



7

# Essentials for Transformative Family Partnerships



**ReadyRosie**<sup>®</sup>

by TeachingStrategies<sup>®</sup>



A child's experiences and interactions outside of school are equally as important as the experiences and interactions that occur inside of school.

As more and more school districts and programs are implementing a whole-child approach to teaching—one that incorporates traditional academic skills alongside social-emotional development, cognitive development, and other meaningful interactions—high quality family engagement is becoming a critical topic. Educators cannot fully embrace a whole-child approach in their teaching

without supporting every aspect of a child's development and learning. This needs to include the bonding and security in all of their relationships, most centrally, their family relationship.

While children have many different teachers, administrators, counselors, etc., as they move through our education system, a child's family is often a constant throughout their entire educational journey. That's why it is critical to move from a "check-the-box" mindset around family engagement to one that is truly transformative.

**Creating meaningful relationships with families and engaging them in children's learning both in and out of the classroom is crucial.**



Often, family engagement efforts boil down to similar components: communication tools, family workshops, photocopied “tip” sheets, open-house events, policy council meetings, parent-teacher conferences, etc. We send out a robocall, make a copy of a tip sheet for families, plan an event, and deliver a message but what kind of impact do those efforts yield?

**Do families feel supported with rich ongoing opportunities to bond and connect with their children?**

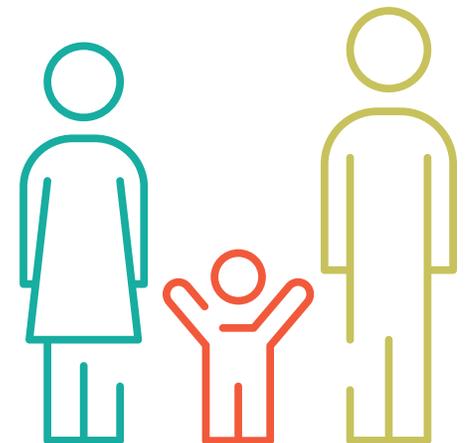
**Do educators feel more connected and ready to partner with families?**

**Do educators walk away with insights that can inform future instruction?**

There is no “one size fits all” answer. Leaders must consider a variety of factors to implement personalized family engagement solutions that will meet the unique strengths and needs of their community.

Based on our experience working with over 6,500 early childhood program family engagement initiatives, we’ve identified seven essential components for transformative family partnerships. These essentials can help you move beyond compliance to meaningful family-school partnerships that lead to changes in outcomes for the families and children you serve.

Continue reading to discover the 7 essentials for transformative family partnerships.



# 1

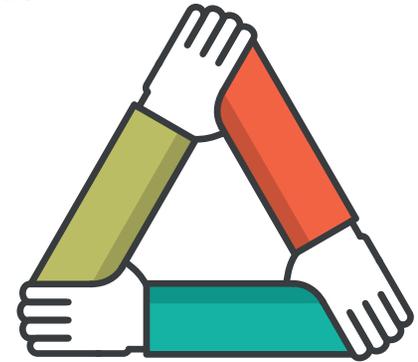
## Demonstrate value and respect for families.

Learning about the families in your school community not only communicates that you respect and value them but also allows you to personalize your program's approach to family engagement based on their real needs and strengths. All families can provide educators with feedback that is critical for their continuous growth as they plan an individualized learning path for each child.

When programs create an environment (physical and/or digital) that demonstrates families' perspectives are valued and respected, families will feel supported to bring incredible funds of knowledge to partnerships.

Schools and programs also have a unique ability to foster community and connections that can strengthen peer relationships and provide organic support for families.

Traditional family engagement efforts are often structured in a way where information and resources are delivered from the school to families. By shifting to a more reciprocal approach that focuses on shared values and building capacity for both families and educators, we can create richer and more authentic strength-based learning communities.



“Whenever they [families] see that you care as a teacher and you want them to practice the videos because it is going to help them [their child] with whatever skill you're trying to teach, they care. **They care, if you care.** So don't be afraid to reach out to the parents.”

