

PRAISE FOR *ENGAGE EVERY FAMILY*

The public education system is fully invested in the five family engagement principles Dr. Constantino describes in this book. Without fully engaged family support, many students fall, without grace, in the face of failure. Entire communities are made better because of a genuine concern for students and their families.

—**Jenny McGown**, Superintendent
Klein Independent School District
Klein, Texas

Now more than ever, we need the wisdom, experience, and passion that Steve Constantino brings to the field of family and community engagement. He understands profoundly what it takes to develop and sustain partnerships grounded in mutual trust, respect, and learning between families and schools. From conceptual frameworks to practical, hands-on tools for reflection and activity, this book provides indispensable guidance for laying an unshakable foundation on which schools can thrive.

—**Gina Martinez-Keddy**, Executive Director
Parent Teacher Home Visits

The second edition of this book couldn't be timelier. What so many of us have uncovered during the COVID-19 crisis this year has been the central importance of family in the education of every learner. Often taken for granted, the family role must be fostered, developed, given its place and its due in the educational process to help every student, and in particular, the most disenfranchised, to succeed. In this edition each of the five principles has been embellished and augmented. This is a book that should be open and in use on desks and laptops, as we proceed into this new school year.

—**Paul K. Leather**, Director
Interstate Learning Community
National Center for Innovation in Education

This second edition of *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* is a true treasure! From reflecting on your own experiences to detailed research, Dr. Constantino guides you through best practices to boost and improve family engagement in your organization. Most of all, this book reaffirms that intentionally investing time and resources into building partnerships with families is necessary and a determining factor to student success!

—**Maria Ovalle-Lopez**, Family Engagement Program Coordinator
Klein Independent School District
Klein, Texas

Dr. Constantino's commitment to family engagement through effective and meaningful practice has influenced my work for many years. I am thrilled that this second edition includes critical research and invaluable new practices around equity

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and trust. We will “Engage Every Family” when we confront our biases, collaborate with our families, and work to build trusting relationships. With this book, Dr. Constantino provides a much-needed roadmap to do just that.

—**Nancy Angevine-Sands**, Founder
With Equal Step

Steve Constantino is the unquestioned guru of effective family engagement, and I welcome his updated take on this crucial topic. If you liked the first edition, you will love the second edition!

—**Anne Holton**, Visiting Professor, Schar School of Policy and Government and at the College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University
Former Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Virginia

Now, perhaps more than ever, our families and schools must be united and be true partners in education. *Engage Every Family, Second Edition*, is the vehicle to help our school communities come together. Dr. Constantino simplifies this process for all of us. Our elementary school in Colombia has subscribed to the Five Simple Principles and the familial response has been wonderful!

—**David J. Gesualdi**, Principal
Colegio Jorge Washington Colombia
Cartagena, Colombia

The principles of *Engage Every Family, Second Edition*, have empowered our principals, division leaders, and teacher leaders to move away from the familiar and routine “check the box” traditional communication and toward powerful, proven strategies of engaging families that directly confront the status quo in order to engage every family. This intentional shift has served as a catalyst for better addressing equitable student access and outcomes. Dr. Steve Constantino outlines strategies and qualitative support tools to practitioners through the use of vivid, contextual stories. His work is authentic because he has practiced, for decades, what he is preaching.

—**S. Scott Baker**, Superintendent
Spotsylvania County Public Schools

Engage Every Family is an essential guide that challenges the misperceptions about disengagement and charts a path for developing relationships of trust with families that have measurable impact on student outcomes. The format provides multiple opportunities to reflect and examine practice as well as guidance to scaffold and deepen the impact of family engagement strategies. I highly recommend this book; it is more than a great read—it is a must-have guide for effective family engagement practice.

—**Michele P. Brooks**, Principal Consultant
Transformative Solutions in Education

Dr. Steve Constantino’s approach to family engagement is strength-based and his belief in all families as valued and valuable is unwavering. He invites us to make a difference

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by exploring our responses to families by examining our beliefs, assumptions, and biases about families rather than by judging families' circumstances. In his discussion about understanding implicit bias, he affirms that the greatest change we can make in regard to engaging every family is in ourselves. How do we move from seeking ways for families to realize the school's agenda, to spending time getting to know families, the knowledge they hold, and the efficacy they possess? Dr. Constantino makes a significant contribution to the field through his deep exploration of the principle Build Family Efficacy. Steve demonstrates that when families believe they can make a positive difference in their children's educational lives they bring to bear their skills, abilities, and resources to do just that. Throughout this entire work, Dr. Constantino develops a conceptualization of family engagement as a process, one that requires a significant cultural shift.

—**Debbie Pushor**, Professor, Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan

I have been a classroom teacher for 29 years, 27 in the middle levels. For the past 10 years, I have been a strong advocate at the State and National levels for middle-school students. I was lucky enough to bring Steve to my school district recently. Using the Five Simple Principles model, he had the entire staff evaluating how it is they engage with our families. The seed was planted, and the process has continued to grow. We all are looking forward to the positive results we see in our students. We are thankful for the guidance of Steve and the ideas presented in this book.

