

**Toolkit of Resources for  
Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education**  
**Part 2: Building a Cultural Bridge**



**REL**  
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REL Pacific

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## Overview of the Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education

The *Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education* is designed to guide school staff in strengthening partnerships with families and community members to support student learning. The Regional Education Laboratory for the Pacific (REL Pacific) developed the toolkit in response to a request from the Guam Alliance for Family and Community Engagement in Education, whose members include K-12 school staff and college faculty who work with K-12 schools. This toolkit offers an integrated approach to family<sup>1</sup> and community engagement, bringing together research, promising practices, and a wide range of useful tools and resources with explanations and directions for using them.

In this Toolkit, we define family and community engagement as an overarching approach for building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent–child relationships, and ongoing learning and development of children. This definition encompasses other existing definitions (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act, 2001) and emphasizes the importance of school staff working as partners with families to support students in multiple ways.

### Description of the Toolkit Contents

Research provides more than 40 years of steadily accumulating evidence that family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of children’s school success (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridgall, & Gordon, 2009). Although there is no single study that makes a definitive case for the impact of family involvement, this accumulated body of evidence links student achievement to specific family involvement activities (California Department of Education, 2011).

This toolkit, which is presented in four parts, includes information and tools that reflect these activities (see Appendix A for an explanation of tool selection). Each tool is introduced with a cover sheet that includes the purpose of the tool; the intended outcome of using the tool, the materials and time needed to use the tool; whether the tool is best used with individuals, small groups, or large groups; the tool type (see Appendix B for a description of the tool types), and the audience for the tool. Brief descriptions of the four parts of the Toolkit follow.

- **Part 1: Building an Understanding of Family and Community Engagement**

Part 1 includes tools that help school staff build awareness of how their beliefs and assumptions about family and community engagement influence their interactions with families and how the demographic characteristics of the families served by Guam schools can provide information about what might support or hinder family engagement with schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *parent* and *family* are used interchangeably throughout this Toolkit. These terms are inclusive of mother, father, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and any influential adult or family member involved in children’s lives. The term *school community* is inclusive of the people that comprise the school community – staff, families, local businesses, churches, organizations, and agencies.

- **Part 2: Building a Cultural Bridge**  
The tools in Part 2 focus on tapping into the strengths of families and community members and helping families to establish active roles within the school community in support of student learning.
- **Part 3: Building Trusting Relationships With Families and Community Through Effective Communication**  
Part 3 tools focus on cross-cultural and two-way communication as ways to enhance family and community engagement.
- **Part 4: Engaging All in Data Conversations**  
The tools in Part 4 help school staff understand what data is important to share with families and community members and how to share such data.

Each part can stand alone or be used in conjunction with the other parts for a more comprehensive approach to family and community engagement, depending on the varying needs of the staff and school community.

## Introduction to Part 2: Building a Cultural Bridge

When a school community includes families from diverse cultures, school staff may need to take specific steps to ensure broad family and community engagement. Part 1 of the Toolkit laid the foundation for taking these steps by helping us examine our beliefs and assumptions about family and community engagement and understand how one's cultural lens influences interactions with others. Part 1 also introduced some demographic data about Guam families that shed light on family circumstances and provided information that helped build our understanding about some potential barriers to family and community engagement.

Part 2 builds upon the foundation established in Part 1 by providing tools that help school staff build a bridge across cultures that addresses those barriers so that families can become partners in support of student learning. Building that bridge is important because when families are involved in students' learning, students achieve more regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level (Antunez, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Information and tools in Part 2 will help us address the important aspects of building a cultural bridge: developing trusting relationships, tapping into and respecting families' strengths, and helping families build their role as partners who share power or responsibilities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These tools provide guidance on asking families and community members *how* they want to be engaged in the school and student learning, which helps them develop a sense of ownership and responsibility and can bring about more meaningful and active participation (Avvisati, Besbas, & Guyon, 2010; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Stoicovy, Murphy, & Sachuo, 2011).

### Description of Part 2 Sections

Part 2 of the Toolkit has two sections which together focus on ways schools can bridge the culture between home and school by valuing and respecting parent strengths and experiences. The tools in this section expand staff understanding of the different ways that families and communities can support student learning and increase their ability to overcome the barriers that keep families from engaging with schools.