- PreK-4 Teacher

### MORE TO EXPLORE

**READ:** [Are You Making Space for True Partnership in Your Parent-Teacher Conferences?](#)

Use the “You Know Your Child Best! Questionnaire” to communicate to families, be it in-person or remotely over the phone, how important their insights are in the development of their child.

# 2

## Honor all languages spoken by families.

Have you ever walked into a room where the person presenting was speaking a language that you didn't understand? You can see that they're sharing something important and the people around you seem to be following along and nodding their heads, but you don't know what is going on.

Despite their best intentions, many educators create scenarios that can not only leave families feeling unwelcome but also questioning the role of their home language in their child's education.

Many wonder, "Should I read and interact with my children in my home language or try to speak to them in English?"

Linguistic and cultural diversity cannot be an afterthought, but must be the first thing we think about in family relationships. Families who speak languages other than English at home have faced decades of historical discriminatory policies, some of which continue to this day, in school systems which directly influence their expectations and attitudes when they are presented with family engagement resources—or any resources—from the school. Educators can counter some

of those effects by honoring a child's home language in the early years, helping families form powerful intergenerational bonds that children will carry with them into adulthood, even as a child's bilingual skills may surpass those of the caregiver.

Planning for linguistic and cultural diversity is imperative for effective and affirming communication.

Seek out opportunities when teaching children and interacting with families to show that their home language is viewed as an incredible asset and powerful tool to help create a strong foundation of knowledge for children to build upon when they are in school. For example, ask families to share their favorite nursery rhymes and songs. Point out specific ways that the home language supports language transfer and reinforces the concepts their child is learning at school.

Think about the different ways that your program shares information with families and make sure it's being communicated in a language and format that is accessible to them.



### MORE TO EXPLORE

**WATCH:** [Finding Diverse Resources for All Families](#)

Families who speak languages other than the primary language spoken in your classroom can be incredible linguistic assets to your program.

# 3

## Co-create to center family's perspectives.



By consistently co-creating, centering families' perspectives, and gathering input throughout family engagement initiatives that impact them, we confirm their leadership role and present an experience that is current and meets real needs. Co-creation doesn't happen overnight. The more often you reach out, the more opportunities you'll have to learn what works best in your school community and with individual families.

Factors that can impact a caregiver's ability or comfort with participating in activities at home or in school may include:

- » inflexible work schedules
- » lack of childcare
- » negative experiences in the school system
- » lack of interpretation/translation services
- » transportation
- » access to digital devices and Internet

Though these factors may hinder an opportunity, they shouldn't be interpreted as a reflection of the family's interest in their child's education. All families have hopes and dreams for their children. Co-creation can help address many common barriers by including families as key stakeholders who can provide ongoing feedback and help personalize development of your program's efforts.

### MORE TO EXPLORE

**WATCH:** [Co-create to center family's perspectives](#)

Families are invested in helping realize the hopes and dreams they have for their children—making them powerful partners in design!

