to graduate on time, understanding the obstacles to effective family engagement, and cultivating strong school and community partnerships – will provide a strong foundation for this work.

The most logical time to launch your family engagement strategies is at the beginning of the school year – or during the summer preceding it – so that you can help students and families transition into a new school year and get started on the right track. This will also allow you to begin gathering a robust set of student performance

data right from the start of the school year – helping you determine whether your family engagement strategies are positively affecting student learning.

As part of the implementation phase, you will collect data regularly to determine the following:

- How well you are reaching the focal families.
- Whether your strategies are being implemented as planned.
- Whether your activities are helping families and students make progress towards the desired outcomes.

These data will guide you through the process of building and expanding effective outreach practices and improving your activities. These data can also help you to identify practices that are not working as well as you had hoped so that you can improve them, thus strengthening your initiative's efforts.

Where applicable, Part 2 of the toolkit includes case examples from the *Family Engagement for High School Success* (FEHS) pilot sites to show what each implementation phase looks like in practice.



PART 2 Outline

The major components of the implementation process, with the central questions that guide each, are:

SECTION 2.1: Reconvening School and Community Partners

- Are the fundamental elements of your planning process still relevant?
- Are school and community partner staff prepared to carry out their roles?

SECTION 2.2: Establishing Data Collection Systems

- How will you collect data to track families' participation and progress toward family and student outcomes?
- How will you track implementation of your strategies?

SECTION 2.3: Launching Family Engagement Strategies

- How will you roll out your initiative's strategies?

SECTION 2.4: Measuring Progress toward Desired Outcomes

- How will you examine data to know whether your strategies are effective or whether you need to make adjustments?

SECTION 2.5: Reflecting on Challenges and Successes of Engagement Strategies

- How will you discuss progress and troubleshoot challenges with initiative partners?

SECTION 2.6: Creating a Year-End Summary

- How do you create a succinct summary of your work and accomplishments to share with your school and community partners, focal families, and other stakeholders?

This toolkit treats these implementation sections – especially Sections 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 – as separate implementation processes, but you should bear in mind that these activities are not necessarily linear, and won't necessarily happen in this exact order. You will find yourself revisiting many of the elements in each section as you implement your initiative. For example, as you conduct your activities, you will collect data on progress, which will feed back into your strategy implementation as you identify ways to improve your activities. Regular "check in" meetings with your partners will help you identify what is working well and what needs to be adjusted to help strengthen the partnerships and the initiative as a whole.

SECTION 2.1: Reconvening School and Community Partners

Before you launch your family engagement strategies, you will need to review the work you did during the planning process and decide whether you need to make any changes to your proposed strategies based on updated knowledge about focal families' situations and the status of your partnerships with school and community partners. You will also work with school and community partners to ensure that they understand the issues your focal families face, recognize the connections between your family engagement strategies and student learning, and are prepared to carry out their roles in implementing the strategies.

You will probably want to launch your strategies at the beginning of the school year, or during the preceding summer, if you plan to hold summer orientation sessions for focal families and students to help them transition to school. Plan ahead so that your school and community partners are able to receive the information and training they need *before* you begin your activities with families.

WHAT YOU DO

- Examine whether any new obstacles or issues have emerged within your focal family group that need to be addressed.
- Consult with school and community partners to ensure they are still prepared to take the active steps agreed upon during strategy development.
- Set up training and informational sessions with key personnel in school and community partner organizations.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- An up-to-date understanding of the issues your focal families face.
- Assurance that your school and community partners are actively committed to your family engagement strategies, and are prepared to carry out their roles.
- Increased school and community capacity to promote family engagement.



EXAMINE WHETHER ANY NEW OBSTACLES OR ISSUES HAVE EMERGED WITHIN YOUR FOCAL FAMILY GROUP THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED.

In the time that has passed since you engaged in the planning process, your focal families' situations may have changed, affecting the obstacles to family engagement that your strategies are designed to address. Checking in with your focal families and partners can give you an updated assessment of whether the obstacles you identified during the planning process still represent the most critical barriers to effective family engagement. If the schools you are partnering with have family coordinators or parent liaisons, they can be a good source of information about what is happening with families.

If you find that some of the obstacles have been partially addressed – for instance, if you initially identified transportation as an obstacle, but a community partner has since provided families with free or subsidized bus passes – you may want to shift your strategies. In this case, you can now focus on distributing the bus passes to the appropriate families and students. If new obstacles have emerged – for instance, if you discover that many families frequently lose phone service or change phone numbers, preventing you from effectively using phone calls to do outreach as planned – you will want to ensure that your strategies address these new obstacles as well.

CONSULT WITH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO ENSURE THEY ARE STILL PREPARED TO TAKE THE ACTIVE STEPS AGREED UPON DURING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT.

You spent a great deal of time cultivating strong school and community partnerships during your planning process, ensuring that all of your partners understood the goals of your initiative and were committed to taking active steps to support the strategies you developed together. The success of your initiative will depend, in part, on how willing and committed your school and community partners are to carrying out their roles. You should not assume, for instance, that having a handful of staff on board means that the school or organization as a whole is ready to be an active partner in your family engagement efforts. Take the time to meet with as many staff members from partner organizations as possible, in order to build relationships and help them see that your initiative is a worthwhile effort.

In addition, before you officially launch your initiative, find out if there have been any changes in resource allocation, organizational structure, or personnel since the planning phase within partnering schools and community organizations that may impact their abilities to serve as active partners in your initiative.

During the summer before implementation, the school district in York, PA, experienced dramatic turnover in key school personnel who had been heavily involved in the family engagement initiative's planning process. United Way of York County responded by re-educating and re-engaging new school personnel to create a solid foundation for the initiative. This United Way also worked to increase the number of teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators who were knowledgeable about and engaged with the initiative to help protect it from the disruption that future staff changes could entail.

TIP: Set aside time before the implementation phase begins to see whether your initiative will be affected by any funding, organizational, or staffing changes and, if so, work with your partners to figure out how you will re-group and move forward.

SET UP TRAINING AND INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS WITH KEY PERSONNEL IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS.

A teacher, parent liaison/family coordinator, or school receptionist is usually a parent's first point of contact with a school's family engagement efforts. This first contact leaves a lasting impression, so training all those who are involved with families is time and money well spent – this is also true for community organization staff. The relationships and rapport that staff establish with families are key to opening lines of communication and encouraging participation. Consider the following activities¹ to support staff efforts:

Train all staff. Include those who are directly involved in implementing family engagement strategies as well as others who come in contact with families. A parent liaison may be committed to welcoming parents into a family resource center, however, other staff may not be as aware of the roles they play in helping families feel comfortable and valued. Make sure that all staff, including receptionists and security guards, understand the initiative's goals and the school or organization's commitment to them. This will ensure that the entire staff is consistent in creating a welcoming environment for families.

In addition to gaining a clear understanding of their own roles, school and community partner staff should become familiar with the roles of people in key positions – such as parent liaisons – in the family engagement initiative. They should be knowledgeable about the services offered by parent liaisons as well as family resource centers so that they can direct families to appropriate supports.

In a family engagement initiative at the high school level, the content of trainings – especially for school and community organization staff and volunteers who are responsible for directly engaging families in student learning, as well as newly-hired parent liaisons and teachers – should also include information about:

- School requirements for high school graduation.
- Access and use of online student data systems (where applicable).
- Available school and community resources to support students' learning and development (e.g., homework help, mentoring and afterschool programs, community service, internships).
- Available community resources that can support students' and families' well-being (e.g., family counseling, financial assistance, health).
- Using the knowledge gained in these trainings, staff and community volunteers will be better able to share relevant information with families.



*As part of the family engagement initiative spearheaded by **United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra in Reno, NV**, the school has made an effort to involve the initiative's Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) in its general staff trainings so that the PIFs are familiar with curriculum standards and other teaching and learning issues that affect students. This has led PIFs to be included as valued members of the school staff, attending Professional Learning Community meetings and planning meetings with the ninth grade Dean of Students when appropriate, as well as collaborating with teachers and other critical school staff members.*

*In Las Vegas, NV, one of the schools partnering with **United Way of Southern Nevada** realized it had no bilingual administrators, even though many of its students' families had limited English skills. To address this problem, the school hired three bilingual administrators who represented the languages most commonly spoken among the focal families, including a Family Engagement Resource Center Coordinator, to improve the school's ability to communicate with students' families.*

¹ Lopez, M. E., & Balle, K. (1993). *Building villages to raise our children: community outreach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.



Know your families. Learn about the families you serve – both collectively and on an individual basis. When working with culturally diverse communities, it is advisable to have staff members who can speak to families in the languages they speak at home, whenever possible. You can form partnerships with ethnically-based community organizations and businesses with diversity specialists to train staff on multicultural principles and also help you with staff recruitment.

Focus on goals. In order to help administrators and staff get behind the family engagement initiative, be sure they understand the connections between family engagement and student learning and development. While you can share powerful data from research, it is also important to include real-life stories of how family engagement has helped students overcome challenges and meet their academic goals. Show that your activities with focal families align with schools' goals of high levels of attendance, academic achievement, and positive youth development.

Encourage staff to be nonjudgmental. Engage in conversations about how people can convey a positive, nonjudgmental outlook towards families. Be aware that negative attitudes can be transmitted through body language as well as words.

It is important to help staff and community volunteers understand parents' perspectives and the obstacles to engagement in their children's learning. Having families share their experiences with teachers and other staff members in training sessions can help them understand the challenges families encounter and develop more successful ways that families can be partners in students' high school success.

Use staff meetings to reflect upon relationships with families. Encourage school and community organization staff members and community volunteers to talk openly about their assumptions about families in order to separate fact from fiction. Through this process biases and stereotypes are likely to surface. Some professionals may assume, for example, that they know more about students than parents – forgetting that parents may also have unique information about their children that can support learning. As a result, staff may fail to listen to what families are doing at home to help their children succeed. The point is not that one side knows more, but that each side has something to offer. Dialogue and feedback from co-workers can help staff gain a balanced perspective and be mindful of overcoming their biases.

Provide adequate supervision. Staff and community volunteers need support in working with families. New hires, in particular, benefit from weekly conversations with supervisors to understand the vision and value of engaging families and the ways to relate positively with families, some of whom have had negative experiences with schools.

Help school and community partner staff understand how to collaborate with one another. School and community partner staff should also receive training on how to collaborate with each other – as well as with representatives from your initiative – so everyone involved in the partnership understands each other’s roles, shares a commitment to the initiative’s goals, and can communicate regularly about activities and progress to help the initiative remain cohesive. While community partners might be familiar with working at a school, or interacting with a particular school staff member (e.g., an afterschool coordinator), many school and community partners will not have had much experience with the kind of close collaboration your initiative seeks to promote.

As you develop a training plan for your family engagement initiative, consider the following questions:

- Who will be trained?
- What knowledge and skills will be imparted?
- How will the training be conducted?
- How will supervision and follow-up learning opportunities be managed?
- How will the performance of staff members and community volunteers in partnering with families be assessed?

While it is important to train school and community partner staff and provide them with information about your initiative *before* launching your strategies, it is also critical that you provide ongoing opportunities for staff training and dialogue throughout the life of your initiative. As new issues arise, take steps to increase staff members’ capacities to partner with families and handle the complex situations that they face.





SECTION 2.2: Establishing Data Collection Systems

In this stage, you will work with your school and community partners to develop data collection systems that will allow you to get accurate counts of the focal families you reach, and to track their participation in family engagement activities and progress on family outcomes. You will develop a system to collect and analyze student data to track progress toward desired student outcomes (as determined during the planning stage). In addition, you will create a plan to track the implementation of your strategies.

WHAT YOU DO

- Review plans and determine what additional data are needed.
- Develop necessary data collection systems.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- Access to the data you will need in order to show progress toward student outcomes.
- A means of tracking the implementation of family engagement strategies.
- A way to gather information on how many families your initiative has reached.
- A means of tracking each family’s participation in activities over the course of your initiative and progress toward family outcomes.

Data systems should be in place before the start of the school year (or the start of your family engagement activities, whichever comes first) so that you can start capturing data from the beginning of your initiative. This is critical both to show progress over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of your work with families. The data you collect should be determined by the desired family and student outcomes of your initiative’s strategies and the indicators – measurable characteristics or milestones that show progress toward those outcomes – that you identified during the planning phase or your work (see Section 1.3 for outcomes development and Section 1.6 for identifying indicators of those outcomes). Data should also be collected on the implementation of activities that initiative partners have agreed to hold for families.



See “Plan data collection methods” and “Set up a system for monitoring implementation of activities” in Section 1.6 for a review of the following topics:

- Using single versus multiple methods.
- Using existing data sources.
- Selecting a sample of individuals.
- Assigning staff and others to collect the data.
- Establishing a schedule for data collection.
- Aligning data collection with out-comes and activities.
- Outlining responsibility for tracking implementation.

REVIEW PLANS AND DETERMINE WHAT ADDITIONAL DATA ARE NEEDED.

Use the table you completed during Section 1.6, “Aligning Data Collection with Outcomes and Activities” (Table 1.6b in Appendix C), to review the student- and family-level outcome data that need to be collected and the planned processes for doing so. Make sure that each indicator you identified has corresponding data that will be collected and that the data collection process you developed is in place before implementation begins. For example, if you want to assess the success of a phone call-and-flyer outreach strategy, you might collect data on how many families attend the activity promoted through those methods. If you want to understand the effect of a workshop about graduation requirements, you might conduct pre- and post-workshop surveys to determine the change in families’ understanding of what their child needs to do to graduate from high school on time. Be sure that the data you plan to collect for each indicator of progress is logically connected to the purpose of the activity or intervention.

Relevant initiative partners also need to agree on who is responsible for what type of data collection, and when (or at what intervals) that data will be collected. For example, a school’s principal may agree to provide aggregate data on focal students’ attendance and credits earned at the end of each semester, while a community organization responsible for holding workshops for families may agree that its staff will record the names of families in attendance and ask families to complete surveys at the end of each workshop to measure relevant outcomes.

You should also keep in mind that the strength of a strategy and the number of people reached by a strategy will likely have an impact on the progress toward related outcomes. Determining ways to measure implementation, participation, and progress toward outcomes will help you evaluate the success of your initiative and areas for improvement; this type of analysis will be discussed more in Section 2.4.

DEVELOP NECESSARY DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS.

It is important to track whether activities are being implemented as planned. If activities are postponed, or don’t happen at all, that will affect your families’ abilities to gain the knowledge and skills they need to support student learning, and it will compromise your ability to understand your initiative’s progress. In Section 1.5 of the toolkit you determined the school and community partner actions that will be part of the initiative (Tables 1.5a – 1.5b in Appendix C). Using the list of actions you created in Section 1.5, you can use Table 2.2b in Appendix C to track whether activities are happening as planned. Keep track of when activities are taking place throughout the implementation process. This information will be useful in Section 2.5 when you meet with initiative partners to discuss both areas of success and those needing improvement.

While some of the data you need may already have a data collection system in place, you will likely need to develop a system to measure indicators

TIP: In addition to developing methods to collect data on the benefit(s) of specific activities, consider surveying all of your focal families at the end of the year to collect information on how their knowledge, skills, interactions with school staff, etc., have changed over the course of the year and which elements of the initiative they found most beneficial (e.g., parent liaison contacts, computer training workshops, etc.). This will help you gain a more holistic assessment of your focal families’ overall experiences with your efforts to engage them in student learning.

