



## Indicator Explanation



DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Talent	Target professional learning opportunities	2B.5 Professional development programs for teachers include assistance in working effectively with families.

**Explanation.** Research indicates that few teachers receive adequate preservice training to effectively engage with their students' families. Teachers need ongoing training in effective communication, encouraging engagement at home, and on cultural differences and how learning about the home culture can affect both classroom instruction and partnership with families. Professional development should include hands-on practice and reflection.

**Questions.** How often are teachers (and other educators in the school) offered professional development to help them work effectively with families? Do the trainings include: The importance of family engagement, including engagement at home? Communication skills, including active listening? Ways to learn about home cultures and then incorporate that knowledge into both classroom instruction and interactions with families? Practice? Time for reflection?

"Although most educators agree that family involvement is important, few enter their profession knowing how to develop excellent partnership programs" (Patte, 2011, p. 147). Dotger and Bennett (2010) propose that teachers and school leaders need both preservice training and ongoing professional development, including practice in engaging with a variety of family contexts, to develop the necessary skills to foster effective school-home partnerships. Teachers may incorrectly assume families know how to help their children, and they may express surprise that parents find school personnel threatening (Shumow & Harris, 2000).

The major emphasis in teacher preparation programs is on the technical aspects of professional performance, not the deeply interpersonal aspects of their task. Such interpersonal aspects include empathy, communication, and in-depth knowledge of the lives of the families in which their students dwell outside the classroom. (Hiatt-Michael, 2006, p. 12)

Carefully planned professional development can help teachers learn about effective two-way communication and other components of partnering that are vital to leverage this key to student success (Lasater, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2018). One study found that student performance in math and reading improved at a high rate (40–50%) when teachers reached out to parents in these three ways:

- Met face-to-face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home
- Contacted families routinely with news on how the children were doing, not just when they were having problems or acting up (Westat & Policy Studies Assoc., 2002, cited in Henderson et al., 2007, p. 94)



Many teachers report receiving little or no preparation for working with parents during their undergraduate teacher education programs (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Kirmaci, 2019; Patte, 2011; Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2016; Shumow & Harris, 2000). In contrast, a few isolated programs do offer examples of practical, engaging course and field work that provide a solid foundation for teachers to build on when interacting with students' families (Accardo et al., 2020; Baker & Murray, 2011; Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Collier et al., 2015; de la Piedra et al., 2006; Katz & Bauch, 2001; Murray et al., 2013; Power & Perry, 2001; Sutterby et al., 2006; Sutton et al., 2020; Walker & Dotger, 2011; Warren et al., 2011), although the quality of parent contacts and interaction can vary by placement—urban vs. suburban, and general education vs. special education (Hindin, 2010). Edwards and White (2018) are among those offering practical strategies to improve preservice preparation.

Understanding what teachers believe is especially important in order to design effective professional development workshops about parent involvement... Teachers are valuable informants because they have a unique and proximal vantage point from which to observe family participation and influence on children's school. Teachers can also inform us about the strategies they find effective and the barriers that they encounter in involving parents. It is particularly important to understand these barriers when planning programs (Shumow & Harris, 2000, p. 11).

Teachers are often unaware of the broad research base showing that effective family engagement encompasses much that happens in the home and community to support children's learning (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2010); educators may mistakenly think of parent involvement as strictly events or scheduled interactions inside the school building. Districts and schools need to provide sufficient time and opportunity for staff development and support (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015). Extra support is often needed when there is a conflict between teacher and parent perceptions (Lasater, 2016).

Teacher training is even more essential when the teacher and the students' families have different home cultures, even if they share the same race/ethnicity. In one study, teachers seemed stymied by the question about what knowledge the families or communities might have that could contribute to the children's education, possibly indicating that the teachers held a deficit view of these families or that the teachers perceived academic skills and knowledge as separate from typical family activities (Shumow & Harris, 2000). "The evidence did not support the assumption that teachers from the same ethnic background as the families were able to apply their tacit knowledge to parent involvement practices or to reflect the children's background in delivery of the school curriculum" (Shumow & Harris, 2000, p. 18).

The Bridging Cultures Project used in-service training and action research to help a cadre of teachers learn about collectivistic cultures vs. individualistic cultures (e.g., many Asian, Latino, Native American cultures; Trumbull et al., 2000, 2001, 2003, 2020). Though the project aimed to promote more effective instruction, the teachers found that it also greatly facilitated improved communication and partnerships with their students' families. Kugler (2012) notes that something as basic as eye contact can easily be misinterpreted by those from different cultures—school personnel born and raised in the U.S. expect to have eye contact during conversation as a basic sign of attention and respect from the listener.

