



MAYOR BOWSER PRESENTS



ATTENDANCE.DC.GOV

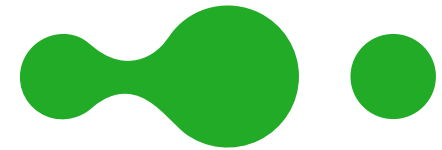
Family Engagement

Module 4

A Framework for Family Engagement

Module 4a

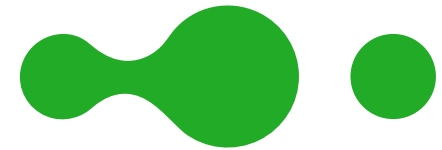
Objectives



Participants will be able to:

- Explain the what, why, and how of family engagement.
- Understand the connection between family engagement and improved student attendance.

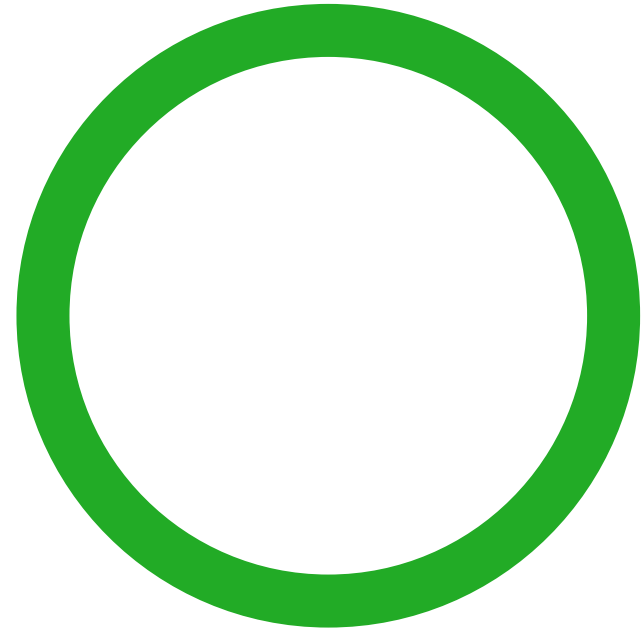
What is family engagement?



What does family engagement mean to you?

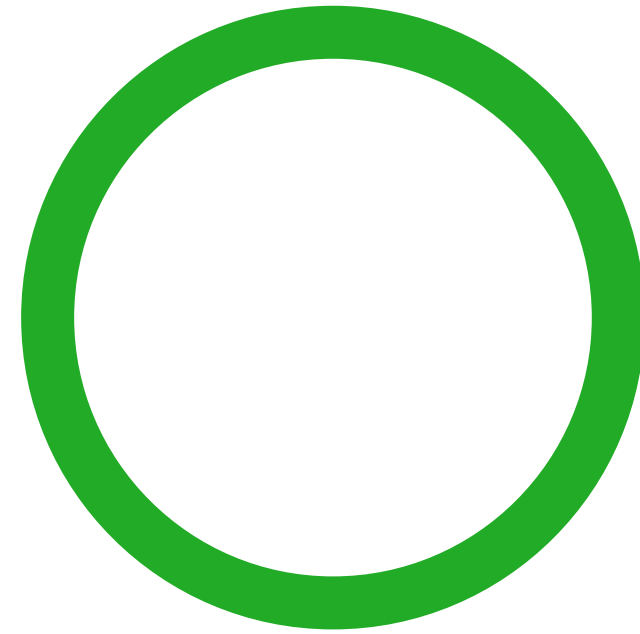
What are some things your organization has done to engage families this past year?

Why family engagement?