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra in Reno, NV, collaborated with school district partners to build a Parent Involvement Facilitator (PIF) tab into the district’s existing student data system. This tab allowed school-based PIFs to enter and categorize data on their interactions with families and automatically link the information to the relevant students’ school data.

of families' participation and progress toward outcomes. Tracking families' participation can be done using databases that you build specifically for your initiative or by using existing student performance databases that are customized to also capture the indicators needed for your initiative. For instance, some school districts may have the capability to include families' participation data and indicators of success in their student databases, but this often takes time and needs to be planned well in advance of implementation, and relies on a very high degree of collaboration with the school district.

If no data system with the necessary capabilities exists, another way to capture families' participation data is by using a spreadsheet that includes formulas for calculating summary data as well as unduplicated counts² of families' participation in activities. Recruiting someone with the necessary skills to design this kind of spreadsheet and tailor it to your initiative will allow you to track individual families' participation across multiple activities and analyze participation data for specific activities, while tracking overall participation and unduplicated counts. In addition, this type of spreadsheet could also be used to track the individual families reached through various outreach methods (e.g., phone calls or flyers sent home). There are multiple ways to track this kind of information; an example of this type of tool – created using MS Excel – including a detailed description, is located in Appendix C (see Table 2.2a) of this toolkit. A preview of the tool is displayed in Figure 1.

² An unduplicated count of families ensures that each family is counted only once, even if they participate in multiple activities. It is a way to measure how many individual families you have reached through your initiative.

FIGURE 1: FAMILY PARTICIPATION SPREADSHEET

Student Name	Parent 1 Name	In Focal Population	Summer Orientation 8-24-10	Contract with P.I. Coordinator	FERC Drop-in Session	Total Activities Attended
Last Name, First Name 01	Last Name, First Name	0	1			1
Last Name, First Name 02	Last Name, First Name	1	0	1		1
Last Name, First Name 94	Last Name, First Name	0	1			1
Last Name, First Name 95	Last Name, First Name	1	0	3		3
Last Name, First Name 96	Last Name, First Name	1	1	1	3	5
Last Name, First Name 97	Last Name, First Name	0	1			1
Last Name, First Name 98	Last Name, First Name	0	1			1
Last Name, First Name 99	Last Name, First Name	1	0			0
Total Instances			5	5	3	13
Unduplicated Count		8	5	3	1	7
Focal Population: Total Instances			1	5	3	9
Focal Population: Unduplicated Court		4	1	3	1	3

KEY:
 1 = yes/participated once
 0 = no/did not participate
 Numbers above 1 = the number of times a family member participated in the activity
 P.I. stands for Parent involvement
 FERC stands for Family Engagement Resource Center

TIPS:

- Capture data for indicators of families' progress using multiple methods, including staff reports on families' changes in behavior, knowledge, or attitudes; and surveys or interviews with families that capture their beliefs, practices, and opinions related to the initiative's goals.
- Lay out a clear plan for which partners are responsible for capturing these data, how they will capture the data, and at what intervals.
- Be sure to determine who will be in charge of managing data collection among partners and how the data will be shared among them.

To capture indicators of families' progress toward outcomes you may need to develop systems for staff to monitor and track growth, such as an increase in parents' understanding of graduation requirements or an increase in parents' abilities to use student performance data to identify and access academic support services for their children. These indicators may be captured through surveys or interviews with families (i.e., self-reports) or through reports from students. Initiative partners should work together to determine how progress toward each outcome will be tracked and develop any surveys or other tools in advance.

Many of the student-level indicators will involve data that are available through a school or district's existing student data system. Review the tips for collecting data from student data systems listed in Section 1.2, "Setting up systems for gathering timely data." Because the initiative will rely on the school or district data system for meaningful indicators of student performance, you will need to have a well-established partnership with school or district personnel who have access to these data and who are able to share the aggregate focal student data, or their analysis of it, with your team.

During the planning phase you should have identified specific items and indicators that you would need from the student database – such as attendance, disciplinary actions, and homework completion rates. If you have not already done so, now is the time to lay out a plan for when and how these data will be shared with the team. Ideally you will want to be able to integrate these data with the other relevant data that you are collecting on families and students. Your team needs to determine if this is possible and how it will be done. Privacy concerns can make it difficult to access some of these data in a timely fashion, so be sure to allow time for this.



SECTION 2.3: Launching Family Engagement Strategies

In this section, you will launch your family engagement strategies, ensure that your strategies allow families to build on the knowledge they gain and skills they develop, and make adjustments to your strategies based on information you collect about how well you are reaching your focal families.

Your strategies should fall into three general categories: outreach strategies to connect with focal families; strategies to encourage families' participation in activities; and strategies to increase families' engagement in student learning.

WHAT YOU DO

- Engage in effective outreach strategies to connect with focal families and promote participation in activities.
- Avoid random acts of family engagement: keep the focus on strategies that guide parents to support their children on the path to high school graduation.
- Understand that it may take time for some focal families to fully engage in their children's education.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A logical, deliberate roll-out of your family engagement strategies.
- Information about how well you are reaching your focal families.

ENGAGE IN EFFECTIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO CONNECT WITH FOCAL FAMILIES AND PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES.

Effective outreach involves more than just bringing families through the door: It is about forming lasting relationships among families, schools, and community partners. As families become more familiar and comfortable with parent liaisons and other staff who reach out to connect with them, they will likely be more willing to participate in school- and community-based activities designed to support their involvement in student learning.

Recruiting families can involve logging many hours contacting families, especially those who are mobile or who work long hours. Having multiple ways of contacting families, including via personal contacts, increases the likelihood of reaching them. Using a variety of outreach strategies helps to ensure that families not only know about the existence of resources and opportunities to support student learning, but that they are also reminded about these resources and opportunities through repeated exposure to the information.

Outreach efforts to families can include:

- Personal phone calls.
- One-on-one conversations.
- Letters mailed to homes.
- Flyers posted or distributed by community partners.
- News bulletins on local TV.
- Advertisements in local papers.

Using a variety of outreach strategies helps to make sure all families know about resources and activities, and reminds families through repeated exposure to the information.

TIPS

To promote family participation:

- Offer the same activity on multiple days and at different times. This allows families the flexibility to navigate work schedules and other time constraints.
- Request that school partners distribute information through teachers and school staff, send materials home with students, and post flyers on bulletin boards or in family resource center rooms.
- Ask community partners to help with outreach. They can provide high-visibility notices of family engagement activities in multiple locations, such as community centers, housing authority offices, bus stops, and other community spaces.

As part of the family engagement initiative in Gurnee, IL, the local high school developed flyers to distribute throughout the community to remind parents about parent-teacher conferences. United Way of Lake County supported this outreach effort by placing AmeriCorps volunteers on-site at the school to distribute flyers to parents in person at the end of the school day. After this intensive outreach effort, the school saw participation in parent-teacher conferences rise from 25% in 2010 to 46% in 2011.

In addition, some communities may need specific outreach strategies that are tailored to the cultural norms and traditions of that group. For example, families who are recent immigrants may have come from a culture where teachers are considered “experts” and where it is inappropriate for parents to try to play an active role in their child’s education. In this case, parent liaisons or other staff who reach out to parents would need to make it clear that parental involvement is truly valued by schools to help shape families’ thinking about how they should interact with teachers and other school staff.

Similarly, parents who are unfamiliar with the language and culture of the U.S. school system may not know how to gauge whether their child is having difficulties in school. For example, the pilot site in Reno, NV, reported that some students had told their Spanish-speaking parents that an “F” on a report card stood for “fantástico,” and their families assumed that the students were doing well in school when in fact they were falling further and further behind. Again, it is critically important that you have a thorough understanding of your focal families and the obstacles that prevent them from taking steps to effectively support student learning. This knowledge will allow you to tailor outreach strategies and intervention activities to the specific needs of your focal population.

Using school and community partners as additional communication channels not only increases the likelihood that families will get the information they need, but also conveys a sense of importance regarding the event(s) and increases the likelihood that families will take the activity – and their participation in it – seriously.

AVOID RANDOM ACTS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: KEEP THE FOCUS ON STRATEGIES THAT GUIDE PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN ON THE PATH TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION.

All too often, family engagement efforts focus on isolated, one-time events rather than on desired outcomes. Families are eager to learn about how their children are doing and what they can do to support their pathway through high school, so don’t let that enthusiasm go to waste. Make sure that your activities align with your family engagement outcomes and connect with the overall goal of the initiative – high school success.

You will most likely plan to start implementing your strategies at the beginning of the school year, or during the preceding summer, to help your students and families get started on the right track. Most of the FEHS pilot sites, for example, focused on helping incoming ninth grade students and their families understand how to navigate high school coursework and graduation requirements. Many of their strategies involved summer orientation sessions and relationship-building efforts with family liaisons at the beginning of the school year to help ensure that students and families experienced a smooth transition into ninth grade. Both the “starting point” you select for launching your strategies and the way you sequence your efforts are important.

As you roll out your family engagement strategies, you should also ensure that the strategies build on one another and provide families with information and skill development in a logical sequence. For instance, if a major obstacle to family engagement relates to negative home-school relationships, then your initial strategies might need to focus on rebuilding these relationships and fostering positive home-school communication. Then, once trust has been established, you can begin to offer workshops designed to help families understand how to navigate high school requirements.

Well-designed family engagement initiatives at the high school level include a comprehensive network of strategies to:

- **Acquaint families with high school requirements.** You can work with the school to help enhance traditional offerings, such as back-to-school orientations, to better address the knowledge gaps that families often have regarding high school graduation requirements and expectations. This method helps to conserve resources by allowing you to “piggy-back” on existing activities sponsored by the school or other community partners. While these activities are often geared towards a broader school population than your focal students and families, you can work with the school to modify the activity so it helps meet the specific needs of your focal population while still benefiting the larger school community.
- **Help families gain skills and follow up on action steps to help support their children’s learning.** Your family engagement initiative should train and employ staff in multiple, strategic ways to increase the range of your efforts. Parent liaisons can establish relationships with families, and coordinate or conduct trainings for families to help them understand how to navigate the requirements of high school and, increasingly, teach families how to access student performance information online. Parent liaisons can also follow up with families after parent-teacher conferences and check in with parents about students’ use of homework help and other resources to boost academic performance.
- **Build positive relationships to help connect families to the school on an ongoing basis.** Your family engagement initiative will experience changing levels of enthusiasm and participation among families. Parent liaisons can keep in touch with families through phone calls, email, and personal notes that remind them of appointments or scheduled activities. Above all, showing care and concern for students can provide the motivation families need to follow through with activities and actions designed to help them support students’ pathways toward high school graduation.

United Way of Lake County in Gurnee, IL, worked with the high school to redesign the freshman orientation program in an effort to create a more meaningful strategy for helping focal students and their families transition into ninth grade. In past years, this event was primarily a time for families to pick up their students’ schedules and bus passes. The expanded orientation provided the students and families with the opportunity to meet their school principal and teachers; learn about the high school’s expectations for behavior, attendance, and credit accumulation; understand graduation requirements; and tour the school. School and community partners assisted in promoting the event, and the orientation was offered during both the daytime and evening. Both of these factors helped contribute to the activity’s success. While not specifically designed for focal families, the orientation became more comprehensive and meaningful thanks to the involvement of the initiative, and focal families as well as the overall student population benefited.

United Way of Southern Cameron County in Brownsville, TX, hired a family coordinator who conducted a fall Family Academy to help orient incoming focal families and students to the high school’s expectations of students, such as attendance requirements and credits needed for graduation. The family coordinator also held trainings on using the district’s online student performance tracking system (GradeSpeed), helped set up parent-teacher conferences, and provided referrals to community organizations offering social supports like housing assistance.

The FEHS initiative involving United Way of Southeast Missouri in Cape Girardeau, MO, focused on using parent liaisons to engage focal families in a variety of activities to help build home-school relationships and enhance families’ understanding of high school graduation requirements. Parent liaisons participated in parent-student orientations, staff professional development trainings, and parent-teacher conferences to ensure that focal families knew about the kinds of supports the parent liaison could offer families over the course of the school year. The parent liaison also helped parents use the district’s student performance tracking system (Parent Link) to monitor their children’s attendance, academics, behavior, and earned credits.

For **United Way of Southeast Missouri in Cape Girardeau, MO**, the greatest challenge in working with families was connecting with them on an ongoing basis. Obstacles that the FEHS pilot site faced included high family mobility, disruptions in communication access, and difficulties in helping families to see that a one-time visit with school personnel or a parent liaison was not sufficient to help their child be successful in school. It was sometimes difficult to help families understand that effective engagement is a long-term commitment that requires daily follow-up, regular family meeting times to talk with their children and establish expectations, and finding necessary resources to support their children. This pilot site noted that it has been doing a great deal of hand-holding and “walking the walk” with parents to help them access resources and connect them with the information they need, and while these one-on-one interactions have been effective in helping the parents in the moment, the site has still been struggling with how to help the families become more self-sufficient in supporting their children on a daily basis.

The parent liaison working with **United Way of Southern Cameron County’s family engagement initiative in Brownsville, TX**, discovered that many of the focal families needed help with housing, employment, and other basic needs. It was extremely difficult for parents to focus on supporting student learning while dealing with the stress of being homeless or unemployed. In addition, some of the focal students were suffering from abuse or neglect at home, and needed mental health and social services interventions to help stabilize their situations and allow them to re-engage in school. This highlights the need for strong community partnerships that can provide a comprehensive array of student and family support services.

UNDERSTAND THAT IT MAY TAKE TIME FOR SOME FOCAL FAMILIES TO FULLY ENGAGE IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION.

Even with effective outreach strategies and well-designed activities that provide families with valuable information and resources, it can be difficult to get some focal families to commit to ongoing efforts to engage with their children’s learning – whether at home, at the school, or in the larger community.

To address these challenges, school and community partners need to have a deep understanding of the obstacles that hinder families’ abilities to effectively engage in their children’s education. Awareness of these challenges helps staff develop the patience and empathy necessary to help guide families through what can sometimes feel like a long and bumpy learning process. This awareness can also help school and community partners connect families with necessary support services and other resources that can address obstacles preventing families from engaging in student learning.

Many families of at-risk students have faced longstanding barriers to understanding how to help their children succeed. For example, some families may be accustomed to only hearing from the school when there are problems to report, and may have never been treated as if they had a meaningful contribution to make to their children’s learning. For these families, it will take much more than just a few personal phone calls from their parent liaison or participation in one or two family activities in order for them to fully realize their potential as active partners in their children’s academic achievement.





HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

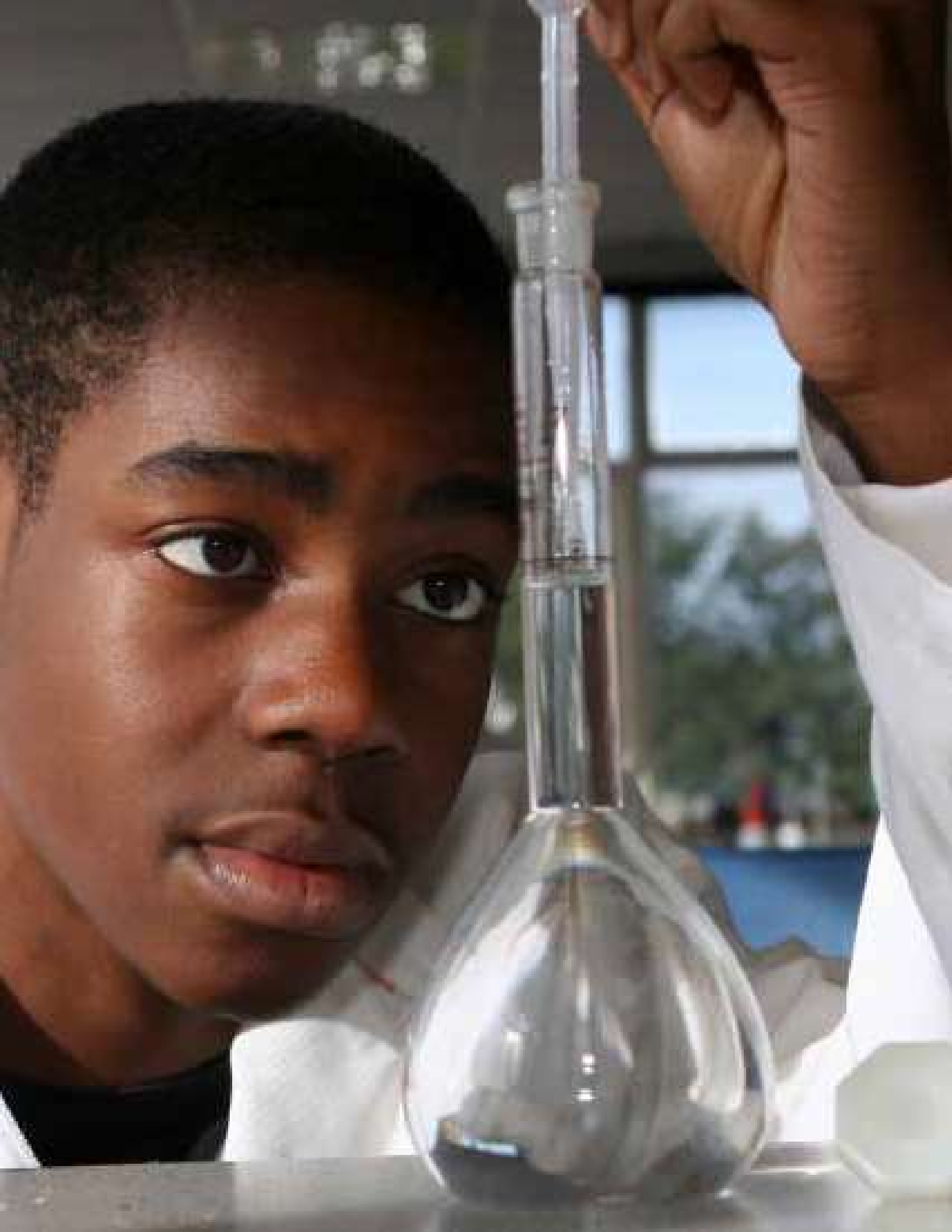
Be mindful of **dosage** issues: Given your initiative's desired outcomes, consider if the breadth, intensity, and duration of your activity or intervention are sufficient to help your families make progress towards these goals.

Breadth refers to how many topics and skills are addressed in a given activity or intervention. For example, a freshmen orientation that involves a tour of the high school, time for parents to meet with teachers and parent liaisons, and discussions about high school graduation requirements, has much greater breadth than an orientation where the primary purpose is to distribute course schedules and hand out a list of community-based academic support services.

Intensity refers to how often an activity or intervention occurs. For example, a parent liaison could contact a family once, at the beginning of the year, to offer support in understanding graduation requirements and ways to help their child achieve those benchmarks, or the parent liaison could contact the family weekly, offering support over time as the family's knowledge and skills develop. The more frequently an activity occurs, the greater the chances are that families will develop relationships with staff and build on the skills they learned initially.

Duration refers to the period of time that an activity or intervention spans. A three-part workshop series to help parents understand how to access and use the online student data tracking system might take place within a one-week time span, or may occur over several weeks to allow parents time to reflect on what they learn in each session. The duration of an activity should reflect the complexity of the knowledge or skills being imparted so that families have an adequate amount of time to absorb and apply what they have learned.

TIP: It's important to remember that families can be meaningfully involved with their children's learning at home without attending school-based events. You should not assume that parents are not interested in supporting student learning just because they don't show up at scheduled activities. Parent liaisons and other staff members responsible for connecting with families need to determine how they can best support focal families' involvement in student learning – whether that means encouraging families to attend workshops to understand graduation requirements or helping them understand what they can do at home, with their children, to promote academic achievement.



SECTION 2.4: Measuring Progress toward Desired Outcomes

In this section, you will examine data you have collected to determine how well your family engagement strategies have been implemented, whether families are taking more actions to support student learning, and whether you have made progress toward desired family and student outcomes.

WHAT YOU DO

- Examine data on family engagement strategies, including information on whether your strategies have been implemented as planned, how many families you have reached, and whether families are making progress towards the desired outcomes.
- Examine data on student outcomes to assess progress.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- An understanding of whether your initiative is making the desired progress on implementing planned activities and achieving family and student outcomes.

Along with your school and community partners, you have identified a common set of family and student outcomes and designed strategies to achieve them. You have established data collection systems to track the implementation of those activities and assess changes in families' abilities to actively support student learning. Regularly examining these data will give you a good indication of how your initiative is progressing. Measuring progress toward these outcomes helps you understand which of your strategies are making progress and which may need more attention. Regularly examining outcome data with your partners promotes continuous learning and directs you to take steps to improve these outcomes (this process is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5).

EXAMINE DATA ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES, INCLUDING INFORMATION ON WHETHER YOUR ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED AS PLANNED, HOW MANY FAMILIES YOU HAVE REACHED, AND WHETHER FAMILIES ARE MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD THE DESIRED OUTCOMES.

A well-designed implementation process involves a set of strategies that are thoughtfully sequenced to allow families to develop and build on the knowledge and skills they acquire through your efforts. It is important to track whether the strategies' corresponding activities are taking place as planned. If some activities are delayed or not held at all, families may not be able to obtain necessary information or develop skills in certain areas, which can affect their progress toward outcomes.

TIP: If you find that activities are, in fact, not being implemented as planned, make a note of why your plans have changed. This information will help you better contextualize the data you collect on family outcomes. You should also discuss these changes and how they might impact progress with the other partners in your initiative.

TIP: If you have collected data on families beyond just your focal families, it can be valuable to summarize and review these data as well so that you can fully assess the reach of the initiative.

In addition to tracking whether activities are occurring, you will need to track whether your activities are working. There are two types of data to review that can help you assess your initiative: indicators of participation (e.g., the number and percentage of families participating in an activity), and indicators of impact (e.g., the number and percentage of families reporting that they have discussions with their children about the importance of regular attendance).

Reviewing both types of data is important to understand the effectiveness of your initiative. The questions in this section – along with the corresponding tables and worksheets in Appendix C – will help you organize and review the data you and your partners have collected using your established data collection systems. Through this process you can identify successful outreach approaches and determine which strategies are helping families develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support student learning as well as recognize which strategies might need adjustment.

In Table 2.4a (see Appendix C) you will record the number of total families and focal families who participate in each of your initiative’s family engagement activities, as well as the family outcome(s) that the activity is designed to impact. In Table 2.4b (see Appendix C) you will record data showing whether your families are making progress toward the desired outcomes.

Once you complete these tables and begin to review your family activity participation and outcomes data, the following questions can help enhance your understanding of the data and your initiative’s activity implementation. These questions will also be helpful when you engage partners in reviewing your initiative’s progress.

- How does the number of families that actually participated in each activity compare to the number of families you expected to participate? If the turnout was much lower than you anticipated, what factors might have contributed to this?
- How does the progress you have made on specific family outcomes compare to families’ participation in related activities?
 - Are you seeing evidence of progress towards an outcome for the entire focal population even if only a few families participated in the activity designed to promote that outcome? (If so, that activity probably cannot be credited with driving that improvement.)
 - Conversely, was an activity well attended yet you saw little evidence of positive change among the families who participated in it? (If so, that activity is probably not having the desired impact on knowledge or skill development.)
- What was done to reach out to inform focal families of these activities and support their participation? Which of these efforts were the most successful in promoting participation? Which efforts seemed least successful?

- Which activities were most successful in helping focal families increase their knowledge or skills regarding ways to support student learning? What do you think may have contributed to the activities' successes (e.g., opportunities for questions, families sharing challenges and ideas with one another, role play simulations)?

Examining data on a multi-layered family engagement initiative requires collaboration among various partners to ensure that all relevant information is collected. The data then need to be regularly summarized and reported out to your partners and other stakeholders to keep everyone informed about your initiative's progress and to help identify areas for improvement. Section 2.5 discusses the need to schedule regular meetings with the partners within your initiative to review data on strategy implementation, evidence of progress towards outcomes, and other issues that affect the health and functioning of the initiative as a whole.

EXAMINE DATA ON STUDENT OUTCOMES TO ASSESS PROGRESS.

The desired student outcomes you selected should be linked to your desired family outcomes, with family outcomes promoting progress toward student outcomes. Because of this, it will often take longer to see evidence of progress on student outcomes, especially when the chosen outcomes are based on a significant span of time, such as credit accumulation at the end of an academic year. With this in mind, you should regularly track the milestones that indicate whether students are making progress towards these outcomes. For example, if students are expected to earn 11 credits by the end of ninth grade, you should examine whether students are making progress toward accumulating these credits at the end of each grading period. Compare these data with the results from your family outcomes so that you can determine whether the progress on family outcomes may be influencing student outcomes.

Table 2.4c in Appendix C will help you to track progress toward student outcomes. If you are in the beginning stages of implementation, these data can serve as early signs of progress about whether you are on track to achieve the desired long-term student outcomes.

United Way of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas, NV, partnered with the Clark County School District to implement the family engagement initiative in five high schools. Each set of family engagement strategies has associated measures and tracking tools developed by an external evaluator. At each school, a site leader trains school personnel, AmeriCorps staff, and family volunteers on how to use the tools, and at each event or family session, specific information is collected. Every month, the school site leader reviews the data collection tools and processes to ensure that data are being collected as intended. Semi-annually, the external evaluator reviews quarterly data reports and drafts a summary brief that describes student and family achievements, including lessons learned and recommendations for initiative improvement. School and community partners review the brief, and their comments and decisions are incorporated into a final version that is posted online and distributed to stakeholders.



SECTION 2.5: Reflecting on the Challenges and Successes of Engagement Strategies

In this stage, you will set up regular meetings with your school and community partners, representatives from your focal families and students, and initiative staff to reflect on your progress and build consensus for the initiative's continued growth. This process of continuous improvement involves using data and stakeholder input to understand progress and challenges and make adjustments as needed to strengthen the initiative.

WHAT YOU DO

- Establish a timeline for regular check-ins with partners to discuss progress towards outcomes.
- Reflect on family engagement outcomes and progress, and take steps toward improving strategies.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- Ongoing information about the health of your initiative.
- Agreement from all parties about what is working well and what kind of adjustments need to be made.

ESTABLISH A TIMELINE FOR REGULAR CHECK-INS WITH PARTNERS TO DISCUSS PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES.

As you enter the implementation phase of your initiative, you should begin meeting regularly with your school and community partners, as well as representatives from your focal student and family populations. In these meetings, you will discuss the initiative's progress on implementing strategies and achieving student and family outcomes, address any challenges that arise, and reflect on the initiative's overall efforts to increase family engagement in student learning. The meetings should be designed to promote constructive learning and identify action steps to strengthen your initiative.

REFLECT ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES AND PROGRESS, AND TAKE STEPS TOWARD IMPROVING STRATEGIES.

The data you examine as part of Section 2.4, as well as any reports you generate from those data, should be the centerpiece of your meetings with your partners to understand how well the initiative is working and what might need to change. The reflection questions posed in Section 2.4 can serve to frame the discussions you have during these meetings.

TIP: Try to establish a regular schedule of meetings *before* the initiative gets under way; otherwise, partners are likely to have other priorities competing for their time and it may be difficult to get on people's calendars.

Findings from formal data collection efforts provide a solid base for understanding your initiative's progress and challenges, but you should also seek other information to supplement these data. If available, include observations of family activities, staff feedback, and minutes from parent meetings. Combining multiple sources of information can either provide confirmation of the evidence of progress or raise questions for further analysis and discussion.

Here are some additional questions that can help school, community, and family partners reflect on their progress in implementing a family engagement initiative:

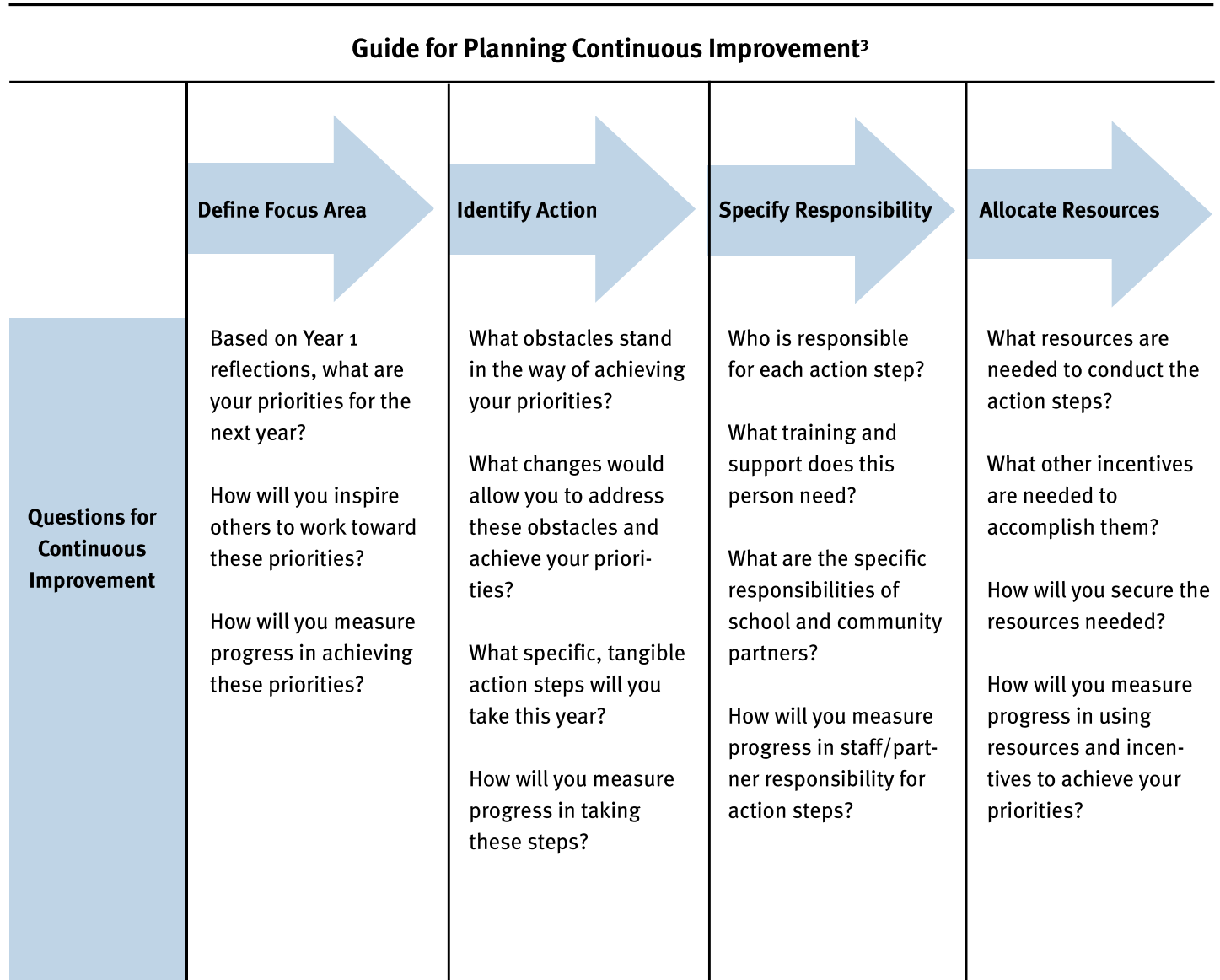
- What is happening in the school district and community that is affecting the implementation of the family engagement strategies? How can you take advantage of opportunities and/or meet challenging situations?
- Do you feel you're making reasonable progress towards desired outcomes, given the dosage (breadth, intensity, duration) of the family engagement activities you have put in place? If staffing or resource issues have impacted your ability to carry out the intended dosage of your interventions, how might you assess your progress in light of these changes?
- What are you finding out about reaching and engaging focal families? What is working and what is not, and what can you do differently?
- What other difficulties are you facing in implementing your initiative with families? How are you addressing these difficulties? What specific resources or supports would help you address these challenges?
- What are you finding out about which strategies are most successful in providing families with the knowledge and skills they need to support student learning? Which strategies need to be improved? What can be done to improve the effectiveness of these activities in reaching the desired family outcomes?
- What associations are you noticing between progress toward family outcomes and progress toward student outcomes? For example, if you are a year or more into your initiative and your focal families have made good progress toward their desired outcomes but you are not seeing a corresponding improvement in student outcomes, why might this be?
- As a result of your experience and what you have learned thus far, what are your priorities for the next year?