- **Section 2.1: Tapping Into the Strengths of Families and Communities**  
This section emphasizes the importance of educators focusing on families' strengths and respecting their role as partners working toward co-constructed goals for student success. It also addresses parents' beliefs about the value of engaging with schools.
- **Section 2.2: Establishing Roles for Building Family and Community Engagement**  
This section provides guidance around establishing positive roles for staff and families in support of student learning. It includes an explanation of the variety of roles that parents and community can assume when they engage with schools and provides a tool that helps educators and parents understand those roles.

## Toolbox

### Summary of Part 2 Tools

The tools comprising Part 2 of the Toolkit are summarized in Table 2.1. The table includes the name and number of the tool, the tool type (i.e. activity, protocol/process, activity, chart, or template), the group structure (i.e., small group or large group) that is most appropriate for using the tool, and the type of participants (i.e., school staff or parents/families/community members) for whom the tool was designed.

**Table 2.1: Summary of Part 2 Tools<sup>2</sup>**

Tool Number	Tool Name	Tool Type	Group Type	Participants
2.1.1	Tap Into Family and Community Strengths	Activity	Small Group Large Group	Both
2.2.1	Epstein – Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships	Process	Large Group	Both

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<sup>2</sup> Tools are designated first by the part of the Toolkit in which they appear, next by the section, and last by the number of the tool within the section. For example, Tool 1.1.1 is in Part 1, Section 1 of the Toolkit, and it is the first tool in the section.

## Section 2.1: Tapping Into the Strengths of Families and Communities

### Introduction

The growing diversity of school communities requires their members to understand the strengths and general characteristics that families bring to the school so that those strengths can be utilized to support student achievement. Educators must recognize that parents are not all the same: They are people who have their own strengths and weaknesses, complexities, problems, and questions, and educators must work with them and see them as more than “just parents” (Edwards, 2009).

Engaging families goes beyond matching school needs to parents. It also involves getting to know individual parents and their stories to help determine what help *they* need as individuals to support their children’s learning.

### Key Points

- **It is critical to identify family strengths in order to engage with families as partners in their children’s education.** To identify and make use of family strengths, educators may need to shift from a deficit model – focusing on what families *aren’t* doing – to a strengths-based model that acknowledges that families *want* to help their students succeed (Moore, 2011). For example, in the Chuukese population it is not unusual for the extended family or another interested community member to come to school functions when a child’s parent is not available. Rather than seeing this as a case in which parents do not care about their child’s education, educators can see the involvement of others as a reflection of a cultural strength — the community is interdependent and focused on group success. If the parent isn’t available, another member of the community steps in to support the student. Of course, educators must avoid the pitfall of thinking that all family characteristics in a culture can be generalized. Instead, they must get to know each family better.
- **Collaborating with families based on strengths develops strong relationships between home, school, and community.** Educators can help families build on their strengths by asking them how they want to be involved and how the school and community can create opportunities for that involvement. When educators recognize parents’ strengths, they are more likely to reach out to parents as true partners in their children’s education (e.g., work together with them to set goals for their children’s education, help them understand how to support their children’s learning at home, acknowledge the importance of the home language). To make use of family strengths, the school and community need to offer diverse and culturally appropriate approaches to engaging families. They need to provide opportunities for parents to be viewed as individuals, recognizing the diversity that occurs within and between cultural groups.



- **Partnering with communities to promote family engagement helps schools and families support student learning.** Family, school, and community have “overlapping spheres of influence,” and if the three spheres, or areas of influence interact and communicate with each other, it is more likely that students will receive common messages about student success (Epstein, 2010). By partnering with communities (e.g., businesses, faith-based organizations, community centers), families and schools can maximize their efforts to support student success (Epstein et al., 2002). Research shows that all students can benefit when all stakeholders work together.

### **Toolbox**

- **Tool 2.1.1: Tap Into Family and Community Strengths**  
This tool helps bring together the collective knowledge of the group using the tool to recognize the strengths that families bring to the school environment in support of children’s learning.

## Tool 2.1.1: Tap Into Family and Community Strengths

### Purpose

To raise awareness of the many strengths that families and communities have to improve the partnership among family, school, and community

### Outcome

Participants will have more awareness of the strengths that families and the community bring into the partnership with schools in support of the children's learning.