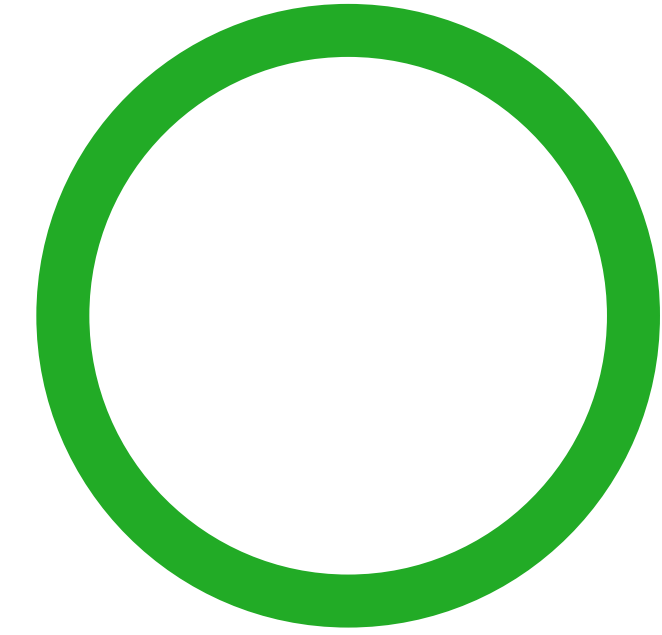
Mindset

Nearly half of parents underestimate the importance of attendance.



Data

Research highlights frequent discrepancies between parents' perceptions of their child's academic progress and reality, but points to high-frequency information as an antidote.



Action

Studies underscore that to reduce chronic absenteeism it is necessary for schools and parents to communicate about the importance of attendance.

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-research-shows-nearly-half-american-parents-underestimate-harm-school-absences>

<http://www.columbia.edu/~psb2101/ParentRCT.pdf>

<http://blogs.svvsd.org/counselor/wp-content/uploads/sites/1486/2016/11/BestPracticesinImprovingStudentAttendance-1.pdf>

Why family engagement?

- 1 Higher graduation rates**
Family engagement is associated with reduced dropout rates and higher graduation rates.
- 2 Increased student achievement**
Family engagement leads to increased student achievement.
- 3 Reduce absenteeism**
Family engagement can reduce absenteeism.

- 4 Better social skills**
Family engagement leads to better social skills and less conduct problems.
- 5 Trust**
Family engagement helps improve trust in schools.

What does family engagement look like?

Programs successful in engaging families from diverse backgrounds follow practices that:



Trust

Focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community.

Needs-based

Recognize, respect, and address families' needs.

Culturally responsive

Recognize, respect, and address class and cultural differences.

Partnership

Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

How can I accomplish that?

- Connect early and often.
- Practice empathy.
- Remember: It takes a village.

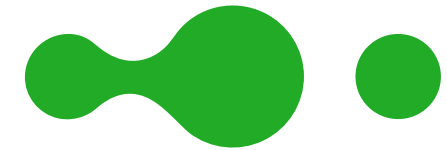
Connect early and often

- Don't just contact; connect.
 - Take the opportunity during every meeting, phone call, text, etc., to strengthen the relationship. Check in, ask them how they are . . . there is always time to establish a connection.
- Ask families to respond to your communications and show them that they are heard.
 - When you reach out to families regarding an unexcused absence, ask them if everything is okay and offer to help.
- Stay connected through regular positive communication between the hard-to-hear news.
 - This can look like a friendly text or robocall home every Friday sharing a particular success or proud moment. Be as specific and personal as possible.