In addition to assessing progress towards outcomes, you should use these meetings to discuss the overall health of the partnership. Are all of the partners still committed to the initiative's goals? Do the partners feel as though their contributions are valued? Do the family representatives feel that the activities and other engagement strategies are addressing their needs in ways that respect the important roles families play in promoting

student success? The strength of your partnerships is vital to the success of the overall initiative, so it is important to continually nurture these relationships and take steps to address any troubling dynamics that might arise.

You can use the tool in Figure 2 to help you prioritize your next steps while taking account of the available resources.

FIGURE 2: A GUIDE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



³ Graphic and content adapted from Milway, K. S., & Saxton, A. (2011). The Challenge of Organizational Learning. *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Summer 2011). Retrieved from http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_challenge_of_organizational_learning; Bennis, W., & Goldsmith, J. (2010). *Learning to lead: A workbook on becoming a leader*. New York: Basic Books; Goode, T., & Jones, W. (2006). *A guide for advancing family-centered and culturally and linguistically-competent care*. Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.

LEARNING FROM FEHS PILOT SITES:

Staff and Partner Reflections

The following lessons are based on the pilot sites' experiences with the first year of implementing their family engagement initiative. These lessons and insights arose from discussions the sites had with their partners and internal staff as they reflected on their initiatives' progress.

School Relationships

- Build a broad base of relationships with schools, including school administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers. This way, even if there is turnover among school leadership or staff, the initiative remains stable – a group of remaining personnel will still understand the family engagement initiative and develop ownership for its implementation.
- Keep school and district leaders informed at all times and get their input on any new ideas and activities.
- Re-examine communication processes on a regular basis. This may involve more face-to-face meetings and fewer teleconferences. Positive communication is important at all times.
- Engage school partners to design and conduct meetings about the family engagement initiative.

Community Relationships

- Continue to examine roles and responsibilities of community partners. This will enable partners to gain clarity about how they should work individually and as a team, and will ensure commitment and accountability for producing results.
- Be strategic in the use of community resources. For initiatives that are helping families access online student data, business partners can provide computers that can be refurbished and personnel that can train parents to use computers.

Family and Student Outreach

- Reach out to parents early – even when their children are still in middle school, if possible. Find out what family activities are happening in middle schools and recruit families to participate in high school family engagement opportunities.
- Connect with students before reaching out to parents. When the student is approached first and understands how she can be supported to be on track for graduation, families will perceive this interest in the student and will be more likely to become engaged in supporting his or her school success.

Family Relationships

- Establish personal relationships. A family coordinator can establish a rapport and provide information that creates high interest among families to guide their teens through high school. This relationship can also allay parent fears about communicating with teachers and other school personnel.
- Communicate to families that they are an integral part of a working team for their students' high school success.
- Do not be discouraged when attendance at parent workshops is low. Take this as an opportunity to build deep relationships with the families who are there, and who can now serve as ambassadors to recruit more families into future workshops.
- Recognize that pressing family issues must be addressed. When students come from stressful home environments, many family issues must be resolved in order for students to remain focused on their education. Students may require referrals to professional counseling for anger management, stress, anxiety, and illness if they are to function successfully in school.

Capacity Building

- Hire an experienced family coordinator to partner with families. This person should have depth of knowledge about the community and be skilled in working with underserved families.
- Provide extensive training and supervision to front-line workers. Make sure that all staff and/or volunteers who will have contact with families receive training on communicating with underserved families, understanding cultural barriers, and the functioning of the school system. Staff and volunteers should also be supervised regularly and coached on improving their interpersonal skills and knowledge about education issues.

Evaluation and Learning

- Continue to refine and improve data collection and reporting. This entails reviewing and updating surveys and other evaluation tools to capture relevant information with (1) the next cohort of students and families to be served by the initiative and (2) students that are moving to the next grade level.
- Improve data collection to measure unduplicated counts of families participating in the initiative.

SECTION 2.6: Creating a Year-End Summary

In this step, you will create a summary that captures the first year of your initiative's implementation efforts. This summary will allow you to communicate with your partners, funders, and the larger community about the successes of your initiative and your plans for future growth.

WHAT YOU DO

- Select and summarize key elements from the implementation of your family engagement strategies.

WHAT YOU GAIN

- A thorough, but concise, summary of the first year of your project's implementation.
- A means of communicating your progress to partners, investors, and other stakeholders.

At the end of the planning process, you created a description of your proposed initiative to share with stakeholders and to help elicit support for your work (see Section 1.7). Now that you have completed the first year of implementation, you can create a summary of what you have done, the goals you have accomplished, and your plans to continue your initiative in subsequent years.

You should plan to share drafts of your summary with your key partners – including family and student representatives – during one of your reflection meetings. Because of their ongoing participation in discussions about the initiative's progress, this group will be able to provide valuable feedback about whether your summary truly reflects the initiative's goals, accomplishments, and future directions.

SELECT AND SUMMARIZE KEY ELEMENTS FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES.

Your summary should be concise (three to five pages) and should tell a story that highlights your successes and challenges as well as future plans. The following elements should be included:

Goals and Outcomes

- A summary of your initiative's overall goals.
- Descriptions of the focal student population and your desired student outcomes.
- Descriptions of your family outcomes and how they are linked to student outcomes.

Implementation of Activities

- A list of major family engagement activities, including a discussion of the obstacles to family engagement and evidence of the activities' effectiveness (e.g., data from pre- and post-surveys, skills assessments).
- A small selection of the most substantive activities to feature in more detail.
- The challenges you encountered along the way and how you overcame them.

Accomplishments

- The number of focal families you reached through your various activities (both total instances of engagement and an unduplicated participation count).
- A breakdown of family participation rates by activity type to help readers understand which activities elicited the highest levels of participation.
- Your overall progress towards desired family and student outcomes backed by observable data.
- Quotes from diverse stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school and community partners) about how the initiative has benefited them.

Future Directions

- The next steps you hope to take to grow the initiative.
- Specific supports and resources you will need to realize this growth.

The summary should be a concise narrative that is accessible to a variety of audiences: the families who were the focus of your efforts, the school and community partners who worked with you, the individuals/organizations who funded your project, the community at large, and other interested stakeholders who may wish to partner with you in future years or otherwise support your work.

For an idea of what this type of summary might look like, see Appendix F to view a sample of the FEHS year-end summary from United Way of Southern Nevada (Las Vegas).

APPENDIX A: Profiles of *Family Engagement for High School Success* pilot sites

The planning process made possible by the FEHS initiative was innovative and unique. It helped strengthen schools' and communities' action plans by emphasizing a holistic view of students in which families supported and advocated for their successful journey to high school graduation. By adopting an outcome-focused approach and using local data, the United Way FEHS pilot sites designed different models of family engagement that removed barriers and built stronger connections between families, schools, and communities. The process also engaged school and community partners for buy-in, as well as empowered parents and students to take an active role in planning so that strategies would address their real needs and interests. This was the first time in these communities that all stakeholders participated in developing strategies to boost high school graduation rates, resulting in action plans that had true potential for success.

In all, 15 United Ways and their surrounding communities participated in the planning process during 2009–2010, and eight of the sites began implementing their plans in the 2010–2011 academic year. The following profiles highlight the plans created by those eight sites, as well as their short- and long-term desired outcomes.



**UNITED WAY
OF SOUTHEAST
MISSOURI (SEMO) –
CAPE GIRARDEAU,
MO**

Who: 550 students in grades eight through twelve. Targeted rising ninth graders have reading and writing scores below the district’s grade level expectations, while the targeted high school students are on the district’s academic watch list.

Why: In the past five years, Cape Central Senior High School’s dropout rate nearly doubled to 13 percent, while the graduation rate steadily decreased from a high of 79 percent to its current 72 percent.

Focus groups with school, parents, and community partners revealed that many of the targeted students’ families did not communicate with schools and did not feel welcome there.

What: To support student learning and promote more positive and effective home-school relationships, the planning group put together a support package that includes the following:

United Way of SEMO hired parent liaisons to bridge the parent-school gap and serve as advocates for students. Liaisons build better relationships between families and school staff, and train parents to use tools and resources that will support their teenagers’ learning.

- The project will provide parents with technology training to support their use of the student data system.
- Schools will begin holding student-led parent-teacher conferences, allowing students to guide the conversation and help build relationships between parents and teachers.
- Community partners who have existing relationships with the United Way will provide tutoring, mentoring, enrichment activities, and access to computer labs after school.
- Community partners will provide alternative settings for parent-teacher conferences and other meetings with school staff and support groups, so that parents have a neutral space in which to interact with teachers, staff, and support groups.

EARLY OUTCOMES

Already, the parent liaison put in place by the AT&T planning grant has reached 43 focal students, connecting them with resources and improving the families’ relationships with school staff. Of those students, 32 (74 percent) are now on track academically and will be promoted to the next grade level at the end of the year. The project plans to expand this strategy by adding a parent liaison for each grade level.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- By 2014, over 90 percent of the district’s students will be on track for high school graduation.
- Fewer students will fall below the proficiency level in reading and writing assessments.
- More ninth and tenth grade students will earn a C or higher in English and math.
- Fewer students will miss 10 or more days of school per year.

INNOVATIONS

Schools hired parent liaisons dedicated to improving parent-school communication and supporting student learning.

Parents will receive training on Parent Link, the online portal for families to track grades, credits earned, attendance, discipline, and homework assignments.

Who: 1,251 incoming ninth graders and their families from five high schools. Focal students have either failed a core subject or have attendance below 90 percent.

Why: Approximately 35 percent of all students in the Clark County School District fail to graduate from high school; additionally, 60 percent of at-risk students struggle to complete graduation on time.

Parents feel that they don't have a voice in the school. They don't feel welcome and are concerned about the lack of personal and timely communication.

What: Schools will take steps to employ outreach efforts that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and will build relationships with families by being responsive to their needs. Some examples follow:

- Schools will create parent resource centers where they can meet other parents and school staff; they will also learn how to access the online student data system.
- Schools will give parents a voice by holding town hall and informational meetings, where parents will be able to meet staff and other concerned parents.
- Schools will offer “English as a second language” classes to enhance parents’ ability to communicate in English.
- Schools will foster peer networks by using parent volunteers to reach out to focal families. They will also use multiple methods of communication, such as phone, mail, and email.
- Community partners will help develop and disseminate linguistically appropriate materials and provide translation services.
- Schools, with help from community partners, will provide incentives for families to attend events and meetings such as childcare vouchers and transportation tokens or gas cards.

EARLY OUTCOMES

In a community where parents did not feel welcome at schools, and where there were significant cultural and language barriers to involvement, over 255 parents and 3800 students participated in the planning process through surveys, focus groups, and in-person meetings to give schools direction about what kinds of outreach and support students and parents need to feel like they have a voice at the schools.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- 80 percent of focal students will maintain attendance rates of 90 percent or higher in ninth grade.
- 80 percent of focal students will maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or greater during ninth grade.

INNOVATIONS

At newly created parent resource centers, families will learn to use Parent Link, an online system that offers information about attendance, grades, homework, and school-related events via notifications through telephones, email, and the internet.

The project will leverage the Nevada State Parent Information and Resource Center’s conceptual model for family engagement to strengthen partnerships by training school staff, AmeriCorps, and families on how to best educate and engage focal families to then meet the needs of our community’s children.

**UNITED WAY
OF NORTHERN
NEVADA AND
THE SIERRA
AND THE
EDUCATION
ALLIANCE OF
WASHOE
COUNTY –
RENO, NV**

Who: Approximately 600 rising ninth graders across 12 high schools who are not on track to graduate. These at-risk students were identified using the Washoe County School District Risk Index, which factors in data on eighth grade reading and math performance, student retention, student mobility, and attendance.

Why: Graduation rates for the 12 high schools range from 74 percent to 41 percent.

Families lack access to schools' data resources, have difficulty helping their teenagers transition from middle to high school, don't understand graduation or attendance requirements, and have difficult home circumstances.

What: Planning committee teams (which included families, school staff, and administrators) worked together to identify assets and barriers to family engagement and create a system of supports, including:

- The United Way will help school staff engage in proactive, positive communication, such as welcome phone calls, orientations, and home visits, while moving away from the current pattern of only contacting families with negative information.
- Schools will communicate graduation requirements and education terms in clear, accessible language to families who may not be familiar with the US education system.
- Schools will match families with academic supports (such as Smarthinking.com, an online tutoring program) and will include families in their college and career preparation offerings.
- High schools will be more proactive about reaching out to families at the beginning of ninth grade to ensure they have necessary information about courses and other graduation requirements, rather than waiting until problems arise.
- High schools will partner with middle schools to create parent engagement strategies to ensure that parent involvement doesn't drop as students begin ninth grade.

- Schools will develop parent mentors to help parents navigate the education system.
- Schools will provide home visits for families who may not have an easy way to get to the school.

EARLY OUTCOMES

Over 80 parents have been trained on the use of Edline, an online monitoring tool that tracks attendance, assignments, and grades. This training included information on high school graduation requirements and college or post-secondary options, and linked parents with a teacher or counselor to develop a high school graduation plan with their teen.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Students will achieve 90 percent attendance and earn six credits per year.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of graduation requirements and pathways to college by the end of the first term of their ninth grade year.