### Logistics

Materials Needed: chart paper, markers, "Family and Community Strengths" sheet

Time: 45 minutes

### Tool Type

Protocol      **Activity**      Template      Process      Article      Chart  
Other

### Group Type

Individual      **Small Group**      **Large Group**

### Participants/Audience

Parents      Staff      **Both**

## Tool 2.1.1: Tap Into Family and Community Strengths

### Purpose

To raise awareness of the many strengths that families and communities have to improve the partnership among family, school, and community

### Directions

1. Introduce participants to the purpose for the activity and the importance of knowing and appreciating the many strengths that families and the community bring to the table.
2. Ask participants to form pairs. Distribute the “Family and Community Strengths” sheet. Ask pairs to brainstorm the family and community strengths that could support children’s learning and achievement in school.
3. Ask pairs to form groups of four and share their thoughts, adding new ideas to their “Family and Community Strengths” sheet that were shared by the other pair in their group.
4. Ask groups of four to form groups of eight people. Ask the groups to share and combine their ideas into one list of parent strengths and community strengths.
5. Depending on the size of the group, you can either combine the groups again, or have each group of eight post their papers and ask for a volunteer to combine all of the lists.
6. Ask the group to reflect on the consolidated list by answering the following questions:
  - a. Which parent strengths should we make use of in our classrooms? In our school?
  - b. Which community strengths should we make use of in our classrooms? In our school?
7. Debrief the process with the large group by asking the following questions:
  - a. How did this activity shift your thinking about family and community strengths?
  - b. How can you help parents see the strengths they have to support their children’s learning?

**Tool 2.1.1: Tap Into Family and Community Strengths Graphic Organizer**

**Identifying Family and Community Strengths**

<b>Family Strengths</b>	<b>Community Strengths</b>

## Section 2.1: Establishing Roles for Building Family and Community Engagement

### Introduction

Schools that focus on educating children without considering the impact parent and community members have on student learning are missing an opportunity to create powerful learning environments for children. School staff are largely responsible for establishing the nature of the relationships and the roles that families play within the school community. To determine the roles that would most benefit children's learning, educators need in-depth knowledge of the community they serve, including the community's needs (Gray, 2013). This section provides guidance that helps school staff work with families to clarify and establish positive roles for staff and families in support of children's learning.

### Key Points

- **Parents and community can take on a variety of roles when they engage with schools.** Roles for family and community in schools can be broadly defined, from helping students learn at home to participating in school activities, being involved in decision making regarding their children, and collaborating with the community to support their children (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Joyce Epstein and colleagues have created a research-based framework for developing community partnerships that includes six types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Paying attention to the six types of involvement helps schools coordinate their efforts so that parents and community members can assume a variety of roles as partners with the school (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).
- **Connecting family and community engagement to school improvement helps focus roles.** Family and community engagement often consists of efforts that are uncoordinated and separate from school improvement efforts. This has been described by Kressley (2008) as “random acts of family involvement.” To ensure that family and community engagement promotes student growth and school success at every grade, schools can help parents understand the critical role they play in supporting student learning and achievement of school improvement goals. For example, family members can serve as volunteers, participate in school decisions, set learning goals with their children, and participate in other curriculum-related activities (Van Roekel, 2008).

- **Bureaucracy can discourage engagement and limit the roles that parents and community members are willing to accept.** If ethnically diverse parents feel they lack the knowledge and confidence to operate within the bureaucratic structure of the school community, they may involve themselves at lower levels or not at all (Young, 1998). Many school districts try to involve parents in the actual planning and operation of schools. While teachers make decisions related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, parents are encouraged to help make other important decisions, such as how to allocate resources. Ethnically diverse parents may see decision making as a consensus building process while the school may instead value “one man, one vote” (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000). This disparity between decision-making processes may cause some parents to seek other, more comfortable ways of engaging with the school.
- **One role doesn’t fit all.** It is clear that parental situations, perspectives, and skills affect their ability to support their children in particular ways. For example, asking a parent to read at home with their child might seem an easy request, but some parents have never been shown how to read interactively with their children or they may lack the reading skills to do so. In addition, some parents might not believe that the positive effects of reading to their child will make a substantial difference. Parents with different perspectives and skills need varying supports in order to effectively respond to requests to support their children’s learning (Edwards, 2011).

## Toolbox

- **Tool 2.2.1: Epstein—A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

The tool in this section can be used to understand and establish possible roles that family and community could play in supporting student achievement.