—**David Vroman**, Middle School Teacher
Potsdam Central Schools
Potsdam, NY

Partnerships between schools and families have always been important but are often overlooked. When COVID-19 first shut down our school buildings in early 2020, our households became home schools. Continuous learning and development were much easier for students whose caretakers and teachers already had strong levels of engagement and relationship. For years, Dr. Constantino has been calling out the importance of these partnerships. He is a trusted and authoritative voice on parent and family engagement, sought after by practitioners and leaders across the country and around the world. He has a rare combination of personal wit, sophisticated scholarship, and a practitioner's heart. *Engage Every Family* is a call to action for every educator, everywhere. The work of family and school engagement is more important than ever before, and Dr. Constantino helps us get started and get better at it.

—**Stephanie Malia Krauss**, Senior Director, Special Projects
Jobs for the Future
Staff Consultant to the Youth Transition Funders Group
Author, *Making It: What Today's Kids Need for Tomorrow's World*

Engage Every Family

Second Edition

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Engage Every Family

Five Simple Principles

Second Edition

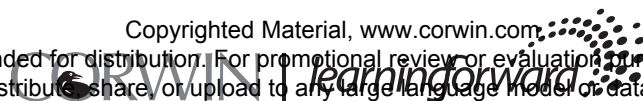
Steven M. Constantino

Foreword by Kirsten Baesler

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Foreword

After listening to Dr. Steve M. Constantino talk about family engagement, I wished I could begin my education career over again. As a classroom teacher, librarian, vice principal, and even as a school board member, I had not fully realized the importance and power of family engagement and its critical role in promoting student success until I encountered Dr. Constantino. He opened my eyes.

Family engagement has become a priority emphasis in North Dakota education. We have facilitated training sessions in some of our school districts, which have imbued family engagement into the fabric of their educational mission.

Teachers have embraced the idea of getting closer to their students and families (although not without some initial trepidation!). They understand that true, authentic family engagement isn't about doing more, it is about doing things differently. Our teachers are learning to be approachable, and they want to know how they can be more helpful.

Because of what I learned through Dr. Constantino's work, I have formed the Superintendent's Family Engagement Cabinet. It includes family members from across North Dakota, with children in all school grades. They are passionate about working to make sure their students are getting a good education, and I am inspired by their dedication and enthusiasm.

We have a rapidly growing Facebook group, North Dakota Family Engagement, and a PK–12 Alliance to promote family educational involvement. These receive joyful support from my teammates at the Department of Public Instruction, who know a good thing when they see it and are eager to be part of it.

As Dr. Constantino proves in his books and numerous workshops and keynotes, when families are involved in, and supportive of, the education of their children, the student is more successful. You almost don't need research to establish that fact. It makes sense to every family member and educator.

Families want to be involved in the education of their children, but often they're not sure how to go about it. School culture can be hard to understand and even harder to navigate. Dr. Constantino helps to break down those barriers, and empower educators to create a better partnership with families. We must go beyond parent–teacher conferences and family fun nights and encourage broader and deeper relationships.

Dr. Constantino deserves credit for inspiring and facilitating our commitment to improving family engagement in North Dakota. Because of his work, families are becoming more involved in North Dakota education, and our students are the winners in it all!

Read this book and be inspired. I was.

Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction

State of North Dakota

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Preface

If we as educators could successfully teach all children by ourselves, then it seems to me that we would have already done so. The fact that we haven't should be all the motivation or evidence we need that engaging every family in the educational life of their child is essential to desired school outcomes. Why haven't we been more successful in engaging every family in the educational lives of their children? Why do so many of us still struggle with the notion of engaging every family as a viable conduit to improved student learning outcomes?

These are daunting questions.

I have been at this family engagement business for a long time, traveling the country and to different parts of the world to share the message of family engagement and its powerful effects upon student achievement. Over these many years, I have had countless conversations about families and their role in education and, more importantly, how educators can better engage every family.

This book is a continuation of those conversations.

Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles, Second Edition, outlines a pathway and process for any educator or group of educators to engage every family in the academic lives of children and acts as a framework for implementing best practices to increase the likelihood of engaging every family, including those families that have been traditionally disengaged or disenfranchised from schools.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION?

With the advent of the Every Student Succeeds Act and numerous state-level reforms in educational practice and accountability, there is a growing interest in engaging families in the academic lives of children. As more and more schools and districts look to implement effective strategies to engage every family, we learn more about what works and what doesn't, what resonates with educators and what does not. I appreciate the large amount of constructive feedback on the first edition and I am thrilled that we can now bring you a new edition.

Chapter 3, *Understanding Disengagement*, has been retitled to *Equity, Bias, and Family Disengagement*. This title change reflects the important conversations that are taking place about equitable learning outcomes for children and the chapter discusses the role of family engagement in that process. An expanded discussion of implicit bias helps educators to better understand why families are seemingly disengaged and disenfranchised from their children's learning lives.

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Changes to the Five Simple Principles Model, Descriptions, and Clarifying Statements

Chapter 5, *An Introduction to the Five Simple Principles*, shares new thinking and updates to the logic model. Additional action research, feedback, and program evaluations from hundreds of workshops have helped refine and update the model and the principle descriptions to more clearly reflect the process and outcomes of the Five Simple Principles.

In Chapter 6, *A Culture That Engages Every Family*, new information about the notion of family academic socialization has been added as well as a new survey to help establish baseline information about school culture and family engagement.