Practice empathy with families

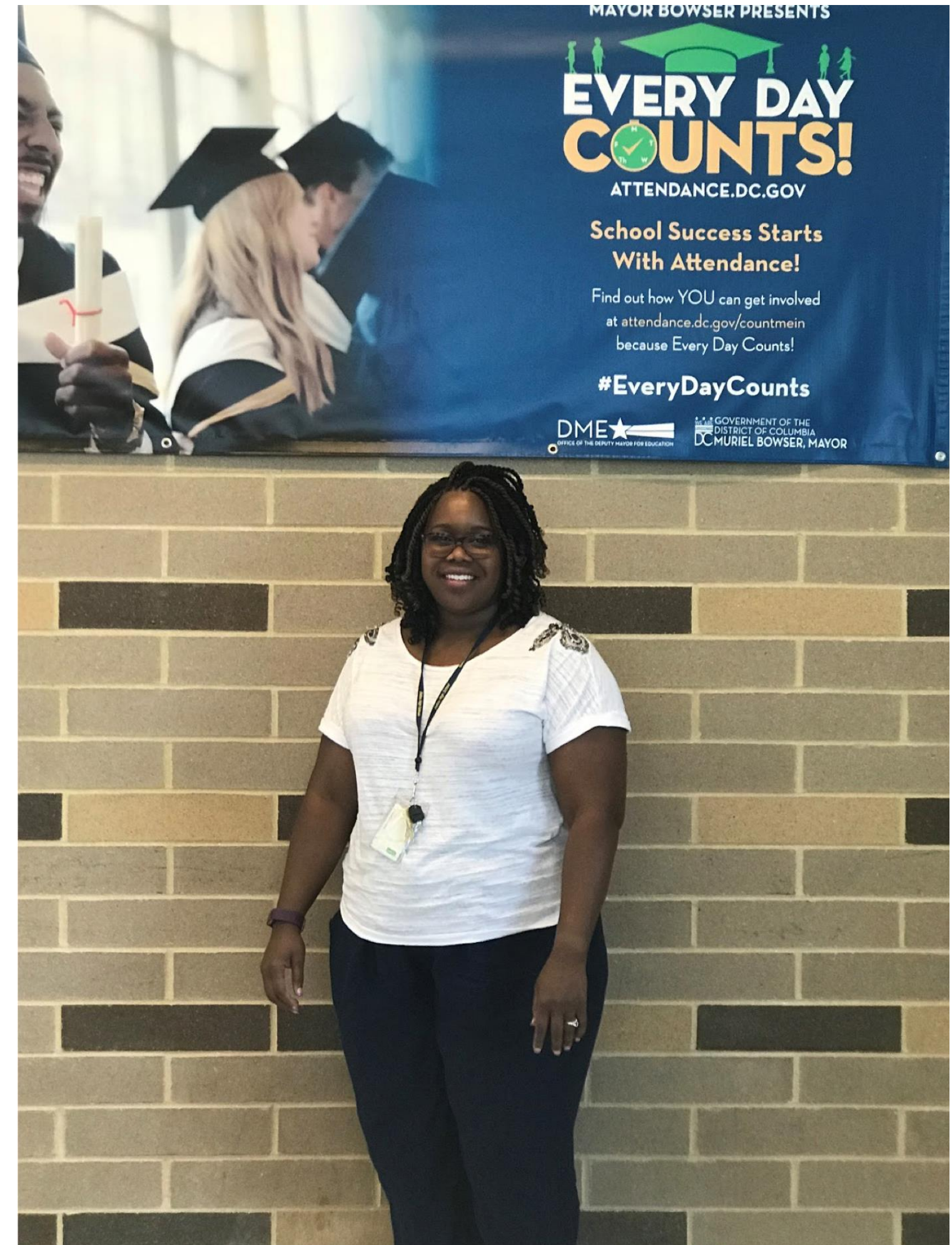
- Take the time to sit with and listen to students and families.
 - Every family and student wants to belong in their school community and in the world.
- Show them they matter by asking open-ended questions.
 - Using empathy interviews can help to get to the root cause of student absenteeism and build a foundation of trust.
- Put yourself in their shoes.
 - Imagine what it might be like to be them, and let them know you care.

Spotlight: Practicing empathy with students and families



Alycia Jackson

Teacher, Ballou High School



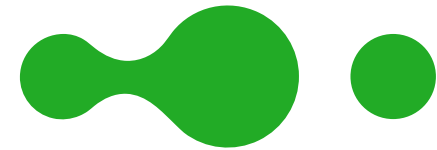
Remember: It takes a village

- Empower families to find solutions as a team.
- Lasting change happens when we work together with families to connect them with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to remove barriers to great attendance.
- Opportunities for this work happen when we connect with families, hear about barriers from their perspective, and collaboratively determine what they need to overcome those barriers.