## Tool 2.2.1: Epstein—A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

### Purpose

To increase the school staff's skills to empower parents to become active participants in their children's education by using their own strengths at school, at home, and in the community

To understand the components of a comprehensive program of family and community engagement and be able to plan a goal-linked program that will increase student success in school

### Outcome

Participants will develop a list of ideas for how to plan, implement, and continually improve family and community involvement in schools.

### Logistics

Materials Needed: "Epstein— A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships" handout

Time Needed: 1 hour

### Tool Type

Protocol      Activity      Template      **Process**      Article      Chart      Other

### Group Type

Individual      Small Group      **Large Group**

### Participants/Audience

Parents      Staff      **Both**

## Tool 2.2.1: Epstein—A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships<sup>3</sup>

### Purpose

To increase the school staff's skills to empower parents to become active participants in their children's education by utilizing their own strengths.

### Directions

1. Ask participants to count off by 6 and assign each numbered group to one of the six types of parent involvement in the Epstein framework.
2. Ask small groups to discuss the questions for their assigned parent involvement type with all members recording group consensus on their "Epstein—A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships" handout. (10 minutes)
3. Form new groups that include one person from each of the groups representing the components of Epstein's six types of parent involvement.
4. Explain that the representative from the group that discussed Epstein's first type of parent involvement has five minutes to read the description of the type of parent involvement, read the questions, and describe the group's responses to the questions to his or her new group.
5. Ask the representative to lead a five-minute discussion of the type of involvement to gain more perspectives and responses for the questions.
6. Ask the representative from the second of Epstein's types of parent involvement to follow the same procedure as the representative for the first type of involvement (steps 4 and 5).
7. Ask each of the other representatives to repeat the process (steps 4 and 5).
8. Ask representatives to return to their original home group and share any additional perspectives and ideas related to the group's assigned type of parent involvement.
9. As a large group come to consensus on three actions or ideas that the participants are willing to implement in the next month of school.

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<sup>3</sup>Sources: Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Voorhis, J. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Epstein, J.L., et al. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

For more information visit the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)



## Tool 2.2.1: Epstein— A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Handout<sup>4</sup>

### Epstein— A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

**1. Parenting:** Epstein’s first type of involvement focuses on how parenting practices empower children by building and maintaining home environments that support children as students. This type of involvement also refers to schools understanding their students’ families.

- How can we strengthen parents’ understanding of child development at each grade level?
- How do we make sure information and resources are accessible to all families that want or need it?
- How can we learn about parents’ goals and dreams for their children’s education and future plans?

**2. Communicating:** Epstein’s second type of parent involvement aims for clear parent–teacher communication about school programs, happenings, and student work and progress.

- In what ways do we need to improve communication between home and school to make sure that it is regular, two-way, and meaningful?
- What steps can we take to promote regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between teachers and families?

**3. Volunteering:** Epstein’s third type of involvement is volunteering. When teachers effectively recruit, train, and schedule parents’ volunteer time, then students and parents benefit.

- What prevents parent volunteering in our school, volunteer activities that may be done at home, or counting volunteers who come as audience members to support student activities?
- How can teachers encourage and use parent support in their classrooms?

<sup>4</sup> Sources: Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Voorhis, J. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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For more information visit the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

## Epstein— A Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

**4. Learning at Home:** Epstein’s fourth type of involvement is providing information and strategies for parents to use with their children at home.

- What strengths do parents have and how can we help them use these strengths to help their children academically?
- What may be some challenges when attempting to promote learning at home and how can these challenges be overcome?

**5. Decision Making:** The fifth type of involvement in Epstein’s model is decision making, where parents and teachers are partners in creating, discussing, or implementing shared views and actions to achieve shared goals for school improvement.

- How can we ensure that all parents’ voices are heard on decisions that affect children and families?
- What are the school decision-making areas in which parents as leaders on committees and all parents as valued partners should be involved?

**6. Collaboration with Community:** Epstein’s sixth type of involvement is collaboration with community. It is important to involve local community members and organizations in comprehensive partnership programs to support and inspire students and teachers, to strengthen families, and to enable students to “give back” to the community.

- What resources and services from the community will strengthen family practices and student learning?
- How can we communicate and promote opportunities for connecting students, educators, families and community resources?