# 4

## Harness data to tell the story of improved outcomes.

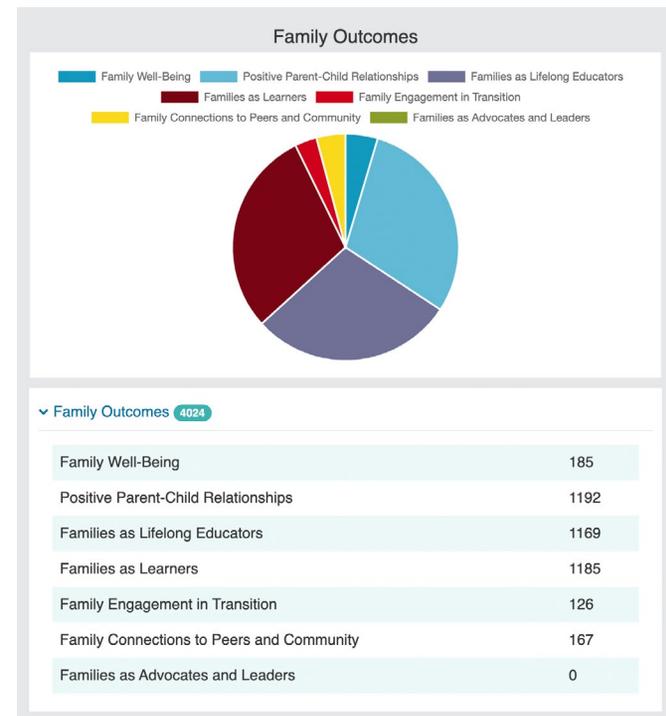
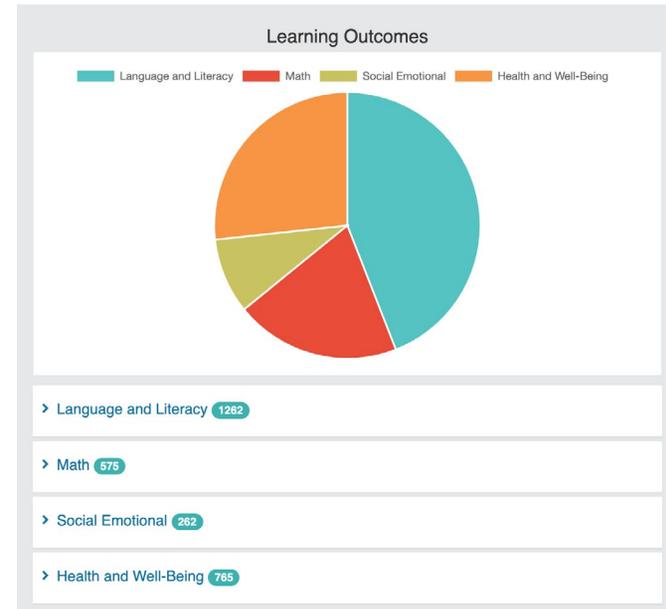
Data can help personalize and customize partnerships with families. If assessment or progress-monitoring data shows strengths in certain areas, that data can be used as an opportunity to celebrate those strengths with families! If individual, class, or school-wide data is showing areas for growth, it provides an opportunity to work with families and share strategies that would support and build those skills in the home environment. Data allows educators and families to share ownership of children’s outcomes.

Family engagement efforts can begin with data, but the data story does not end there. Capturing data about the learning that happens outside of the school day, at home, in the grocery store, or between the pages of a book, allows both educators and caregivers to paint a clearer image of a child’s learning journey. That data can inform instruction and empower caregivers with concrete documentation that can be used to advocate for their child in the school system.

### MORE TO EXPLORE

**READ:** [Enhanced Data Views: Strategically Partnering With Families to Increase Learning Opportunities](#)

When data is reciprocally generated, families and programs can use that data to inform their interactions with children and achieve better outcomes.



# 5

## Model family interactions.

It's time to stop telling, and start showing. Modeling child-adult interactions is a powerful way to provide a "window" into important parenting information instead of an abstract description of "what you should do." Modeling also allows families to see multiple aspects of positive parenting practices that are not easily communicated through text alone. It can help provide families with a deeper understanding of their children as learners.

“ It's really helpful for your kids and for us as parents. We're always thinking of what to do and that [Modeled Moment videos] actually helps you think of ideas. You just have to watch it, and do it with your kids—and they really enjoy it! ”

– ReadyRosie™ Parent



### MORE TO EXPLORE

**WATCH:** *Pantry Talk* Modeled Moment Video ([English](#) | [Spanish](#))

Video modeling, like that found in the ReadyRosie™ Modeled Moments, allows families to view practices on-demand, whenever works best for their schedule, and as many times as they'd like.

# 6

## Link family engagement activities to classroom learning.



All family engagement efforts should begin and end with child outcomes and program goals.