INNOVATIONS

Schools are making tools that track student progress more accessible to parents, including use of the new system-wide student-data portal.

Schools will open computer labs for afterschool use by parents and families, and partner with community organizations, such as the YMCA, to provide computer access in non-school locations.

Who: 50 ninth grade students (from each incoming class for the next three years) who have failed two or more sections of the state-mandated eighth grade test, and had over seven absences during eighth grade.

Why: From 2004–2009, Los Fresnos school district lost an average of 40 percent of students from each class.

Families are reluctant to get involved due to a lack of direct and timely communication from schools, lack of information about attendance and course requirements, and the inability to participate in school activities due to conflicting work schedules.

What: The project seeks to improve home-school communication and build family awareness and skills to support high school graduation through a set of aligned strategies that include:

- Schools will hire a family coordinator for each cohort to serve as a case manager for students and families. The position will be based on the *Promotora* model, appropriate to the Hispanic community that the project serves. The Promotora is seen as someone who is a member of the community, speaks the language, and understands families’ values and challenges.
- The family coordinator will provide parents with frequent updates on attendance and grades via text and other methods.
- Rising ninth grade students will attend a summer academy with their families to familiarize themselves with the campus, get a head start by earning a half credit in an elective course, establish relationships with staff, learn about attendance requirements, and co-create a graduation plan with staff and family.
- Family members will participate in hands-on training in the district’s online attendance and grade monitoring system, receive a map of locations where they can access computers, and be introduced to “Homework Help” tutorials that will be provided after school.

- Parents will establish a Parent Council to form networks of support and take action around the common goal of high school graduation.

EARLY OUTCOMES

The planning process debunked long-held myths about the dropout problem. School leaders had assumed that income, limited English proficiency, and behavioral problems were the best predictors of future dropouts, but a careful review of data showed instead that the real predictors were attendance and grades. In response, principals quickly assigned 30 failing ninth graders to an intensive remediation program. Now, those “quietly failing students” are completing the year with credits in four core subjects – and are on track to graduate.

Through the formation of Parent Councils, families have also expressed a desire to learn parenting techniques, including how to communicate with their teenagers, the best ways to discipline them, and how to encourage them to succeed in school.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Ninth grade students will have no more than five absences.
- Ninth grade students will complete credits in at least three of four core courses.

INNOVATIONS

In response to parent requests to receive updates about their students through text messages, the United Way is piloting a program to notify parents of student absences via text message.

Schools will use text messaging, email, and other methods based on family preference, to update parents about academic progress.

Who: Approximately 300 ninth graders who were chronically truant in eighth grade and 500 tenth graders who failed to meet one or more of the following requirements during the first semester of ninth grade: 92 percent attendance rate, no in- or out-of-school suspensions, and achievement of 5.5 credits.

Why: At the Waukegan High School, 30 percent of students drop out of school prior to their sophomore year.

Focus groups revealed that many of the targeted students’ families are unaware of school requirements, are confused about their role in their teenagers’ progress, feel intimidated by school personnel, and feel unable to assist with schoolwork because their teenagers had exceeded their own academic abilities.

What: Families, schools, and community leaders rallied to improve graduation rates with a comprehensive support package, including:

- Schools will offer a fall orientation to inform incoming freshman and parents about attendance and graduation requirements, the online data system, and school-career connections.
- The project will implement a “Soccer on Sundays” program for truant students and their fathers. This program will launch during next summer’s orientation and will include soccer games, a barbeque, a team-building activity, parent sessions on supporting teenagers, and student attendance contracts.
- Parents who complete a training series on Infinite Campus, the school’s new online student tracking system, will take home a refurbished computer. Other families will be directed to several community computer access points. A bilingual messaging campaign will encourage involvement.
- Family resource coordinators will help families feel welcome at the school and inform them of their students’ progress and of affordable, local youth activities.

- Teachers will reach out to families through parent-teacher conferences and, starting in the third year of the project, teacher home visits.
- Teachers and family resource coordinators will participate in family engagement and diversity training taught by volunteer diversity-training officers from community-based businesses.
- Community partners will provide students with ongoing academic help through an internet-based homework and mentoring support program.

EARLY OUTCOMES

With the AT&T contribution, the United Way brought together the Latino Leadership Council, the Waukegan High School Faith Council, and the Hispanic Institute to develop a comprehensive fall freshman orientation for the 2010–2011 year. For the first time, the 300 incoming freshman and their parents will receive user-friendly information about attendance and graduation requirements, the online student data system, and the school-to-career pathway.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Ninth and tenth graders will achieve a 92 percent attendance rate.
- Students will stop earning in- and out-of-school suspensions.
- Tenth graders will achieve five and a half credits.

INNOVATIONS

New “Soccer on Sundays” program will combine fun with information and encourage fathers to engage with schools.

Community partners will donate refurbished computers to families that complete a computer workshop about the online student data system.

A bilingual “Check Your Child’s Progress” public media campaign will raise awareness of the importance of graduation.

Who: In AY 2010–2011, the project will serve between 100–250 ninth grade students and families, and another 100–250 rising ninth grade students by the spring, prioritizing the 100 most vulnerable.

Why: The Philip and Sara Burton Academic High School had a 48.1 percent graduation rate in 2009. Significant obstacles exist for families, including lack of information about the school system, language barriers between staff and families, and a general lack of understanding about the importance of family engagement.

What: The AT&T contribution has enabled families, school staff, and community partners to come together in support of student achievement and to develop a family engagement project for the school. The project includes a network of supports and resources, including:

- Disparate school and community services are coming together to develop Philip and Sara Burton Academic High School into a whole “community school.”
- This community school will partner with Beacon Schools, a community organization providing educational supports to students and families, and GEAR UP, a college and career prep program for ninth and tenth graders and families.
- GEAR UP will create a ninth grade curriculum centered around college readiness for families and will train parent liaisons and community partners to provide additional support. Beacon and GEAR UP will also partner with other programs, such as the University of California’s Early Academic Outreach Program, to further enhance students’ college readiness.
- A family engagement team of staff, students, families, and community partners, led by the parent liaison, will reach out to families about workshops and events and will assist with translation.
- The team will work with community partners to establish a parent resource center to pro-

vide college and career planning information and support services (such as English and GED classes for parents), as well as computers to access online student data systems.

- Beacon Schools will provide ongoing workshops and information about graduation requirements, and will train parents about the online data system.

EARLY OUTCOMES

The school’s ninth grade teachers formed a freshman academy team which meets regularly to collaborate on instruction, track student progress, and implement support strategies. The team played a substantial role in the planning process and is committed to ensuring that the family engagement action plan is integrated into the school’s structure and programs. The team is working with community partners to develop the schools’ freshman orientation and is coordinating with the family engagement team to improve home-school communication.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- 10 percent fewer ninth graders will earn failing grades in the first semester, and 10 percent more low-performing students will earn a 2.5 GPA or more by the end of ninth grade year.
- Students will accumulate the necessary number of credits to be on track for graduation by the end of ninth grade and will make progress in meeting the academic requirements for applying to California public institutions of higher education.

INNOVATIONS

A parent resource center will be established to provide a one-stop shop for computer access, support services, and classes for parents.

Families will be offered tools to help support teenagers’ goal-setting. Information will be provided in multiple media (phone, in-person, video, online) and activities will be scheduled to accommodate parents’ work schedules.

Who: 100 rising ninth graders at risk of dropping out due to truancy, repeating a grade, having more than one suspension in 2009–2010, or scoring poorly on the state NCLB test. The focal student population also includes 15 ninth graders enrolled in a program that serves students who are not successful in a typical school environment due to severe truancy and behavior problems, among other reasons.

Why: York County School District's graduation rate for 2005–2006 was 36 percent; a rate that has been consistent for the last decade.

Students and families feel that communication with school personnel is poor. Families seek more contact with teachers, more information about how students are performing, and how to support them.

What: The project built upon an existing dropout prevention initiative and included an extensive planning process that engaged three major community service organizations, a judge, religious leaders, and school personnel to develop a set of integrated supports, including:

- The schools will include families in the Link Crew program, which provides an orientation and ongoing support from upperclassmen to freshmen.
- Parents of students in the SWIS program will mentor focal families by providing an orientation session and helping families navigate high school and community resources.
- Focal group families will participate in a workshop in the beginning of the school year to discuss the role of discipline referrals, attendance, and grades.
- Families will receive a new graduation requirement tool that lists all required courses and notes on their teen's progress.

- Families will be supported in their efforts to set clear expectations regarding their teenagers' behavior at school through a variety of programs and interventions. School personnel, including the guidance counselors, Title I parent liaison, at-risk coordinator, and the school social worker, will provide individual and group support and case management to students and families.

EARLY OUTCOMES

To address families' needs for timely information about student progress and provide easy access to technology, the community created a computer lab and resource center at a local library for use by families and students. School and community partners provide training for parents on using computers at the lab and accessing the online student data system, which is available in multiple languages. The computer labs are also available to parents for GED preparation, ESL/ELL help, literacy and numeracy classes, and employment tasks such as resume writing.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Students will earn six credits and a GPA of 2.0 or higher by the end of ninth grade.
- Students will have no out-of-school suspensions in the next academic year.
- Students will increase attendance by 10 percent.
- Students will improve their state scores by 10 percent by the time they reach eleventh grade.

INNOVATIONS

To improve personal connections, the school will create a booklet with student and staff profiles. Rising 9th graders will write a brief biographical essay to introduce themselves to the high school staff, and staff will submit a brief essay that introduces themselves to the students and their families. The booklet will also include a telephone and email directory, school calendar, and a graduation requirement tool.

Who: 120 ninth graders and 70 rising ninth graders across five high-poverty urban and rural middle and high schools. The students targeted for this project meet the following risk criteria: more than three absences, two suspensions and/or four disciplinary referrals per month; one or more course failures per grading period; earning less than 80 percent of the possible credits available per grading period; and earning a low score on the state assessment test.

Why: The three targeted high schools have on-time graduation rates of 47–70 percent, compared to the district average of 77 percent. These schools serve many families living in poverty, have low reading test scores, and have high rates of disciplinary referrals and absences.

Parents are often unaware of how absences or behavioral issues impact their teens’ ability to stay on track academically. In addition, parents reported a lack of knowledge of their teens’ class subject matter, as well as a lack of awareness of academic supports that could help them.

What: The United Way is focusing on an interrelated set of strategies to address these barriers and help students and families achieve desired outcomes, including:

- The project plans to use the “Check and Connect” dropout prevention program currently in place in two high schools, and expand it to the additional focal high school and two middle schools. The program provides students with intensive support from a dropout prevention specialist who also functions as a family liaison.
- The family liaison will conduct home visits to keep families informed of their teens’ progress and connect them to resources such as financial, health, and other support services.
- The project will provide a community resource coordinator (CRC) for the focal schools. The CRC will enhance coordination efforts among families, schools, and community partners to ensure that all parties are aware of relevant support programs such as tutoring and mentoring services and other organizations that serve families.

- The CRC will work closely with the Check and Connect specialist/family liaison to ensure that students and families most in need of such services are connected to them.

EARLY OUTCOMES

Despite notions otherwise, surveys from the planning process revealed that families had great interest in helping their students by using tutoring supports and other resources, but did not know how and where to access them. As a result, schools are working with afterschool programs such as at the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Boys and Girls Clubs for further academic support. The CRC will help connect families to needed resources.

ONE- TO FOUR-YEAR DESIRED OUTCOMES

Absences and disciplinary referrals will be reduced.

- The number of credits earned will increase.
- State assessment test scores will increase.
- Students will have no failed courses.

INNOVATIONS

Communication was identified as critical to this project, and will be tackled in these ways:

- “Community Cafés” will host conversations for parents about important topics.
- Parent liaisons will reach out to families to bridge the home-school gap.
- Text messaging and the Infinite Campus online system will be used to update parents on student attendance and performance.

APPENDIX B: Checklists for planning and implementing family engagement initiative

As you move through the toolkit and begin planning and implementing your family engagement initiative, this checklist can help keep track of various tasks and stages along the way. Since many steps may happen simultaneously or may involve jumping ahead or going back, this checklist can be helpful to make sure that no stages are overlooked.

CHECKLIST FOR PART 1: PLANNING

SECTION 1.1: Building a Community of Partners

In this stage, you identified and began to work with a community of partners who share the goals of your initiative, and established clear roles and responsibilities for each partner.

Did you...

- Choose specific partners within the community who share a common goal?
- Foster a solid relationship with schools and/or the school district?
- Include relevant community organizations?
- Incorporate student, family, and community partner voices in the planning process?
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for all partners?

Do you have...

- School and community resources – such as experience, expertise, connections, services, and funding – to support the project?
- Valuable insights from families and students?
- Collective ownership for the project?

SECTION 1.2: Defining the Focal Populations

In this stage, you examined local data to determine the students and families who will be the focus of your initiative's efforts. These data should provide a baseline snapshot of where your students stand at the beginning of the initiative and allow you to measure their progress over time.

Did you...

- Use local data to identify risk factors and select your focal population(s)?
- Decide which schools will participate in your initiative?

Do you have...

- A clear identification of focal students and families?
- Data that identify risk factors for not graduating and make the case for focusing on specific students and families?

SECTION 1.3: Defining Outcomes

In this stage, you identified intended student outcomes that target the factors that predict failing to graduate on time. You also identified family outcomes – actions you want students' families to take that will support the achievement of your student outcomes.

Did you...

- Identify desired student outcomes that target the indicators that these students are not on track to graduate?
- Identify family outcomes, or actions, that will support achievement of your intended student outcomes?

Do you have...

- A clear understanding of the changes that you would like to see among specific populations of students and families?
- A basis for aligning school and community resources with the outcomes you seek to achieve?

SECTION 1.4: Identifying Obstacles

In this stage, you worked with families, schools, and community partners to identify the specific obstacles that prevent your focal families from taking necessary steps to support their students' academic success.

Did you...

- Develop an understanding of common obstacles to family engagement?
- Ask focal families and students to identify obstacles families face in supporting high school graduation/success?
- Ask school personnel and community partners who interact with focal families to help identify the obstacles families face in supporting high school graduation/success?
- Set priorities and determine which obstacles are the most critical to address?

Do you have...

- A better understanding of the obstacles that impede the achievement of your family outcomes?
- Knowledge of where to target your strategies for maximum impact?

SECTION 1.5: Developing Strategies

In this stage, you designed strategies to address the family obstacles you identified in Section 1.4, and identified the actions schools and community partners will take to help families overcome these obstacles.

Did you...

- Develop strategies to address obstacles?
- Identify school and community partner actions to implement the strategies?
- Ensure alignment among desired family outcomes, identified obstacles, and school/community partner actions?

Do you have...

- Effective approaches for addressing obstacles to family engagement?
- Focused and intentional actions that will enable families to help keep students on track for high school graduation?
- Efficient use of school and community resources to achieve desired outcomes?

SECTION 1.6: Measuring Progress and Results

In this stage, you developed a system to track your progress, including identifying indicators and selecting data collection methods. Tracking progress on an ongoing basis will help you determine whether you need to make changes to your initiative as you go along.

Did you...

- Identify indicators of progress towards your outcomes?
- Plan data collection methods?
- Set up a system for monitoring implementation of activities?
- Develop a schedule for regular data review and use?

Do you have...

- A system to track progress and make adjustments if necessary?
- A system to learn whether the initiative is making a difference for families and meeting desired outcomes?