Promising Practices in Family Engagement

Module 4b

Module 4b Objectives



Participants will:

- Explore promising practices in family engagement.
 - Communication and connection
 - Home visits
- Identify potential incentives to drive family interest in attendance.

Family communication/connection

Comprehensive family engagement programs can be hard to achieve, but they reap benefits—most models impact increased attendance.

Communication and **social networks** are cornerstones of family engagement.

Inviting families to engage with the school community inside and outside of school strengthens their connection with the school and leads to increased graduation rates, test scores, and student attendance.

Sample family communications calendar

What	When	Why
Beginning-of-year letter/text	September	Sets expectations around attendance and warm welcome
Importance of attendance during the holidays	October	Sends early with calendar to inform ticket purchases
Thank-you texts for PTC	November	Remind parents they are valued partners in education
Parent appreciation month (I'm thankful for texts . . .)	December	Acknowledges hard work can go a long way
Excited to see you back! (first week back competition)	January	Motivates attendance after a winter break
How are we doing? (informal survey)	February	Makes visible the value of their word
State test reminders (good night's sleep)	March	Encourages on-time attendance in March
The importance of Spring attendance	April	The lowest attendance is in Spring or bad weather
Invite families to participate in teacher appreciation	May	Fosters stronger school family connection
End-of-year letter celebrating strong attendance or encouraging better attendance	June	Finishes the year noting attendance trends and bringing awareness to families
Invite parents and teachers to community event	July	Keeps connection via a neutral location over the summer
Set up home visits	August	Strengthens family connections for next year

Sample family event calendar

What	When	Why
Teacher meet-and-greet/Family orientation	September	Ensures families have a touchpoint at the school
Family potluck/recipe swap	October	Engages the warmth and value of home life through food
Parent academic workshop	November	Following parent teacher conferences, equips parents with skills to follow up with students academically
Open classroom	December	Demystifies life in the classroom for families
Family movie night	January	Drives up excitement for the first week back at school
Parent workshop event	February	Gives parents access to staff knowledge of learning and developmentally appropriate support strategies
State test information night	March	Demystifies high stakes testing
Family appreciation night	April	Flips the script and appreciates families for all they do
Park meetup	May	Offers a neutral location for family ease and comfort
End-of-year celebrations/performances	June	Celebrates student learning and finish the year strong
Community meetup	July	Offers a positive, low-stakes summer meetup
Home visits	August	Systemically shares hopes for new year

Letters to engage families year-round

- An [attendance guide](#) for families.
- A generic [letter](#) you can use to communicate to families the importance of attendance at the beginning of the school year. This anticipates typical barriers and offers suggestions to overcome them.
- An end-of-year recognition [letter](#) that reinforces the benefits of coming to school every day.
- A Thanksgiving [letter](#) thanking families for their commitment to good attendance and addressing extended holidays and missed academic time.
- A winter holiday [letter](#) addressing extended holidays and missed academic time.

Parent-Teacher home visits

Engaging parents at the school site can be interrupted by access to transportation and time, and letters can be lost.

Strategic home visits can be a particularly effective way to build connection and parent capacity to support engagement with their children at home.

Parent-Teacher home visits

Home visits should:

- Focus on building a relationship with the family.
- Be held at the home or in a neutral community location.
- Be voluntary for teachers and families.
- Not stigmatize students (i.e., be only for struggling students).
- Be scheduled in advance as a sign of respect to families.
- Always be conducted in pairs (for safety and information gathering).

Recognizing schools, students and families

Establish a system of attendance incentives that recognizes good and improved attendance, not just perfect attendance, since the children who struggle most would soon be left out of such awards. Nothing is too big or too small, and many times students can be motivated by no-cost incentives, including time with a favorite staff member.

Current incentives in DC can be found at attendance.dc.gov

Work time

Chart responses to each of the following questions as it applies to your organization. Think in terms of proactive and reactive interventions.

- What are we doing?
- What do we want to start doing?
- What do we still have questions about?

Works cited

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