Chapter 7, *Principle #2*, has been changed slightly from *Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships* to *Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships*. This slight nuance is important because the basis of relationships—trust—has been emphasized more in the descriptors and definitions. There is an expanded section on the procedures, practices, and policies that shape family engagement in every school. Also added is a short but important discussion of the difference between *communication* and *engagement*.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my friend Gina Martinez-Keddy, executive director of the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project, for helping me to update, revise, and expand the section on home visits. Also expanded in Chapter 7 is the discussion of families with limited English proficiency and the important changes and updates to technology as a vehicle for engagement.

Chapter 8 represents one of the biggest changes to the Five Principles Model. *Empower Every Family* has been revised to *Build Family Efficacy*. In workshops across the country and in feedback about the book, what became clear is the confusion the word *empower* caused the reader. Many believed that the word *empower* meant to embolden families to somehow work against the school. Nothing could be further from the original intent. The model, description, and clarifying statements have been augmented to better promote the idea of *family efficacy*, empowering families to work alongside teachers, as a direct conduit to improved learning. An expanded discussion of conferences has been added, as well as a new clarifying statement to support the important research notion of family academic socialization.

In Chapters 6 through 10, which encompass the detailed explanation of each of the five principles, more detailed descriptions and updated research have been added to ensure a firmer foundation for each principle. At the conclusion of each chapter, the qualitative activities designed to help readers understand present conditions in their school with regard to each principle have been changed to a series of questions based on the principle descriptions. These questions help you get to the desired outcome faster.

One of the most often-asked questions in workshops around the country centers on family engagement at the secondary school level. A new chapter—Chapter 4,

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Engaging Every Family in Middle and High School—discusses the barriers to secondary school engagement and the steps that can be taken to address these barriers and help family engagement at the secondary level to be as robust as it is at the elementary level.

WHAT ARE THE FIVE SIMPLE PRINCIPLES?

Principle #1: A Culture That Engages Every Family

Principle #2: Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships

Principle #3: Build Family Efficacy

Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making

Principle #5: Engage the Greater Community

The book will share in great detail the logic model of the Five Simple Principles and devotes entire chapters to each of them. Below is a brief overview of the principles and why they are important in the overall scheme of connecting family engagement to learning.

1. Principle #1: A Culture That Engages Every Family

More often than not, desired change in an organization is temporary, sporadic, or fleeting. This happens because the change never permeates to alter the culture of the organization. Therefore, the notion of culture as the leading standard is essential for long-term success and growth.

2. Principle #2: Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships

Relationships with every family are absolutely essential in the consistent engagement of families from grade level to grade level and school to school. Relationships and trust are born out of distinct, meaningful, and thoughtful systems of communication that relate a value in reaching out and connecting with every family. Communication, for the purposes of this principle, also includes the important concept of welcoming environments in schools.

3. Principle #3: Build Family Efficacy

In simple terms, one definition of efficacy is the power of one (or some) to produce an effect. Establishing instructional and curricular processes that are inclusive of families begins to allow families to become immersed in school learning and to enhance and support learning at home.

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4. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making

Every family needs a voice in certain school decisions, and school leaders must put into place mechanisms that ensure that every voice will be heard. Family engagement in decision making ensures that policies, procedures, and practices have at their core a support for engaging every family.

5. Principle #5: Engage the Greater Community

The key to effective community engagement is to first conceptualize what that engagement should look like, with a clear delineation of desired outcomes. There are rich and deep resources in most communities; however, many schools and districts struggle in leveraging those resources.

EVERY FAMILY AND ALL CHILDREN

“How do you work with parents who don’t support the school?” a principal asked me. Later in the book, we’ll dive a bit deeper into the potential responses and solutions to the challenge the question presents, but in short, it starts with an examination of what we do right now and how that might need to change.

Most schools are very adept at engaging those who are already engaged. The key to creating family engagement that supports better learning outcomes is to ensure that there is a plan in place that engages every family: families for whom English is not a first language, ethnic and minority families, families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and families of students with special needs. Every family, in this case, does truly mean *every* family. And the engagement has better achievement for children—*all* children—as an outcome.

But there is a brutal fact that we must confront. Since we clearly understand that use of the phrase *those students* sets differing expectation levels for student learning and drives expectations that ultimately impact achievement gaps, why then would we label families as *those families* and use that as a determination of our ability to engage them or, perhaps worse, allow it to provide us with a perception that they do not wish to be engaged? Do we value a relationship with a family in poverty? Do we believe it’s worth our time?

Because a family is a minority family or a poor family, a nontraditional family, a family with special needs, or a family with a different ethnic or cultural origin has nothing to do with their desire to be engaged and see their children succeed; but these factors seem to drive excuses as to why we don’t engage them. It is not family circumstances that determine engagement but our response to those circumstances that will make the difference. This book has a clear premise: to engage every family intended for distribution. For promotional review or evaluation purposes only.

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CONFRONTING THE NEMESIS OF SKEPTICISM

Too often in education, exposure to new ideas and initiatives has been a ritual of annual staff back-to-school meetings. Educators, especially teachers, have become suspect of most new ideas and even more skeptical of the annual unveiling of “this year’s initiatives” by school leadership. They have seen these ideas come and go, with significant monies being spent and little change in student outcomes.

Family engagement practices are not immune from this skepticism, which is often a significant reason for their lack of success. More so than skepticism are educators’ perceptions that strategies and efforts to engage every family are futile, largely because of apathy on the part of disengaged families. While there are many challenges to successful family engagement practices, family apathy toward their child’s education is rarely one of them.

Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles confronts the belief of educators who might not think there is value in engaging every family. Too many books start with the assumption that educators value family engagement and are merely looking for ways to improve it. Other books provide research as a way to prove to educators that the concept is viable. Both of these options are important contributions to the body of work but dangerous in their assumptions.

This work is a conversation about family engagement, not an intravenous drip of facts and strategies. It may very well challenge the conventional wisdom of other books, but at the same time, it offers suggestions on how educators can move forward. This book encourages educators to explore, reflect on, and discuss their present ideas, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about family engagement before any ideas or strategies are presented.

WHY A FIELD BOOK?

Educators have commented about the need for a working and teaching resource. Providing questions, topics for discussion, activities, case studies, and opportunities for professional reflection will link *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* directly to the experiences of all educators.

Given the constraints on your time, it would be attractive to read through this book and skip over the various activities that are included. You are encouraged not only to read the text but also to delve into the activities and reflections that are provided. To ensure that your school is successful with family engagement, try some or all of the following activities:

- Record your thoughts, ideas, and experiences as you use the book to enhance the degree to which every family is engaged with their children’s learning. Fold the corners of pages over and write in the margins.

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- If you are working with a group, start a Google Hangout and keep a conversation going. Communicate, converse, collaborate, and reflect on the ideas presented. Have conversations with your colleagues about what you are reading and thinking. It's the best way to apply the presented ideas to your own experiences and set of circumstances. If the work is meaningful and relevant to you as an educator, then the likelihood of it having lasting positive effects is greater.
- Work with groups of colleagues to get a better understanding of the presented concepts and a better understanding of why the effort to engage every family is worth it. Discuss your ideas, your fears, and your dreams with your colleagues.
- Work together to try out new strategies and support each other's efforts. Listen to the thoughts and opinions of others and juxtapose them against your own. This type of collaboration will ensure that great things will occur.

SPECIAL FEATURES THAT WILL HELP YOU ALONG YOUR JOURNEY

Case Studies

Throughout the book, there are case studies of situations that are similar to those that occur every day in our schools. The case studies include questions for discussion and reflection.

Forms, Checklists, and Needs Assessments

Where appropriate, checklists, forms, needs assessments, and other items have been included to assist you as you work through the Five Simple Principles and consider the implementation of the ideas presented.

Scenarios, Questions, and Points to Ponder

The key to this book is to reflect on present practices and, using the framework and ideas presented, to create a new culture inclusive of engaging every family. To that end, there are numerous opportunities for you to respond to short scenarios, answer questions, and ponder in more depth some of the lofty issues we face in education and how family engagement can enhance our practice.

Process Ideas

Family engagement is more a process and less a string of events to which families can attend. When appropriate, there are sections, questions, and activities devoted to the important processes for meaningful and lasting family engagement.

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Where We Are

Throughout the book, you will find opportunities to reflect on where you are. Your reflections should lead you to a better understanding of your current situation and clarify a path toward your desired outcomes.

Graphics and Activities

The book includes activities that you and your colleagues can engage in to support your efforts in engaging every family. Graphics are used to illustrate ideas and allow you to collect information and data about your efforts.

No one book can provide all of the answers and strategies regarding effective family engagement. With that said, this book makes an important point: Strategies without process and culture change are ineffective or short-lived. Let's face it: If family engagement were as simple as implementing lists of strategies, every family would already be engaged.

A cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to family engagement will ensure that success remains elusive. The ideas and thoughts that *you* create, coupled with the suggestions and information provided, act as a foundation through which the Five Simple Principles can be implemented and measured.

WHAT YOU WILL GET FROM THIS BOOK

There is a return on the investment of the time and energy you will spend reading this book and working through the various activities:

- You will determine the existing culture of your school with regard to family engagement and how you can help change it to be inclusive of every family.
- You will have a deep understanding of the processes and components to truly engage every family in the academic lives of their children, which will result in improved learning outcomes for all.
- You will have the chance to learn, think, reflect, and practice before you implement ideas in your classroom, school, or district. There are numerous activities, questions, and case studies to engage your thinking and actions.
- You will have all of the tools and resources to engage every family!
- You will see results.

AS THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Family engagement is not a cure-all or a panacea for everything that ails our system of education, nor is it the sole solution to our student achievement woes. However, it

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will move us closer—much closer—to our goal of excellence for every student. Family engagement is a means to an end, a process that results in improved outcomes for all students.

Families who build strong efficacy with the educational lives of their children can make a huge difference in the degree to which their children are successful in school. The concept of family engagement is simple: Involve families in the learning lives of their children and they will become partners and advocates of success.

While the concept may be simple, actually making it happen can be a bit more complicated. This complication could be why we haven't seen more universal or consistent success with engaging every family. Some families, sure. Most families, sometimes. Every family . . . hardly ever. What, then, does it take to engage every family? It is this question that motivates this book.

Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles was born out of necessity. Educators are strapped for time and money. We are under pressure to perform and have been conditioned to try just about anything to help our students pass the test upon which they (and we) will be graded. We must show developmental growth and mastery of learning, and we must do so with conditions that are rather dire. And we must do so now!

