

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING SERIES

Family Engagement to Support Immigrant and Multilingual Families

Welcome to the Family Engagement Learning Series briefs! These briefs summarize a six-part webinar series of conversations designed to Raise the Bar for family engagement practices between school and home. The 2023 series, produced by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Carnegie Corporation of New York and Overdeck Family Foundation, provided an overview of evidence, highlighted bright spots in the field, and shared resources and evidence-based strategies to support student success with education leaders and practitioners.

Introduction

“[Raise the Bar: Lead the World](#)” is the U.S. Department of Education’s call to action to transform public education and unite around what truly works — based on decades of experience and research — to advance education equity and excellence. Achieving academic excellence for all students by supporting the conditions to accelerate learning and offering a comprehensive and rigorous education, as well as boldly improving learning conditions, are key focus areas under Raise the Bar, with a focus on assisting states and districts in achieving these goals for every student. Creating pathways to global engagement by providing [every student a pathway to multilingualism](#) is another key focus area that aligns directly with this webinar’s content.

The United States is currently home to about 45 million immigrants, which is about 14% of the population. By 2065, immigrants and their children will make up 36% of the U.S. population. Multilingual and immigrant learners bring perspectives to our schools that promote open dialogue, increase collaboration and cultural competencies, and improve learning for all students.

Schools around the country are looking for strategies to better support multilingual students and ensure their families have access to educational experiences that affirm and protect their cultural and linguistic identities. Family engagement can play a vital role in building culturally affirming and welcoming school communities where immigrant and emerging bilingual learners are supported to thrive and excel.



While implementing these strategies, education leaders should foster safe and inclusive school environments in which all students and their families are treated with dignity and respect and issues of bias and discrimination are addressed.

We believe parents, families, and caregivers are essential partners in supporting student success. Research finds that strong partnerships between home and school lead to increased academic success and engagement for students. Thus, the U.S. Department of Education is committed to [Raising the Bar for Parent Partnership in Our Schools](#).



Evidence: Family Engagement to Support Immigrant and Multilingual Families

The third webinar in the series, [Family Engagement to Support Immigrant and Multilingual Families](#), was moderated by [Dr. Stephany Cuevas](#), Assistant Professor of Education, Attallah College of Educational Studies, Chapman University.



Scan to access the webinar

Montserrat Garibay, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), U.S. Department of Education, and Ambika Kapur, Program Director with Carnegie Corporation of New York, shared a wealth of resources and evidence before introducing [Becoming an Ally: Partnering with Immigrant Families to Promote Student Success](#).

Dr. Cuevas's research focuses on Latinx family engagement in student higher education. She shared a few effective family engagement practices:

- Empowering immigrant families to better support their children's learning and socioemotional well-being.
- Fostering belonging and helping families feel welcome.
- Centering the strengths and needs of immigrant families.

Dr. Cuevas further highlighted research-informed best practices including:

- Making time to get to know and learn from families.
- Investing in partnerships among the school and families and communities.
- Creating welcoming and immigrant-friendly environments.
- Developing culturally responsive and rigorous programs, curricula, and frameworks.
- Developing the capacity of educators and other providers to work with immigrant and multilingual families.



Learnings from Bright Spots

Panelists shared their insights, based on their organizational perspective, for how best to support immigrant and multilingual families. Panelists included:

- [Gloria Corral](#), Parent Institute for Quality Education;
- [Crystal Gonzales](#), English Learners Success Forum;
- [Angélica Infante-Green](#), Rhode Island Department of Education;
- [Veronica Crespín-Palmer](#), RISE Colorado;
- [Jessica O'Muireadhaigh](#), Aurora Public Schools (Colorado);
- [Dr. Manuel Burciaga](#), Rialto Unified School District (California); and
- [Dr. Tammie Castillo-Shiffer](#), Santa Maria-Bonita School District (California).