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## Appendix A: Tool Selection

The focus for developing the Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Parents and Community as Partners in Education was on selecting tools that would help school staff understand why and how to engage parents from the diverse cultures that are present in the Pacific, specifically on Guam. In order to identify resources that might include appropriate tools, REL Pacific staff conducted a web search using Google, Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest Education Journals using the following search terms: parent engagement, parent involvement in the Pacific region, cross cultural communication with families, building trusting relationships with parents in the Pacific region, Micronesian education, indigenous learning, cultural competency with families and communities, cultural beliefs and assumptions, community partnerships, Parent Information Resource Centers, federal policy parent engagement, and access and equity for families. Additionally, REL Pacific staff reviewed websites of nationally recognized centers, including the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; Center on Innovation and Improvement; National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education; National Center for Parents with Children with Disabilities; Center for Study of Social Policy; Harvard Family Research Project; McREL International; SEDL; and WestEd. These sites were accessed to review their resources and to identify commonly-referenced websites that might also serve as additional resources.

As REL Pacific staff reviewed the resources, they first considered whether existing tools could be adapted for the Pacific context. Many of the tools included in the identified resources focused on parents of Hispanic or African American students, were more appropriate for parents of mainland middle class students, or were not closely enough related to the topic of the Toolkit section to be useful. Consequently, REL Pacific staff developed many of the Toolkit's tools. These tools reflect REL Pacific staff's experience working with schools in the Pacific region and with indigenous populations in the United States and Canada. Table A.1 indicates whether the tools in Part 2 were adapted from existing sources or developed by REL Pacific staff.

Some of the tools developed by REL Pacific are based on general group processes (i.e., inner and outer circle, carousel) for exploring people's knowledge or beliefs about a topic or generating ideas. To develop some tools, REL Pacific staff began with an existing graphic (i.e., The Iceberg Concept of Culture in Tool 1.1.2 and the trilateral graphic in Figures A, B, and C in Tool 1.4.1) that illustrates a concept (e.g., understanding cultural influences) related to family and community engagement or a way of thinking about it and created a tool based on the graphic. REL Pacific staff developed Tool 2.2.1, Epstein- Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships, based on information from Joyce Epstein's research. She provided suggestions for and feedback on the activity in Tool 2.2.1 when we sought permission to use the framework.

Taken together, the tools in the Toolkit provide many avenues for school staff to enhance their understanding of family and community engagement in education and their ability to involve family and communities as partners in supporting student learning.

**Table A.1: Source of Tools in Part 2 of the Toolkit: Adaptation, New Development, or Use of Existing Graphics**

Tool Number	Tool Name	Development	Comments	Citation
2.1.1	Tap Into Family and Community Strengths	REL Pacific Staff	This tool uses a common process (form pairs, then fours, then eights) for engaging participants in sharing ideas and tapping into the range of expertise in the group. REL Pacific staff developed the activity, including the questions for reflection and debrief of the process.	NA
2.2.1	Epstein – Framework for Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships	REL Pacific Staff Existing graphic	This tool uses an existing framework as the focus of an activity developed by REL Pacific staff. The researcher on whose work the activity is based provided feedback on and suggestions for the approach to the activity.	Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Voorhis, J. L. (2002). <i>School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.  Epstein, J.L., et al. (2009). <i>School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.  For more information visit the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University at <a href="http://www.partnershipschools.org">www.partnershipschools.org</a>

## Appendix B: Tool Types

The descriptions below are specific to this Toolkit and may or may not apply in other contexts.

Tool Type	Description
<b>Activity</b>	A structured learning experience that involves discussing, reading, writing, or creating something for a specific purpose
<b>Article</b>	A written document, that is part of a journal, newspaper, policy brief, or other larger document that is not a book, that is used as part of an activity or as a resource that supports learning related to a particular topic
<b>Chart</b>	A graphic representation of information provided in table form
<b>Process</b>	A structured approach to accomplish a task that includes specific steps that can be used in a variety of situations
<b>Protocol</b>	A structured way to conduct a conversation that includes guidance in the form of questions or steps
<b>Template</b>	A graphic organizer that guides users in accomplishing a specific task, such as developing an action plan
<b>Other</b>	Types of tools that are not described as activities, articles, charts, processes, protocols, or templates



*McREL's Pacific Center  
for Changing the Odds*

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