However, for many people in other cultures, the opposite is true—looking away or down shows respect and deference to the speaker. Similarly, wording can be easily misinterpreted: offering a workshop or tip sheet on "parenting" may insult families ("They think we're not doing a good job! I don't want someone telling my how to raise my kids," Henderson et al., 2007, p. 83). Instead, offer suggestions for maximizing learning outside of school, and invite the families to suggest specific topics of interest. Teacher training can bring awareness of the deficit view many hold toward parents of poverty, language difference, or low education by showing how to recognize and build on families' strengths and funds of knowledge (Chen et al., 2008; Kyle et al., 2005; Moll & González, 2004). "When school staff have a better understanding of their students' home cultures, families' parenting practices, home contexts, home crises, or significant family and community events, they can develop processes and strategies to bridge school-based and home-based activities and increase support for student learning" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 14). Creative methods of delivering professional development may be especially effective (Housel, 2020).



Symeou et al. (2012) reported on a professional development course that involved training teachers to use active listening and other communication skills (typically used by counselors) and provided opportunities for practice and reflection, which resulted in teachers reporting increased confidence and better communication with the parents of their students. “Two-way communication involves the importance of listening as well as informing” (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 26). Positive communication sets the stage for developing a home–school relationship built on trust and respect (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Jaynes (2010, 2013) meta-analyses predict that educators who consistently show love and respect for students and their families, hold high expectations of students, and communicate effectively and frequently will be successful. Overloaded teachers and busy parents may face a variety of barriers to beneficial communication, but wise school leaders will establish a healthy climate and find ways to promote ongoing, candid, supportive, bidirectional communication (Redding, 2006).

Professional development is enhanced by opportunities for teacher practice and reflection. Kyle et al. (2005) describe the reflection process:

It is just this process that enables a teacher, away from the immediacy and demands of the day, to consider decisions made, consequences, purposes, and next steps. In our study, this provided a time for the teachers to consider ways in which they did or could have connected their teaching to what they were learning from their students’ families. (p. 33)

To achieve a healthy school learning community, Cavey (1998) recommends “hands-on,” interactive professional development, followed by brief refresher trainings throughout the school year and focus group discussions on implementation. Teacher action research projects are another avenue for improving family–school partnerships (Beneyto et al., 2019).

Home visiting, usually by pairs of teachers, has proved to be a powerful and effective tool that benefits the teachers as well as the students and families (Kyle, 2011; Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Wright et al., 2018), but it is vital that the teachers receive professional development before visiting. Visits may be to the student’s home or to a location in the community of the family’s choosing and can also be useful to teachers in effectively differentiating instruction (Cornett et al., 2020).

It is imperative that administrators and school boards also participate in preservice and ongoing professional development on the importance of and strategies for cultivating positive home–school relationships (Dotger & Bennett, 2010; Hiatt-Michael, 2006, 2010; Sheldon & Sanders, 2009). In Bartels and Eskow’s (2010) study, “participants reported school administrative support to be important for both their motivation to complete the coursework and their ability to foster change in practice” (p. 68). One education professional they interviewed said this: Throughout all of these courses I have learned the value of forming and strengthening relationships between families and professionals. By putting aside our assumptions, we can hear the needs of each other more clearly. Additionally, I learned that families and staff have many common beliefs and that we can activate small steps in order to improve our relationships. Also, that listening is definitely important, but taking action to initiate change is what families and professionals find most significant. (Bartels & Eskow, 2010, p. 69)

Example, Excerpts from Trumbull et al. (2000, p. 1, 3, 4)

*As a female European American teacher reports to an immigrant Latino father that his daughter is doing well in class — speaking out, expressing herself, taking an active role — he looks down at his lap and does not respond. Thinking that perhaps he has not understood, the teacher again praises his daughter’s ability to speak out in class and explains that it is very important for children to participate orally. Looking even more uncomfortable, the father changes the subject. The teacher gets the impression that this parent is not interested in his daughter’s school success, and she feels frustrated and a bit resentful. Toward the end of the conference, the father asks, with evident concern, “How is she doing? She talking too much?” The teacher is confused. This parent does care whether his daughter is doing well, but why doesn’t he understand what she has been telling him?*



While individualistic cultures stress self-reliance and personal achievement, collectivistic cultures focus more on developing and sustaining a stable, mutually dependent group. These fundamental values help form notions of people's rights and responsibilities, what roles they may take within societies, norms of communication, and ideas of how to rear and educate children.

The framework's power lies in the way it generates insights and understandings that enable teachers to bridge cultural differences — the way it gets us questioning, trying to identify for ourselves what social expectations and ethical values are at work in a frustrating classroom situation or a parent—teacher conference. Teachers are finding that it helps them rethink daily school-related behavior, their own and that of their students and students' parents. Using it as a tool, teachers can generate their own solutions to problems, make effective instructional decisions, and work with parents as true partners.

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