Family engagement is not a quick fix. It is not a strategy that we can slap onto the school and expect to see immediate success. It is not a computer program in front of which we can plop students (or their families) for a period of time and then pronounce them engaged and successful. Strategies without process *always* fail. Always.

There is no one-size-fits-all portion to this book, nor is there any money-back guarantee that implementing a simple set of strategies will suddenly engage every family. *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* is designed to help you change the culture of your school or district and promote the conditions necessary so that families play an important role in the educational lives of their children. The principles are by no means magic. Most importantly, this process will take time and commitment.

It is my sincere hope that this book is just the beginning. The catalyst to these dreams is you. At the end of the day, if this book captures the attention of educators and that attention results in a more universal commitment and ability to engage every family in the educational life of their children, then the stage will be set for greatness.

So, let's get started!

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About the Author



For over twenty-five years, **Steven M. Constantino** has captivated thousands of teachers, administrators, school board members, and businesspeople from the United States and around the world. His keynote presentations and workshops have been featured in local, state, regional, national, and international conferences. Working as a high school principal in 1995, he stumbled across research about the effects of family engagement on student learning and was immediately convinced that this was the missing ingredient in helping all children learn.

Dr. Constantino's work quickly gained national prominence, and soon he began traveling the United States, speaking and working with all types of educators, school board members, and businesses to promote sound practices in family engagement that result in increased academic achievement for all students. His natural gifts as a motivating orator, coupled with his knowledge and practical experiences, make him one of the most sought-after speakers in the field of family engagement.

Dr. Constantino began his career as a music teacher and moved through the ranks. In addition to teacher, assistant principal, principal, deputy superintendent, and district superintendent, Dr. Constantino is also the former chief academic officer and acting superintendent of public instruction for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Today, Dr. Constantino is an executive professor at the William & Mary School of Education, where he teaches in the education policy, planning, and leadership department and continues to travel the globe helping schools, districts, and organizations to engage every family.

ACTIVITY

Think Before You Read!

Do not read this book . . . yet.

You have acquired a book about engaging families and the first thing you read from the author is “Do not read this book . . . yet.” Odd? Yes. Stay with it!

Before you read a word of this book, please reflect and answer the following questions. Discuss your thoughts with colleagues. Take the time now, before you delve into the ideas for engaging every family, to determine what your personal starting point is.

1. When you think about your career in education, what is your impression of the desire for families to be engaged in the academic lives of their children?
2. Over the course of your career, what percentage of families were truly engaged in the learning lives of their children?
3. Keeping the answer to Question 2 in mind, can you determine any patterns in the type of involvement or noninvolvement you have experienced?
4. What do you think are the key ingredients needed to successfully engage every family in the academic lives of their children?
5. Given your answer to Question 4, how do you think you, your colleagues, your school, or your district should go about acquiring the key ingredients for success?

Answer, reflect, and discuss these questions. Then, start reading.

Record your thoughts and ideas from the questions here. As you read through this book, come back and reflect on what you wrote. Taking the time to record your thoughts and referring back to them will help you see how your thinking may change as you work through this book.



Would Every Family Choose You?

CUSTOMERS MAKE PAYDAYS POSSIBLE

I began my career as a band director and enjoyed every minute of my time teaching and making music with students. As a teacher of music, I taught elective classes. Students were not required to take my class and, if it didn't meet their needs or if their interests took them in different directions, they would drop my class. I learned very quickly that recruitment and retention were my keys to success. As a former superintendent once said to me, "Remember, Mr. Constantino, customers make paydays possible."

A free, public education, for the most part, has always been the only plausible option for most families for a long, long time and is a cornerstone of our democratic society. Every child has a right to an education, and the vast majority of us have taken advantage of this right. Alternatives have always existed, but the percentage of families who would or could take advantage of these options was a small minority.

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That is all changing.

There is some debate as to whether or not public education is a right of citizens, good for society, or has simply become a broken idea. Of late, others promote that education is now a commodity. While there is no direct payment for public school services, there is still payment, both in dollars and in societal good, by everyone. With a slight stretch of the definition of *commodity*, it could fit quite well, given the direct competition between public education and the growing number of options open to families with regard to educating their children.

Public education is but one of a number of options open to families who no longer make assumptions or automatically enroll their students in public schools merely because they live in a particular neighborhood. The concept of educational options to families is not a new one, but the availability of these options to a wider range of families is. With the advent of online learning options, the landscape of educational choices is changing, and it is changing quite rapidly.

In my second book, *Engaging All Families: Creating a Positive School Culture by Putting Research into Practice* (2003), I borrowed an idea from a wonderful book titled *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World*, by authors Glenn and Nelsen (1988). In their book, they argue that every parent wants their children to exceed them in their quality of life. Given the complex world in which we live and the financial realities of a postrecession economic society, most families instinctively fear that this will not occur. As a result, they are driven to help their children prosper in any way they can, and for many, the path is the best education available to them.

ACTIVITY

Reflecting on Why

There is a difficult albeit important question that every educator must ask themselves: If families truly have a choice as to where their children will receive an education, will they choose our school district? Our school? My classroom? If your answer to this question is unequivocally yes, then you must ask yourself the logical follow-up question: Why? Why would families choose your school? Why would families choose your classroom or you as a teacher? What is it that is so compelling about your product that a customer will choose it over the growing list of options?