“ What we’re starting to see is, the more the strategy partners families and staff in a way that they’re familiar with the learning and developmental goals and outcomes that the school is trying to reach, those are the kinds of strategies where we see effective results. ”

- Dr. Karen Mapp

### MORE TO EXPLORE

**WATCH:** [Henrie Family Event](#)

Provide opportunities where you're available to make the connection between activities and learning. During social distancing, build community through virtual events.

When family engagement efforts are focused on communication around the learning happening both in and beyond the classroom, they get to the heart of educators' and families' shared goal—improving child outcomes. Plus, a solid foundation partnering with families lays the groundwork for remote-learning readiness.

# 7

## Personalize programming for individual needs and questions.



It is vital that family engagement efforts are responsive and relevant to the individuals and communities they serve. Can you imagine educators implementing an early learning curriculum in the classroom that did not include personalization through strategies like small groups or choice time?

Why wouldn't educators hold to those same standards of personalization when offering support to families?

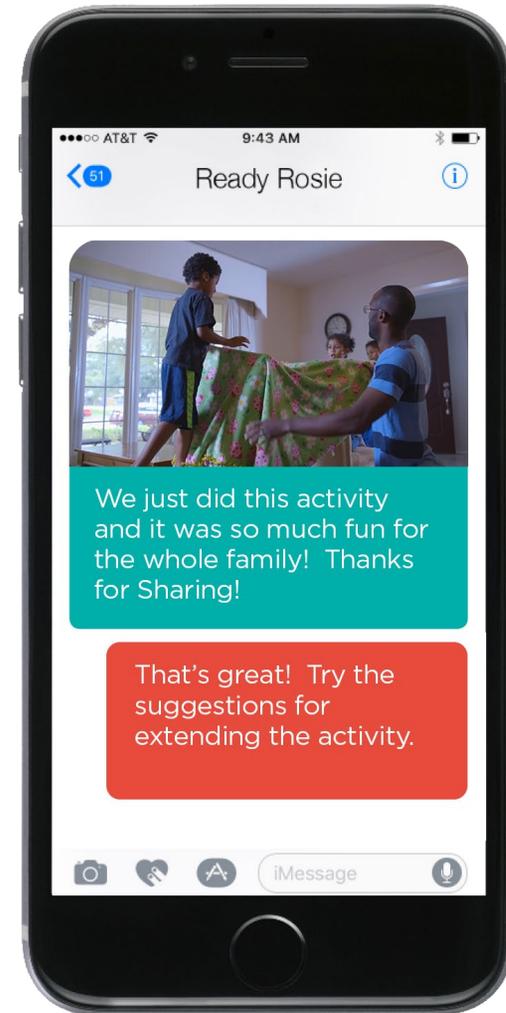
There are many factors at play, every day in the lives of the families in our communities. At the national, local, and individual level, there may be a scary story in the news, extreme weather, or a mom who is beyond frustrated with her child's screen time. While many curriculums and initiatives for families come prepackaged and/or are difficult to tailor to unique needs, families often have specific questions or concerns that cannot simply be addressed with a pre-planned literacy night.

Look for solutions that provide a structure that will allow you to customize delivery and content both for families and with families.

### MORE TO EXPLORE

**READ & WATCH:** [Helping Your Child Prepare for a Storm and its Aftermath: A Coping Toolkit for Families](#)

Find tools that allow you to share relevant content with families when they need it most.



## **BONUS:** Make all learning joyful and play-based.



We've outlined what we see as essential to transformative family engagement, but we want to end with a reminder of what we see as essential to all learning.

Just as educators are intentional in creating opportunities for play that inspire discovery and growth in order to make learning a truly joyful experience in the classroom, educators should support families with resources and strategies that can inspire similar joyful interactions outside of the school building and in times of remote learning.

Many times parenting interventions can be the opposite of fun and playful. While raising children can be challenging, it is also rewarding and joyful! Provide families with ideas that brighten their everyday routine and spark curiosity through the modeling of rich and playful opportunities for learning and nurturing relationships.