SECTION 1.7: Communicating Your Initiative

In this stage, you distilled all of the work from your planning process into a description of your planned initiative, which highlights why this work is important, how the initiative was developed, plans for engaging families, who will be involved, when and where the planned actions will occur, and how you will measure progress.

Did you...

- Select and summarize key elements from the planning phase of your family engagement initiative?

Do you have...

- A thorough, but concise, description of your family engagement initiative?
- A means of communicating your plan to partners, investors, and other stakeholders?

CHECKLIST FOR PART 2: IMPLEMENTATION

SECTION 2.1: Reconvening School and Community Partners

For this stage, you reviewed the work you did during the planning process and decided whether you need to make any changes to your proposed strategies based on updated knowledge about focal families' situations and the status of your partnerships with school and community partners.

Did you...

- Examine whether any new obstacles or issues have emerged within your focal family group that need to be addressed?
- Consult with school and community partners to ensure they are still prepared to take the active steps agreed upon during strategy development?
- Set up training and informational sessions with key personnel in school and community partner organizations?

Do you have...

- An up-to-date understanding of the issues your focal families face?
- Assurance that your school and community partners are actively committed to your family engagement strategies, and are prepared to carry out their roles?
- Increased school and community capacity to promote family engagement?

SECTION 2.2: Establishing Data Collection Systems

In this stage, you worked with your school and community partners to develop data collection systems that allow you to track families' participation in activities, assess progress on student and family outcomes, and determine whether your strategies are being implemented as planned.

Did you...

- Review plans and determine what additional data are needed?
- Develop necessary data collection systems?

Do you have...

- Access to the data you will need in order to show progress toward student outcomes?
- A means of tracking the implementation of family engagement strategies?
- A way to gather information on how many families your initiative has reached?
- A means of tracking each family's participation in activities over the course of your initiative and progress toward family outcomes?

SECTION 2.3: Launching Family Engagement Strategies

In this section, you launched your family engagement strategies, ensured that your strategies allow families to build on the knowledge they gain and skills they develop, and made adjustments to your strategies based on information you collect about how well you are reaching your focal families.

Did you...

- Engage in effective outreach strategies to connect with focal families and promote participation in activities?
- Avoid random acts of family engagement and keep the focus on strategies that guide parents to support their children on the path to high school graduation?
- Understand that it may take time for some focal families to fully engage in their children's education?

Do you have...

- A logical, deliberate roll-out of your family engagement strategies?
- Information about how well you are reaching your focal families?

SECTION 2.4:

Measuring Progress toward Desired Outcomes

In this section, you examined data you have collected to determine how well your family engagement strategies have been implemented, whether families are taking more actions to support student learning, and whether you have made progress toward desired family and student outcomes.

Did you...

- Examine data on family engagement strategies, including information on whether your strategies have been implemented as planned, how many families you have reached, and whether families are making progress towards the desired outcomes?
- Examine data on student outcomes to assess progress?

Do you have...

- An understanding of whether your initiative is making the desired progress on implementing planned activities and achieving family and student outcomes?

SECTION 2.5: Reflecting on Challenges and Successes of Engagement Strategies

In this stage, you set up regular meetings with your school and community partners, representatives from your focal families and students, and initiative staff to reflect on your progress and build consensus for the initiative's continued growth.

Did you...

- Establish a timeline for regular check-ins with partners to discuss progress towards outcomes?
- Reflect on family engagement outcomes and progress, and take steps toward improving strategies?

Do you have...

- Ongoing information about the health of your initiative?
- Agreement from all parties about what is working well and what kind of adjustments need to be made?

SECTION 2.6: Creating a Year-End Summary

In this step, you created a summary that captures the first year of your initiative's implementation efforts. This summary will allow you to communicate with your partners, funders, and the larger community about the successes of your initiative and your plans for future growth.

Did you...

- Select and summarize key elements from the implementation of your family engagement strategies?

Do you have...

- A thorough, but concise, summary of the first year of your project's implementation?
- A means of communicating your progress to partners, investors, and other stakeholders?

APPENDIX C: Tables and Workbooks

This supplement contains the tables and workbooks that have been mentioned throughout the text of the toolkit. To help you navigate this Appendix, the tables are organized and numbered according to their corresponding toolkit section and listed under the section subhead in which they are referenced.

These tables and worksheets are tools to help you plan and carry out various components of your initiative. While you can print out this section and write in the provided tables as you develop your plans, it may prove easier to replicate the various tables using word processing or spreadsheet software (e.g., Microsoft Word or Excel).

SECTION 1.1: Building a Community of Partners

CHOOSE SPECIFIC PARTNERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WHO SHARE A COMMON GOAL.

The table below can be used when you begin to think about the community organizations you would like to partner with for the project.

Table 1.1a: Potential Community Partners

Name of community partner and primary contact person	Does this potential partner work with high school students in schools or neighborhoods with high dropout rates? (Yes/No)	Does this potential partner work with families of high school students in schools or neighborhoods with high dropout rates? (Yes/No)	Does this potential partner have goals or objectives related to increasing on-time high school graduation? Does the partner involve families as part of this work? (Yes/No)

INCORPORATE STUDENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNER VOICES IN THE PLANNING PROCESS.

It is important to continually engage students and families in the planning process. The table below provides a few ideas about how to engage students and families. It provides specific examples to help you develop targeted ideas for the types of feedback to seek from families and students, as well as specific methods you can use to solicit this input.

Table 1.1b: Methods of Encouraging Student and Family Participation in Planning

Input Sought from Students	Methods to Involve Students
e.g., Why do students drop out of high school? How can schools and families motivate students to stay in school?	Focus group with youth at-risk of dropping out of high school
Input Sought from Families	Methods to Involve Families
e.g., Why do students drop out of high school? How can schools and families motivate students to stay in school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of families • Roundtable discussion

*Be sure to include source of data.

ESTABLISH CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ALL PARTNERS.

As you connect with partners and begin to meet and start planning, you can use the chart below to help track community partner roles and engagement over time during planning meetings.

Table 1.1c: Planning Meeting Responsibilities

Date	Purpose of meeting	Type of meeting	Who will set the agenda	Who will facilitate meeting	(Post-meeting record) Participants at meeting
e.g., Feb.2011	Identify at-risk student population	Conference call	United Way project coordinator	School principal	Three families, one school principal, two school family liaisons, three community organization partners

SECTION 1.2: Defining the Focal Populations

USE LOCAL DATA TO IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS AND SELECT YOUR FOCAL STUDENT POPULATION(S).

The table below allows you to identify students at risk of not graduating on time and explain the rationale for selecting them to participate in the project.

Table 1.2: Defining Focal Student Population

Data showing which students are at high risk of not graduating from high school on time*	Number of students in focal population	Focal student population(s)
e.g., Analysis of district data for 2010 cohort of students showed that the two most significant predictors of on-time graduation were attendance and credit accumulation. Those not on track for on-time graduation had failed two courses and had more than seven absences during ninth grade. Ninth graders with low attendance rates and poor credit accumulation had similar performance in eighth grade.	50	Incoming ninth graders who failed two or more courses and had more than seven absences during eighth grade.

*Be sure to include source of data.

SECTION 1.3: Defining Outcomes

IDENTIFY DESIRED STUDENT OUTCOMES THAT TARGET THE INDICATOR THAT THESE STUDENTS ARE NOT ON TRACK TO GRADUATE.

The following table will help you to define your student outcomes and document the current status of the population.

Table 1.3a: Student Outcomes

Baseline data related to risk factors for not graduating on time	Focal (or targeted) student populations	Desired outcome(s) for focal student population
e.g., 37 percent of students missed seven or more days of school in eighth grade.	Incoming ninth graders with more than seven absences in eighth grade.	Students who had more than seven absences in eighth grade will have no more than five absences in ninth grade.
e.g., 35 percent of ninth graders failed two or more classes in eighth grade.	Incoming ninth graders who earned two or fewer credits in eighth grade.	Students who earned two or fewer credits in eighth grade will earn four or more credits in ninth grade (pass all courses).

IDENTIFY FAMILY OUTCOMES, OR ACTIONS, THAT WILL SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT OF YOUR INTENDED STUDENT OUTCOMES.

The table below can help you to align your family outcomes with student outcomes.

Table 1.3b: Family Outcomes Related to Student Outcomes

Student Outcomes	Family Outcomes Related to Student Outcomes
What are your intended outcomes for your focal student population?	What actions do you want <i>families</i> to take with their child to increase the likelihood of achieving your defined student outcomes?
e.g., Students who had more than seven absences in eighth grade will have no more than five absences in ninth grade.	The families of these focal students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate clear expectations to their student regarding school attendance. • Use the online student data system to monitor student attendance.
e.g., Students who earned two or fewer credits in eighth grade will earn four or more credits in ninth grade.	The families of these focal students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate clear expectations regarding student grades/credit accumulation. • Use the online student data system to monitor credit accumulation. • Participate in parent-teacher conferences to understand their students' academic standings and learn about resources to support credit attainment.

SECTION 1.4: Identifying Obstacles

SET PRIORITIES AND DETERMINE WHICH OBSTACLES ARE THE MOST CRITICAL TO ADDRESS.

The table below can help you document the obstacles you identify that often keep your focal families from achieving the outcomes you have set for them. In the next stage of the process, you will build on this chart to incorporate strategies – including specific school and community partner actions – designed to address these obstacles.

Table 1.4: Documenting Obstacles to Family Outcomes

Family Outcome	Obstacles
e.g., Parents will communicate clear expectations about passing all courses.	Families lack information about the academic and attendance requirements to complete high school successfully.

SECTION 1.5: Developing Strategies

IDENTIFY SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNER ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIES.

The following tables will help you identify the current relevant school and community partner activities and resources that relate to your desired student outcomes and broader strategies.

Table 1.5a: School Family Engagement Activities*

Summarize the relevant activities/resources this school currently has related to the student outcomes you've defined:		
Student outcome	School's current activities/resources related to this student outcome	How the school currently engages families in the activities and use of resources
e.g., Students who had more than seven absences in eighth grade will have no more than five absences in ninth grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer orientation for students and families. • On-site family coordinator to communicate and serve focal students and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School informs families about attendance policies at orientation. • School alerts families in a timely manner about student attendance. • School uses the communication medium and language preferred by families.

* Replicate the applicable table for each school you propose to add to your partnership.

Table 1.5b: Community Partner Family Engagement Activities*

Summarize the relevant community activities/resources that are related to the student outcomes you have identified:		
Student outcome	Community partner's current activities/ resources related to this student outcome	How the community partner currently engages families in the activities and use of resources
e.g., Students who earned two or fewer credits in eighth grade will earn four or more credits in ninth grade.	After-school and tutoring programs.	Community Resource Coordinator connects focal students and families with agencies that offer mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and health services.

* Replicate the applicable table for each community organization you propose to add to your partnership.

Table 1.5c: Additional Information on School and Community Partners

Additional important information about the school(s)/community you'll be serving for this project (include source of data):
e.g., There are a large number of ELL students in target population (per district office); school has a translator available to work with these families and there is a cultural center within the community that actively engages these families.

ENSURE ALIGNMENT AMONG FAMILY OUTCOMES, IDENTIFIED OBSTACLES, AND SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNER ACTIONS.

The following table can help you (1) document the obstacles you identify that often keep your focal families from taking the actions needed to promote your student outcomes, and (2) align your desired school and community actions with strategies to address these obstacles.

Table 1.5d: Aligning Family Outcomes, Obstacles, Strategies, and Actions

Family Outcome	Obstacles	General Strategies
e.g., Parents will communicate clear expectations about passing all courses.	Families lack information about the academic and attendance requirements to complete high school successfully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools will offer relevant information that families can use with their student.• Community partners will receive information about academic and attendance requirements from the school and share it with families of focal students involved in their programs.

School Actions	Community Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers use conferences with parents to explain the school’s course requirements, grading criteria, credit accumulation, as well as updates on student progress. • Family liaisons will share information about the school’s academic and attendance requirements with community partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community partners help educate families about academic and attendance requirements, using multiple methods such as home visits and information tables at food markets and drug stores. • Community partners help families understand how community program offerings can support students’ ability to meet academic requirements.

SECTION 1.6: Measuring Progress and Results

IDENTIFY INDICATORS OF PROGRESS TOWARD YOUR DESIRED OUTCOMES.

The table below can be used to help you identify the ways you will assess progress towards your student and family outcomes.

Table 1.6a: Student and Family Outcomes

	Outcomes	What indicators will you use to measure progress?
Student	e.g., Students who earned two or fewer credits in eighth grade will earn four or more credits in ninth grade (pass all courses).	Number and percentage of focal students who earn four or more credits in ninth grade.
Family	e.g., Focal families will set clear expectations about passing all courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and percentage of focal parents who report having conversations with student about the need to pass all classes. • Number and percentage of focal students who say parents expect them to pass all classes.



PLAN DATA COLLECTION METHODS.

The table below can be used to help you align your data collection methods with your family outcomes and implementation activities. The chart also asks you to think about who will collect and analyze the data you collect, and at what intervals you will measure progress.

Table 1.6b: Aligning Data Collection with Outcomes and Activities

Desired family outcomes	Implementation strategies: What are the relevant school/community partner activities?	Outcome indicators: How will you measure outreach and activity impact?
e.g., Families will increase their understanding of how credit accumulation relates to on-time graduation.	Community partner will hold four workshops in community centers to explain college readiness and show the relationship between credit accumulation and graduation. Each workshop is expected to reach a different set of families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and percentage of: Focal families participating in each workshop • Focal families that report knowing importance of credit accumulation for on-time graduation

Data to be collected: What data will you collect to assess progress in implementing your activities?	Data collection process: Who will collect and analyze the data? At what intervals will you measure progress?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants attending each workshop and number of participants who are focal families • Pre- and post-test changes in family awareness of the importance of credit accumulation for on-time graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop presenters will record attendance of families at sessions and conduct pre-test right before workshop. • Project will contract with local college to conduct post-test three months after each workshop and do all data analysis.

SET UP A SYSTEM FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES.

The next two tables can be used to help you identify how you will track implementation of strategies, i.e., the activities in which schools and community partners will engage in service of your family outcomes.

Table 1.6c: Tracking Implementation of School Activities

Planned School Activities	What indicators will you use to measure progress?
<p>e.g., Teachers use parent-teacher conferences to explain to parents course requirements, grading criteria, credit accumulation, and student progress, and how to help student improve.</p>	<p>Number and percentage of focal families reporting that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The teacher provided them information about (1) ninth grade requirements and (2) student progress. b. The teacher was helpful in explaining the information and ways parents could use it to help their student. c. They have plans for using the information from teachers.

Table 1.6d: Tracking Implementation of Community Partner Activities

Community Partner Activities	What indicators will you use to measure progress?
<p>e.g., Community partners use four workshops to explain college readiness and show the relationship between credit accumulation and graduation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants attending each workshop • Number of participants who are focal families • Number and percentage of focal families that report knowing importance of credit accumulation for on-time graduation

SECTION 2.2: Establishing Data Collection Systems

DEVELOP NECESSARY DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS.

The tables in this section can help you measure how many families are attending your activities and whether your activities are being implemented as planned.