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It might be difficult to think of providing an education as a product or service, and it might be more difficult to consider it as an option in an ever-crowded marketplace. Some educators scoff at the idea that education is a business and that we serve customers. There is not enough space here to continue the debate as to whether students are customers or products; both or neither. I've heard it argued just about every way.

If families truly have a choice as to where their children will receive an education, will they choose our school district?

When I suggest that we need to learn better customer service in education, I sometimes am plastered with sentiments that suggest that my audience does not agree. More often than not, thank goodness, we inherently understand that customer service is a cornerstone of our continued successful existence. Family engagement and customer service go hand in hand.

I often challenge schools and districts to consider the questions about choice. Then I challenge them to consider taking an action that could very well send a powerful message to families: Not only do we care about their children but we also understand that there are choices and we are grateful that they choose our product.

An Idea: We Appreciate You—A Way to Set the Stage to Engage Every Family

If you are looking for a quick way to build trusting relationships, consider this one.

Anybody who flies a great deal listens to endless announcements on the aircraft before they take off, as they fly, and as they land and taxi to the gate. In the myriad of announcements, there is always one that goes something like this: "We know you have a choice in airlines, and we appreciate your choosing us. We hope you will continue to choose our airline in the future."

I have listened to an iteration of this statement more times than I can count. Interestingly, even though I have had more than my fair share of delayed and canceled flights, postponements, and cancellations due to mechanical maladies and other types of issues that cause mayhem in my travel, I stay loyal to one particular airline. Why? Why, when I have so many choices, do I continue to support the airline with which I have been affiliated? Is it convenience? Do I want the air miles that much? Am I on a quest to finally get upgraded to first class? Or do I believe at some level that this particular airline truly *values* me as a customer?

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(Continued)

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(Continued)

My preferred airline stays in constant communication with me before, during, and after a trip. They want to know my experiences and every time—*every time*—I have responded with a concern, I have received a response. That's impressive. Even more impressive is their communication when they know a problem has occurred and they want feedback as to how they have handled the situation. They even monitor social media for customer dissatisfaction and respond accordingly.

What if we apply this idea to *our* business? At some point, ask every employee of a school district, from the superintendent through the teachers to the support staff, to choose one family at random and call them on the phone. When they answer, simply say:

Hi, my name is [. . .] and I am calling from [school/district]. I just wanted to take a minute to thank you for choosing our [district/school] to educate your children. We know you have a choice in how to educate your children, and we appreciate your choosing us. We consider working with your children and your family a privilege.

Don't say another word. Just listen. Think about the responses you get.

That's it. That's the whole purpose of the message. You simply want your customer to know that you value their decision to use your product/service. Consider for a moment what would occur if every family in your school or district received this call. There would be an exponential increase in relationships and trust.

Every person who makes a phone call like this from your school district should report his or her experience. Was the message received positively? Negatively? As a result of the phone call, did we learn anything about the student or their family that will help us? How can we modify our service to meet the needs of our families in a better manner?

These are all important questions that lead to the ideal of engaging every family. What do you think would happen? What kind of responses do you think you would get? What message will families take away from this simple effort? You won't know unless you try it.

EVERY OPPORTUNITY IS A MARKETING OPPORTUNITY

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name of this company and their brand are listed as one of the most recognizable products on the *planet*. That is saying something!

My dear friend and family engagement researcher and expert, Dr. Karen Mapp, often shares a story about this company and how they would pay handsomely to have audiences similar to the ones we get at school events. It would be their marketing dream to work with a captive audience to sell their product or elicit feedback about their product. Yet, we do little to market or elicit feedback for our product when we have these gatherings of families.

When we have families together and listening to us, we should take that opportunity to sell our product to them and explain the meaning and relevance of their child's education to them. We also need to create a culture that helps families share their feedback in a manner they perceive to be both safe and constructive. Maybe we should begin to think of these gatherings as sales opportunities.

If public education is indeed a commodity, then the concept of attracting and retaining customers is not that far-fetched. If you do not believe in the commodity idea, then there is still no harm in helping every family understand why you are the best.

SOME IDEAS TO GET STARTED

The most difficult part of any experience is actually making the decision to begin. All of us have made commitments to making changes that often fall short. On New Year's Eve, many of us resolve to bring a renewed energy and focus to goals in the coming year that have previously eluded us. Sometimes we follow through, sometimes we don't.

The fact that you have this book and you are still reading is an indication that you are ready to start or enhance your efforts to engage every family. It seems appropriate to give you a few things to keep in mind as you get into *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles*. Over the years and with mountains of feedback from educators everywhere, a few common themes have emerged. They appear below as a way to draw a starting line and can act as guidelines for you as you begin your venture toward engaging every family.

Keep It Simple

We as educators tend to overthink issues, sometimes to the point of paralysis—we think that change is not worth the time or will not produce the desired result. We take challenges that we face and make

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issue seems impossible. We overwhelm ourselves with problems and ultimately become frustrated.

Simply put, we lose hope. We lose hope that we have the energy or power to change anything. We lose hope that things will change regardless of what we do. Let's commit to breaking that cycle. While I would agree with the idea that hope is not a concrete strategy, I would also argue that it is essential to improving organizations. Be sure, however, that hope is not your only strategy.

So, let's keep it simple. Simple translates into more effective action. Breaking down complex ideas into simple ones allows educators with finite amounts of time and resources to actually think and implement the ideas that are presented. Family engagement is not a race. Implementing strategies without the necessary processes and learning will result in little change to your school—or at best, temporary or sporadic change.