Parents are the experts, and so when we ask them questions and we really put forth that effort, we've had fantastic results from just those conversations. And when we come through and we implement those recommendations, that really goes a long way in building trust, and parents and families know that we are really committed, that we're going to do more than talk about it, we're actually going to do the work.

- DR. TAMMIE CASTILLO-SHIFFER

Key Takeaways and Strategies

Panelists shared strategies for how educators can create welcoming environments for students and families from diverse ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds and ensure that their communication is culturally responsive and accessible. Some strategies include:



- **School and district leadership**

- › Hold school and district leadership accountable for cultural competency and a commitment to serving multilingual and immigrant families.
- › Prioritize funding to improve the infrastructure and provide adequate supports and resources to immigrant and multilingual families.
- › Invest in cultural competency professional development for staff.
- › Develop culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum and materials that focus on simultaneous language and content learning and speak to both students and their families.
- › Communicate clearly (no jargon) in multiple languages through different modalities (i.e., variety of technology/visuals) to ensure that messaging is accessible for families.
- › Elevate immigrant and multilingual families' voices and center their lived experiences through agenda-setting, policies, and practices.
- › Apply a critical lens to determine whether policies around resources, infrastructure, staffing, and practices are serving immigrant and multilingual families.
- › Consider budgets and investment in family engagement, staffing, school and district climate, welcoming school environments, and practices such as parent teacher home visits and community needs assessments.



When families are provided with the information they need, when they have opportunities to develop skills and build community, they positively engage and support their children's educational trajectory, just like every parent does.

- GLORIA CORRAL

- **Educators**

- › Dedicate time to relationship-building and follow up on action items to earn the trust of multilingual and immigrant families and deliver positive student outcomes.
- › Find ways to focus on the shared aspirations that families and educators have for a child.
- › Avoid silos and promote collaboration and information-sharing among stakeholders to produce better family engagement and student outcomes.

- **Environment and engagement**

- › Invite immigrant and multilingual families to be co-creators of policies rather than solely asking for feedback on established practices.
- › Create consistent and authentic ways for educators and families to interact with one another beyond conversations about academics or discipline (i.e., cultural events).
- › Engage the existing community organizations who are serving immigrant and multilingual families (i.e., nonprofits, community centers).
- › Remember that parents are also experts and want to engage with their child's learning. They should be seen as partners in this work.
- › Understand the needs of your families and be willing to provide holistic supports so they can engage (i.e., food, childcare, remote/in-person options, stipends, interpretation, translation, and transcription services).
- › Celebrate families for their expertise and protect their right to be involved.



With multilingual learners being the fastest growing student population in our school system, there is no reason our materials should not be inclusive of their needs and responsive to their cultural assets. This should be the norm, a focus on our multilingual learner students.

- CRYSTAL GONZALES



I think a lot of our families, when they first come into our system, feel like they don't have the rights to advocate or to understand more what's happening in the classroom. But we make sure that they know — and this was co-created with parent groups, to ensure that families knew what their rights are and how to advocate for their rights.

- ANGÉLICA INFANTE-GREEN

RESOURCES

- Family Engagement Learning Series [summary and videos](#)
- U.S. Department of Education's [website](#)
 - › [Department resources for parents and educators](#)
 - › [Raise the Bar](#) priorities
 - › [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition](#)
 - › [English Learner Family Toolkit](#)
- [Overdeck Family Foundation](#)
 - › [2022 Grantmaking & Impact Report](#)
- [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#)
 - › [Partnering with Immigrant Families to Promote Student Success](#)
- RISE Colorado [website](#)
 - › RISE Colorado: [Our Stories. Our Time. Report](#)
- [English Learners Success Forum](#)
- [Rhode Island Department of Education Multilingual Learners \(MLLs\) / English Learners \(ELs\)](#)



This brief is one of a six-part Family Engagement Learning Series produced by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Carnegie Corporation of New York and Overdeck Family Foundation. This webinar series provided an overview of evidence, highlighted bright spots in the field, and shared resources and evidence-based strategies to support student success with education leaders and practitioners. For more information, please visit <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/parents>.