Table 2.2a: Family Participation Spreadsheet

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Student Name	Parent 1 Name	Parent 2 Name	School	In Focal Population	Summer orientation August 24	Make up orientation Sept. 24	Computer/Database Training	Contact with P.I. Coordinator	Family Potluck Nov. 22
Last, First 01	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 02	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0	1		1	
Last, First 03	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 04	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 05	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 06	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0	1		1	
Last, First 07	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0			2	
Last, First 08	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	0				1
Last, First 09	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	1
Last, First 10	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0			1	
Last, First 11	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 12	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				1
Last, First 13	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 14	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 15	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0			1	1
Last, First 16	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 17	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 18	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 19	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 20	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 21	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 22	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 23	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0	1	1	1	
Last, First 24	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	1
Last, First 25	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1		1		1
Last, First 26	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 27	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	0	1			
Last, First 28	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 29	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0	1		2	
Last, First 30	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	
Last, First 31	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 32	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				1
Last, First 33	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	1
Last, First 34	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0	1	1		
Last, First 35	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	1
Last, First 36	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1		1		1
Last, First 37	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1		1		
Last, First 38	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	0				1
Last, First 39	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 40	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	
Last, First 41	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 42	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 43	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1			1	1
Last, First 44	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	1
Last, First 45	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1		1		1
Last, First 46	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	1		1	1	
Last, First 47	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0		1	1	
Last, First 48	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 49	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	0	1				
Last, First 50	Last, First	Last, First	Washington HS	1	0		1	1	
Total Instances					37	6	16	25	14
Unduplicated Count					37	6	16	23	14
Focal Population: Total Instances					14	5	12	25	7
Focal Population: Unduplicated Count				24	14	5	12	23	7

This spreadsheet was created to offer an example of how you can create a simple database using a spreadsheet application such as Microsoft Word. For a more detailed view, this tool can be downloaded as a PDF or an XLS file. Please note that the formulas in the Excel file have been locked because it is very easy to inadvertently alter a formula, and render your data incorrect without noticing it. We recommend using this spreadsheet as a guide to help you create your own tool, rather than attempting to use this actual spreadsheet.

To download the spreadsheet (as either a PDF or Excel [.xls] file), please visit: <http://www.hfrp.org/HighSchoolSuccessToolkit>

This spreadsheet allows FEHS partnerships to summarize and examine data in useful ways including calculating unduplicated counts of participants. The example has fake data in it so that you can see how a completed table would look.

The second and third columns (B, C) allow you to enter the names of students' parents. This may be helpful when you are tracking focal families and want to keep a record of parents' names but you do not need to include names in your table if it is not useful to your work. Some schools may be able to provide the names of parents when they share the class roster.

The fourth column (D) allows you to track which school a student attends. This is useful if you are working with multiple schools.

The fifth column (E) shows if a student is in the focal population or not (1=yes, 0=no). This will allow you to look at the participation data for two groups: focal students/families and all students/families, because formulas in other parts of the table use data from this column.

In the example, columns F through M each allow you to track participation in one activity or event. You can create a tool with as many columns as you need to track your activities. Participation in each activity is tracked by entering a 1 in the activity's column for any student/family that participated. For activities that can be attended multiple times, such as visiting a family engagement resource center, the number entered represents the number of times a family has attended the activity.

The last column in the example (N) provides the total number of times a family has attended activities. This total is automatically calculated based on the data entered in the previous columns.

The rows at the bottom of the table provide summaries of the data for each column. In the example rows 108 and 109 show summary data for the entire population and rows 110 and 111 show summary data for the focal population. These totals are automatically calculated based on the data entered for each student/family. "Total Instances" (rows 108 and 110) provides the total number of times families participated in the activity. "Unduplicated Count" (rows 109 and 111) provides the total number of families that have participated in the activity (families that participated are only counted once even if they participated multiple times). The last column (N) provides the totals for all activities: in the example the cell at row 111 and column N provides the count of unduplicated focal families participating in all activities entered into the table.

K	L	M	N
Parent-Teacher Conference Fall	Parent-Teacher Conference Spring	FERC Drop-in Session	Total Activities Attended
			1
1			3
			1
1			4
			1
			2
1			3
			1
			3
			1
			1
			2
			1
			1
1			3
		1	2
1		1	5
			1
			1
		1	4
		2	5
		1	2
			3
1		1	6
		4	7
			1
			1
			1
1			4
		1	3
		1	4
		1	3
1			4
		2	4
			3
		2	5
		1	3
		1	2
			1
1		1	4
			1
		1	2
			3
1		1	6
			3
			3
		1	3
			1
			1
1		1	4
11	0		134
11	0		50
11	0		87
11	0		24

Table 2.2b: Activity Implementation Tracking

Activity Name	Initiative Partner (e.g. school, specific community organization)	Planned dates and number of times activity will be held	Actual dates and number of times activity was held	Notes (e.g., explanation of any deviation from planned activity schedule)
e.g., College Readiness Workshop	United Way	Four workshops in September and October	One in September, two in October, and one in November	Second October workshop postponed because facilitator became unavailable. Followed up with all registered families to make sure they knew about date change.

SECTION 2.4: Measuring Progress toward Desired Outcomes

EXAMINE DATA ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES, INCLUDING INFORMATION ON WHETHER YOUR ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED AS PLANNED, HOW MANY FAMILIES YOU HAVE REACHED, AND WHETHER FAMILIES ARE MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD THE DESIRED OUTCOMES.

Table 2.4a: Family Activity Participation Data

Provide the number of total families and focal families for each of your initiative’s activities to help families support students’ high school success. For each activity listed, include the family outcome(s) that the activity is designed to impact.

Include only those activities that *directly relate to families* (e.g., home visits, workshops, summer orientation, text messaging, referrals to community services).

Date(s)	Who Conducted/ Sponsored	Activity Name	Related Family Outcome	Number of families expected to participate	Total number of families participating*	Number of focal families participating
e.g., April 8	Family Engagement Resource Center	Data systems training on tracking student credit attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families know how to access data on their students’ credit attainment. Families understand the importance of students earning credits for on-time graduation. 	20	17	10

Unduplicated total number of focal families engaged in all of these activities:
(An unduplicated total counts each focal family only once, even if they participated in several if these activities.)

* Optional: While this information will not help you assess your focal families’ progress toward the desired outcomes, it can help you assess the full reach of your initiative’s activities and serve as interesting data to share with your stakeholders.

Table 2.4b: Family Outcomes – Indicators of Progress

Refer to the family outcomes you developed during your planning phase (see Section 1.3) to complete this table. Record the results for *each* of your family outcomes and include the data collection method and source. Indicate whether the outcomes are for focal families or the total population.

Family Outcomes (Refer to outcomes that you have been targeting, as determined during the planning process.)	Results (Report changes in family knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Use numbers and percentages whenever available. Be as specific as possible.)	Are the results for focal families or all families?* (Indicate with an “F” for focal and “A” for all families)	Data source (e.g., parent survey, family resource center logs, school data system)
e.g., Families will monitor their teens’ attendance.	Of the 85 focal families whose students who had more than 10 unexcused absences in eighth grade, 54 families (63 percent) accessed student attendance data either on line or from school personnel at least once a month during the school year.	F	Parent surveys

* While you should try to collect data specific to your focal families, it’s best to have some data rather than none, so if it isn’t possible to engage in separate data collection efforts specific to your focal families, it would be best to gather data from all of the families that a given activity serves, and simply note whether those results are for focal families or a larger group.

EXAMINE DATA ON STUDENT OUTCOMES TO ASSESS PROGRESS.

Table 2.4c: Student Outcomes – Indicators of Progress

Refer to the student outcomes you chose during your planning phase (see Section 1.3) for this table. Record the results for *each* of your student outcomes and include the data collection method and source. Student outcomes should be for focal students only, because the strategies you design for focal families are unlikely to impact the entire student population.

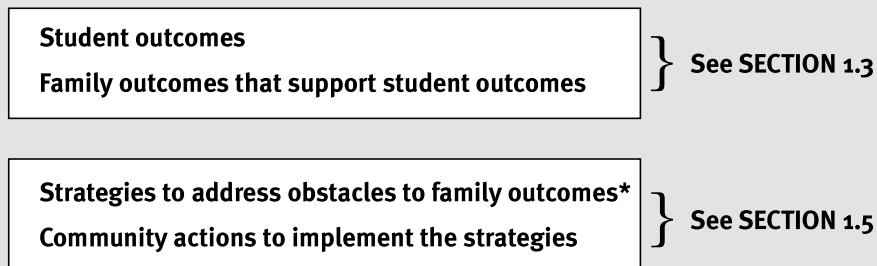
Student Outcomes (Refer to the outcomes chosen during planning process)	Results for Focal Students (Report changes in student attendance, grades, ninth grade completion, etc. Use numbers and percentages whenever available. Be as specific as possible.)	Data source (e.g., survey, school data system)
e.g., Focal students will meet district attendance requirements.	Of the 87 focal students who had more than 10 unexcused absences in eighth grade, 42 students (48 percent) met district attendance requirements in ninth grade.	Attendance records from school data system

APPENDIX D: Developing a Logic Model¹

Creating a logic model is a useful way to bring together the work you do during the planning process. A logic model illustrates the connection between what your initiative plans to do (i.e., its actions) and what it hopes to achieve (i.e., its goals and outcomes). A logic model looks like a flowchart, with key strategy elements arranged inside a series of boxes connected by arrows (see sample logic model at the end of this section). It represents the progression of how various parts of an initiative connect to one another. Although relationships among various components of the model are sometimes two-way, the model is generally depicted as a linear process to make it as clear-cut as possible.

It is important to note that, like an architect's scale model of a building, a logic model is not meant to be a detailed "blueprint" of what your initiative must do to achieve its goals, but rather to provide a general idea of the initiative's scope and design. A logic model is a place to outline your major strategies, examine how they fit together, and analyze whether they can be expected to add up to the changes that you and your stakeholders want to see.

Your logic model should illustrate the following:



**Information about obstacles is gathered during Section 1.4.*

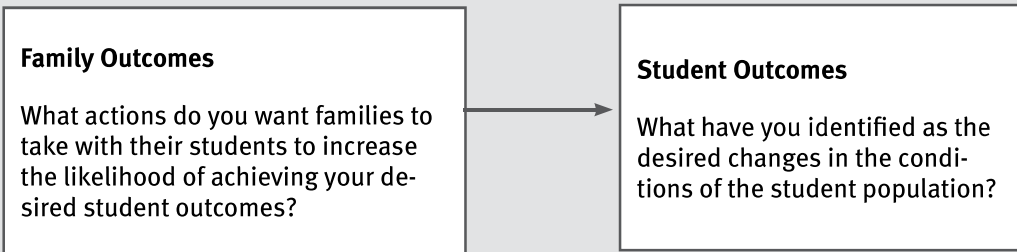
OUTCOMES

Outcomes are the changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors you intend to achieve with your focal students and families.² During your planning process you will select outcomes and then identify actions to achieve them. The logic model will help you show how your actions will lead to these desired outcomes during the implementation phase of your initiative. After completing Tables 1.3a–1.3b in Appendix C of this toolkit, you will have well-defined family and student outcomes to insert in your logic model. Furthermore, the family outcomes should explicitly align with and have an effect on student outcomes.

¹ The information in this appendix section was guided by: Westmoreland, H., Lopez, M. E., & Rosenberg, H. (2009). How to develop a logic model for districtwide family engagement strategies. *Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Newsletter*, 1(4). <http://www.hfrp.org/DistrictLogicModel>

² See Section 1.2 of this toolkit for information about focal populations.

Example of a logic model showing alignment between family and student outcomes

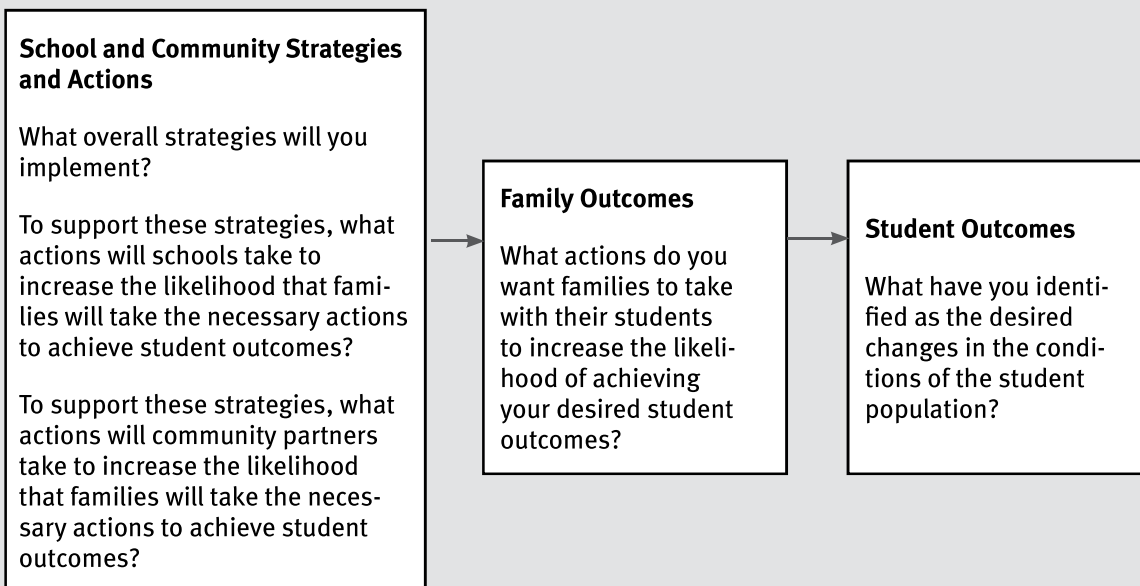


STRATEGIES

Strategies are the overarching methods you plan to use to achieve your family outcomes. They are designed to address the obstacles that you will uncover in Section 1.4 of the planning process. In addition to the perspectives of schools and community partners, getting the perspectives of the focal families and students is necessary to develop relevant strategies. After you complete the charts corresponding to Section 1.4 you will have a set of strategies that are aligned with both your obstacles and outcomes to put into your logic model.

ACTIONS

Actions are the specific things each partner (including schools, community partners, and your initiative's staff) will do to carry out your strategies. Strategies often require collaboration among multiple groups, but actions are normally things that individual groups have committed to doing as part of this common effort. In your logic model, it is important to distinguish the actions that each group is responsible for. This will help visually communicate the responsibilities of different groups. In Section 1.4 you will identify specific actions by schools and community partners to implement the overall strategies. List the actions schools and community partners have each agreed to take under the relevant headers in the actions box of your logic model. For example:



Completing your logic model does not complete the planning process. Once you've documented your strategy, revisit it often and learn from it. Logic models can be useful guides to help answer questions about what needs to be changed or improved in your family engagement plan in order to make it more effective and efficient.

A good logic model is dynamic and can respond to changes in context, focus, and purpose over time. But, to retain its relevance, a logic model must also be supported by a process that brings stakeholders together regularly to tackle critical questions. Families, community members, students, and school staff all share responsibility in ensuring that your family engagement initiative unfolds as you had intended it to and makes acceptable progress towards your desired outcomes. After you develop a logic model, your team will benefit by having a process in place to continue these conversations and refine and revise your logic model over time.



SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL

The example below was adapted from the New Visions for Public Schools presentation at the Family Engagement for High School Success planning meeting at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, December 2009.³

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Strategy – Inform focal families about high school graduation and college-readiness requirements (e.g., credits, attendance, grades, and state tests) and provide ideas about how families can support students’ academic success.

School Actions

- Hold workshops for parents about college-readiness and supporting student success at open houses and parent-teacher conference days at three high schools.
- Assign parent coordinator to encourage families to attend workshops.
- Have teachers/counselors share student performance data with families at conferences and provide tips to support student attendance and performance.

Community Partner Actions

- Train parent coordinators and guidance counselors to offer college-readiness workshops specifically for parents.
- Train teachers at each school to talk with parents about student data on attendance, credits, grades, and state tests.
- Conduct community fairs for families to learn about enrichment resources for students.

OUTCOMES

Focal Family Outcomes – What families will each do to support the following areas:

Credit Accumulation

- Make sure student has required books and instructional materials.
- Review student’s four-year plan with guidance counselor two or more times/year.
- Attend school open house.
- Attend two parent-teacher conferences.
- Use student data report to follow teen’s progress.

Attendance

- Set limits on bedtime.
- Help student get out the door on time each morning.
- Communicate attendance expectations to student and track attendance using report card.
- Communicate with teacher/counselor if attendance is problem.

Earn grade of 80 or better in courses

- Communicate expectation that teen completes homework.
- Understand grading policy and what it takes to get grade of 80.
- Track grades through report card.

Get ready for state tests

- Make sure teen studies for state tests.
- Get copy of test results.
- Learn how school helps students prepare for state tests.
- Conduct community fairs for families to learn about enrichment resources for students.

Focal Student Outcomes – What students will accomplish at the following grade levels:

Ninth grade:

- Earn 11 credits.
- Have 92 percent attendance.
- Earn 80 percent or better in every course.
- Pass one state exam with overall score of 75.

Tenth grade:

- Earn 11 credits.
- Have 92 percent attendance.
- Earn 80 percent or better in every course.
- Pass two state exams with overall score of 75.

Eleventh grade:

- Earn 11 credits.
- Have 92 percent attendance.
- Earn 80 percent or better in every course.
- Pass two state exams with overall score of 75.

Twelfth grade:

- Earn 11 credits.
- Have 92 percent attendance.
- Earn 80 percent or better in every course.

³ For more information, please refer to the brochure entitled *Is Your 9th Grader on Track for College?*, available online at <http://www.newvisions.org/node/313/10/1/111>. A case study of New Visions for Public Schools’ work on family engagement in high school can also be found at: <http://www.hfrp.org/NewVisions>

APPENDIX E: Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods refer to the systems used to gather information about participants and the activities of an initiative. The following are issues to consider in developing your initiative's data collection methods:¹

Using Single versus Multiple Methods. Using multiple data collection methods to assess one particular outcome (e.g., using surveys, focus groups, and parent participation data to measure the effect of parent training workshops) provides a richer, more detailed picture than using one method alone. It also illuminates inconsistencies between methods and reduces the chance of bias caused by a particular method. For these reasons, you should try to use multiple methods whenever possible.

Using Existing Data Sources. Schools, community organizations, and other project partners may already have some of the evaluation information you need. Conducting an inventory of what is already available can reduce data burden as well as data collection costs. You may also be able to take advantage of existing data management information systems being used by schools. At the same time, avoid the temptation to use data just because they are readily available: if the data do not suit your needs, do not use them.

Selecting a Sample of Individuals. The choice of data collection methods is also affected by the sample to be studied. While data can be collected from a number of different people – including students, families, staff, funders, educators, and other stakeholders – most initiatives will at least want to collect data on the students and families who participate in their activities. Some methods are well suited to collecting data from individual student and family participants (e.g., surveys), while others are better suited to a smaller group settings that represent the diversity of all participants (e.g., interviews or focus groups). The choice of sample is, in turn, affected by the size of your initiative. In general, including all participants produces the most reliable results but may limit the type and amount of data collected because of the cost implications of doing so. If you decide to collect data from all participants, realize that this method requires more follow-up to get everyone to respond, and not everyone may consent to participate. The resulting response rate can affect how representative of the whole group your data are. If you decide to use a smaller sample, realize that a deliberate sampling technique is needed to ensure that the results are representative of all focal students or families. Otherwise your findings are less likely to be valid.

Assigning Staff and Others to Collect the Data. The collection of data can require significant amounts of time and resources. Consider who is best suited to collect your data, in terms of their availability, knowledge, expertise, and impartiality. For example, in many projects, program staff can easily collect attendance data on an ongoing basis. However, when the data collector's perspective may influence findings, such as with interview and observational data, it may be better to have unbiased data collectors who are not invested in the project's success. Projects can also seek help from local colleges to help with the collection and analysis of statistical data.

¹ Guidelines adapted from Bouffard, S., & Little, P. M. D. (2004). *Detangling data collection: Methods for gathering data*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/DetanglingDataCollection>

Establishing a Schedule for Data Collection. Different data may be collected at different times. Things to consider when scheduling data collection include:

- **The indicator.** If the indicator you are measuring is the amount of change, both pre- and post-intervention data collection are necessary (e.g., before and after tests). If the indicator is only the level of attainment, only post-intervention measurement is needed (e.g., surveys at the end of a training program)
- **Needs of decision makers.** You will need to take into account who needs data when. For example, collecting parents' reactions to a recurring activity shortly after each occurrence allows event programmers to make improvements for the next time. Likewise, if the school board considers budgets that could affect parent engagement efforts at its April meetings, the data needed to inform their decisions must be ready in ample time for that meeting.
- **Timing related to project activities.** You don't want to wait until March, for example, to collect initial data on the effects of an activity conducted in October. At the same time, however, for many activities intended to influence family engagement, one-time-only data collection will not show if the effects increased or decreased over time. Collecting initial data in October and follow-up data in January and April will provide a better picture of longer-term effects and of the cumulative effects of several related activities. It may be important to collect some measures over a period of years – perhaps even after the participant is no longer part of the initiative – to get a sense of the endurance of the initiative's effects for families, schools, and community partners.
- **Convenience.** It may be easier to collect data from families, school officials, and community partners as part of scheduled encounters rather than as a separate effort. For example, you could ask for parent feedback on the online student performance data system during parent-teacher conferences.

APPENDIX F: Family Engagement for High School Success Year-End Summary

The following is an example of a year-end summary created by one of the FEHS pilot sites to document the impact of their family engagement initiative's first full year of implementation. This initiative began in 2009 as a partnership led by United Way of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. The Las Vegas partnership was one of the largest FEHS initiatives, working with a number of schools and utilizing a complex set of strategies to increase family engagement.

UNITED WAY OF SOUTHERN NEVADA – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE CENTER INITIATIVE

On September 29, 2009, AT&T and United Way Worldwide launched Family Engagement for High School Success (FEHS). This new initiative, part of United Way's national strategy to reduce the dropout rate, was designed to help the families of students at risk of not graduating to become more involved in their children's education. The initiative was launched in response to research funded by AT&T and conducted by Civic Enterprises and Peter Hart Research with America's Promise Alliance, On the Front Lines of Schools, which found that the majority of teachers (63 percent) and principals (51 percent) felt increasing their schools' parental outreach programs would do a lot to reduce the number of high school dropouts.

United Way of Southern Nevada (UWSN) has been the major driving force of the project since it was initiated at the local level. UWSN matched AT&T/United Way's \$50,000 planning grant funding with another \$50,000, for a total of \$100,000, and collaborated with the Clark County School District (CCSD) for project coordination. CCSD selected five high schools to focus on based on low graduation rates and diverse demographics. CCSD agreed to gather data to support the planning process and contracted with Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. (SEI) to lead development of the five year initiative and produce a strategic plan for use across Nevada. SEI also served as the liaison and documenter for United Way and Harvard Family Research Project,¹ and provided coaching and technical assistance necessary for the school teams throughout the project's first two years.

Early on, UWSN obtained buy in and a commitment from the Women's Leadership Council to financially support the project over a five year period through a \$675,000 grant contingent upon CCSD's and the high schools' continued dedication to, and active participation in, the initiative. An overview of project milestones by year is shown in Figure 1.

RESULTS FOR COHORT 1 (2010–2011) STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The initiative focused on students who had either failed a core subject or whose average daily attendance was below 90 percent. There were a total of 1,215 focal students (freshmen) attending the five participating high schools at the beginning of the 2010–11 school year.² As shown in Table 1, by the end of the first semester the total number of focal students had decreased by 134 to 1,117, and remained at that level through the end of the second semester.

¹ Harvard Family Research Project provided technical assistance to the FEHS sites throughout planning and implementation.

² UWSN defined their focal student population as students who had either failed a core subject area, or had below 90 percent attendance in the eighth grade.

Throughout the year, the five schools held 199 events and activities designed to engage focal students and their families, as shown in Table 2. Note: numbers do not show unduplicated counts.

Data were collected at the end of each semester to measure the changes in focal student attendance, grade point average (GPA), and credit acquisition, each of which is considered essential to ensuring that students are on track to graduate. Data are shown in Table 3. Conclusions at the end of the 2010–2011 year reveal that, of the 1,117 ninth grade students who comprised the focal population:

- 25.1 percent were able to obtain an ending GPA of 2.0 or better to end the school year.
- 35.4 percent were able to miss less than ten school days and maintain eligibility for credit attainment.
- 20.8 percent were able to obtain the number of credits they attempted for the school year.
- 54.8 percent had an average daily attendance above 90 percent for the school year.

Overall performance seems to indicate that grade point averages went up, average daily attendance stayed relatively the same, and that students struggled with obtaining the number of credits they attempted (grades and/or absences are usually the factors).

Data were collected via surveys throughout the year from parents and students to gauge changes in behaviors and attitudes linked to successful communications and relationships between schools and families, as well as family-student communication related to education.

FIGURE 1: Project milestones by year

FALL 2009

- AT&T and United Way Worldwide issued a Request for Proposals.
- UWSN awarded grant to partner with CCSD.

SPRING 2010

- Five CCSD high schools selected to participate.
- Schools develop five year plan for increasing graduation rates; create year 1 action plans.
- Planning year evaluation reporting completed.

SUMMER 2010

- United Way’s Women’s Leadership Council adopts project and becomes primary funding partner.
- Additional United Way Worldwide funding received.
- Process and tracking tools drafted.

2010–2011 SCHOOL YEAR

- AmeriCorps placed and trained at sites.
- School teams review/refine data collection tools and protocols.
- Focal population numbers and characteristics confirmed.
- Family Engagement Resource Centers (FERCs) designed and opened.
- Increased outreach and family engagement activities implemented.
- School teams collect evaluation data, receive TA and coaching support.
- Quarterly progress reports drafted and shared locally and with United Way Worldwide /Harvard Family Research Project.
- Year-end project structure/approach evaluation; year two action planning.

Table 1: Comparison of focal population at each school beginning semester one and completing semester two

COHORT 1: 2010-2011	Beginning Semester 1		End Semester 2	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Clark High School	187	14.95%	170	15.22%
Eldorado High School	243	19.42%	223	19.96%
Silverado High School	188	15.03%	166	14.86%
Sunrise Mountain High School	319	25.50%	288	25.78%
Western High School	314	25.10%	270	24.17%
Total	1,251	100%	1,117	100%

Table 2: Engagement events, number of participants and percentage of parents attending each event

Type of Engagement Event	Number of Events	Total Attending	Total Parents Attending
Family Engagement Resource Center events/ activities	157	2,201	762
College/career related	8	1,017	77
Cultural events	3	239	99
Freshman Orientation/ School Open House/Family Nights	11	1152	392
Leadership/advanced classes	2	72	18
Credit/grade monitoring, tracking and report card activities	7	3,840	1410
Parent meetings/advisory councils	11	285	168
Total	199	8,806	2,926

Table 3: Student outcomes for cohort 1, 2010–2011

Student Outcomes	Semester 1* N=1,251	Semester 2** N=1,117
Attendance – Percentage of all focal students missing fewer than 10 days of school***	56%	35.4%
Year-end Attendance – Percentage of all focal students who finished the freshman year attending at least 90 percent of the time (<i>required for graduation</i>)	N/A	54.8%
Credit Acquisition – Percentage of all focal students earning number of credits attempted	29.7%	20.8%
Grade Point Average (GPA) – Percentage of all focal students with at least a 2.0 GPA (<i>minimum GPA required for high school graduation</i>)	30.4%	25.1%

* Semester one data based on number of focal students identified by CCSD at the beginning of the school year.
 ** Semester two data based on number of focal students completing their freshman year.
 *** CCSD provided attendance data based on number of days missed, not those attending at least 90 percent of the time.

Table 4: Parent and student survey results for second, third and fourth quarters

	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter
Data on family-student communication			
Percentage of <i>parents</i> that regularly speak to their student about the importance of good grades	100%	97.7% English speaking 97.85% Spanish speaking	100% English speaking 94.4% Spanish speaking
Percentage of <i>students</i> that report that their families have spoken to them about their grades at least one time in the last month	74%	76.4%	71.7%
Percentage of <i>students</i> that report that their families have spoken to them about their grades daily	25.9%	25%	24.7%
Data on school-family communication			
Percentage of <i>parents and students</i> that believe their student’s teachers and counselors respect the parents’/families’ ideas	88.7% of parents 75.2% of students	86.3% of parents 74.8% of students	92.1% of parents 82.5% of students

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The five high schools continue to work with each other to leverage successes and better reach families. The schools have:

- Collected 428 family surveys and 3,357 student surveys.
- Hosted and made contact with families and students 7,503 times at events, each with an average of 115 people.
- Hosted and made contact with families and students at Family Engagement Resource Centers (FERCs) 2,146 times and earned high levels of satisfaction.
- Identified knowledge and awareness gaps between English and Spanish speaking families.
- Learned of discrepancies between what families are reporting and what students believe about their families (e.g., student surveys show that parents have a lower level of comfort, awareness and utilization of school resources than families indicate).
- Learned that all students and parents/guardians have the same needs – regardless of grades, credits, or attendance rates.
- Determined that awareness of the FERCs continues to be higher among families that speak English than those that speak Spanish – awareness in both groups dropped as the year was ending. FERC awareness is also higher among the general population than the focal population among families.
- By the fourth quarter families were more likely to know of the school events to attend than in previous quarters, based on student surveys.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING 2011–2012 PROCESS (COHORTS 1 AND 2)

- **Gain clear understanding of roles and responsibilities with each partner**, and improve communication between CCSD and UWSN on project direction, status, and goals, and ensure commitment remains high from all parties in supporting the school sites' success with families and students.
- **Continue to refine and improve data collection and reporting**, including the existing data collection tools which need to be reviewed and updated in order incorporate lessons learned and be more effective with the next cohort of incoming ninth graders.
- **Increase focal family involvement** and ensure focal families feel connected to the school through another parent or volunteer to whom they can relate.
- **Create/improve project efficiencies** for collecting and analyzing data through implementing strategies from other states/sites that allow for increased access to focal while still adhering to federal privacy requirements.
- **Increase leadership and capacity of the FERC teams** in order to retain institutional memory and ensure momentum of the FERCs, and provide continued support, motivation, and guidance for FERC teams – driven by top leadership at each site and the District.
- **Continue to learn from one another** through face to face meetings, on site technical assistance, and communication with other FERC teams to learn about effective strategies, partnerships, and activities that emerge over time.



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