You do not have to read this book in a week. As a matter of fact, the longer it takes you to get through the book (assuming you are fully participating in the questions and ideas presented), the more likely your perceptions and actions are changing. As they change, so changes the culture of your school.

Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles is designed to be simple—simple to discuss, simple to plan, and simple to execute. There are no herculean efforts or large budget expenditures needed to engage every family. As a matter of fact, engaging families is nearly budget neutral. Imagine that—a way to increase student achievement that is almost free. Worth considering, don't you think?

Simple ideas presented by groups of educators supporting each other almost always result in success sooner or later. If it takes a week, a month, or five years, so what? Measurable progress toward a goal is key. Breaking down the progress into simple, logical steps will keep the notion of family engagement very doable in the minds of just about everybody.

Remember the classic question: How do you eat an elephant?

The answer is one piece at a time. Do not expect that by implementing the ideas learned in this book, suddenly or magically every family will be engaged. Consider that we want to engage families, especially those that are disengaged from us, one family at a time.

Time and Patience

We are conditioned to fix everything now, today, this minute. There is no time to think, to explore, to investigate, to research, to pilot, to evaluate, to share, or to repeat. For promotional review or evaluation purposes only. Do not distribute, share, or upload to any large language model or data repository.

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and educators, we have become a group of people wandering around, educational zombies looking for a quick fix to what ails us. Professional athletes spend 90 percent of their time training and 10 percent of their time performing. For educators, it is exactly the opposite. That's a problem.

There are no quick fixes to the significant challenges we face in education. If there were, we wouldn't have the challenges. The necessary investment to engage every family is one of time and patience. There is no magic wand to wave that will suddenly engage the disengaged or miraculously engage every family by the beginning of the next school year. The process is often a slow one.

The best way to engage every family might very well be one family at a time. In one case, a preschool teacher worked with a family for over a year before the comfort level rose to the point where a relationship could be established.

The best way to engage every family might very well be one family at a time.

Having patience with families, especially those that have been traditionally disengaged or disenfranchised from our schools, will unquestionably support any effort to reaffirm a commitment to their engagement. Families that are disadvantaged, families for whom English is not a first language, and families whose own school experiences were less than positive all play a role in engagement decisions. These challenges can be overcome. It just takes time and patience.

It is equally important to have patience with educational colleagues who may not see the value in engaging every family. Educators have been made a lot of promises over the years, and many of those promises never materialized. Teachers have become skeptical of educational initiatives, maybe rightfully so. Think of it this way: Family engagement is not an initiative nor is it a new task set in front of you. Consider it the same as doing what we already do but doing it differently, through the lens of engaged families—no new time commitment, no new resources, no new energies, simply doing what we already do . . . differently. Don't think outside the box—blow the box up! Rebuild and reassemble the pieces in a different way.

Not More, Just Different

As a teacher, I remember attending the new school year opening meetings and listening to the leadership share the initiatives for the upcoming year. Over time, the word *initiative* struck fear in my heart. It usually meant that I was going to have to do something else, something new, something for which I may not appreciate the value. I learned to shudder at the word *initiative*.

Family engagement is not an initiative nor is it a race. Family engagement is a commitment to change the culture and as such, it is not intended for distribution. For promotional review or evaluation purposes only. Do not distribute, share, or upload to any large language model or data repository.

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POINTS TO PONDER

1. Discuss with your colleagues the time you devoted to implementing a new idea and the amount of time you engaged with the idea before you decided to abandon it.
2. Discuss with your colleagues those ideas and strategies that have proven effective. How long did it take to implement and perfect the ideas/strategies before you saw the success you wanted?
3. What role did the amount of time devoted to the new concept play in its ultimate success or failure?

is ongoing and never ending. It is important to keep in mind that not everyone on a school staff or in a school district will suddenly think that engaging families is a great idea. In some cases, there will likely be strong opposition to the idea—even flat-out refusal.

Consider that the implementation of family engagement philosophies, strategies, and practices is not adding new responsibilities to your already full plate. Family engagement takes into consideration what we already do. It merely requires us to act *differently*—no new time, no new energy, no new resources—simply a remodeling of what we already have. To engage families means to look at our practices and procedures through a different lens—the lens of families.

During my years as a teacher and building administrator, I marveled at the sharing of ideas and resources among teachers. When one would get a good idea, others would watch to see the results. If the results were good, they would ask the originator of the idea for the information so they could replicate the success. Great methodology is passed among teachers every day. (We'll delve into this idea a bit deeper in the next chapter.)

Educators, similar to the students we teach, are discoverers of knowledge. When presented with good, solid ideas that they see have positive effects on their jobs, the likelihood of their involvement and support of new ideas grows. Engaging every family and promoting the appropriate culture in a school to engage every family takes time and patience. Be encouraging, nurturing, patient, and steadfast. The results will come.

We Already Tried That

It is the rare workshop where I offer more than a handful of new ideas to help engage every family. Quite honestly, schools across the country have captured a plethora of ideas and tailored them to their schools and specific situations. I remember one workshop participant a few years ago who said to me, "Yeah, we did the letter and the phone call and the visit and the food and the childcare and the transportation and three people showed up."