### MORE TO EXPLORE

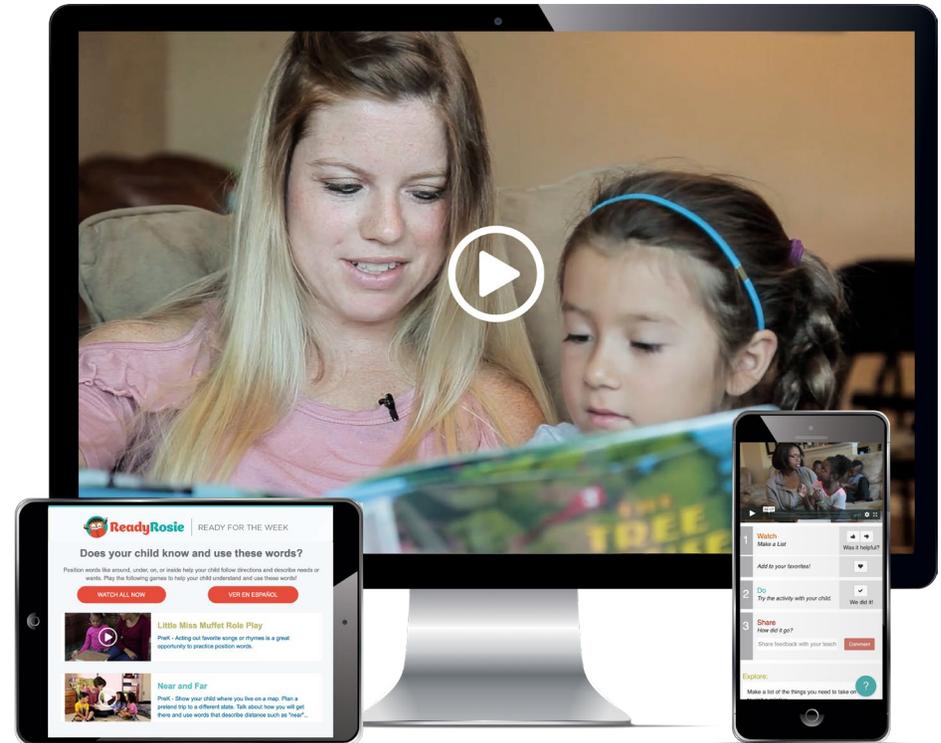
**WATCH:** *Funny Faces* ([English](#) | [Spanish](#))

Leave the tip sheets behind and instead give families the gift of resources that inspire quality time, bonding, and interactions filled with high-fives, joy, and laughter!

Family engagement initiatives have become increasingly common in early childhood programs, a reflection of the field's awareness of the central role families play in a child's health, well-being, and academic success. The inclusion of family partnership initiatives in state and federal programs is encouraging but it takes both a shift in our mindset around working with families and strategic implementation to lay the foundation and build an environment that makes transformative family partnerships possible. Title I and ESSA and Head Start Parent Curriculum requirements and funding provide an opportunity to move from theory to practice with solutions like ReadyRosie™ that can help you realize that shift in concrete ways.

With over 1,200 Modeled Moment videos filmed in English and Spanish that can be delivered to families via text message or email, ReadyRosie™ incorporates the latest research on family engagement; developmentally appropriate practice; state and national standards; Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework; the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework; and CASEL Core SEL Competencies as the foundation of our learning games and activities. Our tools leverage the power of video modeling, family workshops, professional development opportunities, and mobile technology to build powerful partnerships between families and educators.

An intentional family engagement program has the opportunity to dramatically impact children's success in school and in life. ReadyRosie™ helps families and schools deepen and scale family partnerships with 21st century solutions that are rooted in value and respect, home-language focused, co-created, modeled, data-driven, linked to learning, personalized, and joyful and play-based.



Transformative family engagement is within reach.  
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