Addressing Equity Through Family and Community Engagement

Equity is the foundation upon which family engagement is built. Engagement of families in schools:

- Recognizes and seeks to correct the inherent inequities in schools where the majority of educators are white, and students are black or brown.
- Requires reflective practitioners to acknowledge inequities, hold essential conversations with families, listen with empathy, and collaborate with families, while holding the student at the center of the relationship.
- Supports partnerships with families to ensure that students are treated equitably in their education.
- Empowers families to undertake the leadership of educating their children.

The IDOE’s Framework and Foundations for Family and Community Engagement, as well as the Leading Practices, are firmly rooted in the values of equity, honoring and respecting families. Despite the restrictions from the health crisis, teachers can apply many of the recommended Leading Practices through creativity and the use of technology.

Reflecting on Mindset

First, educators from the majority culture should examine the mindset that they bring to their work with students and families. White educators should reflect on their own background and how their experiences effect relationships with families. The Flamboyan Foundation suggests the following prompts for reflection.

- **What might be going on in other areas of the families’ lives that could be putting pressure on them, or making it difficult to engage with you as a teacher?**
- **What assumptions could you be making about families, particularly families who are not communicative and students who are not submitting assignments?**
- **How have systemic racism and historical inequities impacted your and the family’s ability to engage?**

In reflecting on these questions, teachers can revisit their pedagogy and curriculum in ways that are culturally responsive and supportive for students of color. The Indiana Department of Education offers several resources that will equip educators in rethinking teaching and learning through an equity lens.
Culturally Responsive Practices

Reflections should also guide how educators think about and then build relationships with families of color. Family engagement is built on trust between families and teachers, but the historical barriers of systemic racism are difficult for teachers to overcome. Because of the racism inherent in our society, white teachers carry the unrecognized burden of implicit bias. By recognizing their own biases, white people can work to overcome that burden with culturally responsive practices for family and community engagement.

Start with self-education about equity and racism.

- Participate in professional development about racism, equity, and diversity.
- Take advantage of resources offered by the Indiana Department of Education, including these materials on family and community engagement.
- Seek out books on racism and participate in discussion of those books with friends and in communities and places of worship.
- Share learnings with other white friends and family. Organize an anti-racism study group with white colleagues.

Hold essential conversations with the families of your students where you affirm your commitment to the well-being and education of their children, conversations like the one recalled in this video. Engage families as full partners in the education of their children, drawing on their funds of knowledge about those children. Learn to trust families for their knowledge and commitment to their children. You are already applying your caring expertise to the education of their children. By communicating regularly and positively with families as well as collaborating with them for their children’s education, educators will earn the trust of families.

Empowered Families Leading Forward

Understand that families have the capacity to guide schools and educators in difficult times and with difficult issues. Support those families in seeking more leadership in schools. Black and brown families should take the lead in ongoing examination of equity practices and policies at the school and district levels, working in collaboration with diverse educators. Schools that drew on family leadership in responding to the COVID-19 closings reported that they developed culturally responsive and effective strategies that were rooted in the context and habits of the family and the community that the schools are trying to serve. In the same way, schools will benefit by including families in the school reopening process through the 2020-2021 school year.

Learn more about IDOE’s Leading Practices for Family and Community Engagement
Family and Community Engagement – Additional Equity Resources

- Race Matters Organizational Self-Assessment (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- National Equity Project
- Covid-19 Equity Resources
- Your Kids Aren’t Too Young to Talk About Race: Resource Roundup
- Classroom Resources on Racial Equity (Teaching Tolerance)
- Creating a Community of Champions for Children Through Transformative Family Engagement
- Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of COVID-19 and Remote Learning, and Always
- Teaching Tolerance – Self-Guided Learning, Family Engagement
- Tools for Educators to Listen to and Learn from Families During COVID-19 School Closures
- How to Develop Culturally Responsive Teaching for Distance Learning

Tips for Talking About Race with Children and Youth

- Anti-Racism for Kids: An Age-by-Age Guide to Fighting Hate
- Talking About Racism and Violence for Students -
- Talking About Race
- Raising Race Conscious Children
- Talking to Children About Racial Bias
- Helping Students Discuss Race Openly
- Talking to Kids About Racism (video)
- Talking Race with Young Children