I readily acknowledge that while we continue to find new ways to engage families, especially with technology and social media, most of the great ideas are already out there and have had varying levels of success. So, what is the answer?

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It might be time to consider why your efforts, if they were marginally successful, paid so little dividend. Maybe it was the structure or timing of what you did. Perhaps the content didn't resonate with families. Maybe it was the school location that kept families away. Most likely though, the answer lies in the culture that permeates your school. Does everyone value the engagement of every family? How is that value communicated? How do we respond to situations where families do not act as we had hoped with regard to school engagement? What is our response to disengagement? Was the message of your meeting or event meaningful or relevant to families?

Make sure you understand this important fact: No one event or first attempt at engaging every family will bring a thundering herd of families to your doorway. More often than not in communities where family engagement is traditionally low, the successes are small—one family, followed by a few more families, and so forth. If you repeat an event and you increase attendance from three to five people, celebrate that! Don't be discouraged that there were not twenty or thirty people at the event. For many years, I have used this adage: We engage families one family at a time. With time, we hit a tipping point; sometimes it takes a while. Hang in there.

There is another idea about engagement that needs to be discussed. Most of the engagement that impacts student learning happens in homes away from school. I often refer to this as "invisible engagement," engagement you may not see but with which you will see results. This is not to say that workshops and efforts to engage families are fruitless and should be discontinued—quite the contrary. The work we do outside of the home will help promote the efficacy of families when they are with their children and we are not.

In workshops, I usually give the following example of practices that I have witnessed in many schools (including my own!): School staff work tirelessly to create an opportunity for family engagement. They follow all of the appropriate procedures to be an open, welcoming environment and have practiced significant outreach to families. A central idea in the preparation of these events is the notion of its importance. We tend to drive the point home to families about how important it is that they do whatever it is we want them to do (come to a meeting, participate in a workshop, etc.).

When the event occurs and the family attendance is disappointing, it's not what we do next but rather more about what we don't do. We usually are exhausted from our efforts and frustrated with the results. We sulk away and vow never to expend that amount of energy again. We convince ourselves that families are simply apathetic and that our efforts are a waste of time and energy. What we almost never do is follow up with our customer and find out why they didn't attend.

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Consider this: If we repeatedly hammer into a family's head that taking a particular action is important and, upon their not taking the desired action, we never say another word, what message have we sent? Exactly! Reinforced in the mind of the parent or family member is the idea that whatever it was, it simply was not that important. That very notion erodes trust in relationships between schools and families.

REALITY, PERCEPTIONS, AND BELIEFS

Understanding that perception is reality for most people underscores the need to carefully examine the belief systems of people and organizations.

Our personal belief systems play a powerful role with regard to our desired family engagement outcomes. Families apply the very same thinking. Their personal belief systems and customs also play a large role in determining their level of engagement with their child's education. Understanding that perception is reality for most people underscores the need to carefully examine the belief systems of people and organizations.

When a decision is made to undertake a course to engage every family or to increase family engagement, a critical first step is to gauge where everyone is on the subject. Later in the book, ideas and activities will be presented to create a culture for engaging every family. (Hopefully, you took the first step before you ever started reading this chapter.)

Can every family truly be engaged? This question has been debated over the years, and as one can imagine, the answers fall along a continuum between absolutely and absolutely not. It might be interesting to know that many urban and Title I schools have proven that 100 percent engagement is possible. It seems that the answer begins within one's own personal belief system.

Facts, reality, and evidence are clear: There is a strong correlation between family engagement and student learning. Not every family is engaged with their child's education. Every educator does not place the same value on building relationships with every family. Families' experiences with their children's schools shape their engagement practices over time.

Not every school welcomes families. Not every family feels welcome in their child's school. Not every family believes that their voice is heard or that their opinions or ideas matter. It will be imperative that whatever your goals in family engagement, you start with a thorough discussion and reflection on your reality, your perceptions, and your present beliefs on the topic. Not spending this time now will most likely result in very little change, if any.

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WHERE WE ARE

Directions: Have each individual member of your team or school answer the following questions independently and anonymously. Compile the answers to see where your starting point is with regard to engaging every family.

1. What do you believe about family engagement?
2. Do you believe that every family in your (classroom, team, school, etc.) is engaged with their child's learning?
3. If the answer to Question 2 is no, then why do you think there are families who are not engaged?
4. If every family in your (classroom, team, school, etc.) is not engaged, would you welcome their engagement?
5. What would engaging every family look like to you?

FINALLY, THE SECRET TO SUCCESS!

Here is a story that underscores the secret to successfully engaging every family. Read through the story. The point of the story and the secret to success should be clear by the time you finish reading it.

Having numerous issues and stressors in his life, a gentleman made the difficult decision to seek professional counseling. This was a decision that did not come lightly and one that the man debated and rejected many, many times. In the final analysis, though, the man realized that without some assistance, the issues in his life would continue to affect his health and his relationships with the ones he loved. Because of this, he took the large, difficult, and scary step to seek help.

Upon arrival to the counselor's office, the gentleman was immediately put at ease. He was under no obligation to say anything he didn't want to say or take any action he didn't want to take. He was in complete control of the conversation. Almost without knowing it, an hour went by, and the gentleman was asked if he would return the following week. He agreed.

The following week (and several weeks after that) seemed to be a repeat of the first. The gentleman was under no obligation to say anything he didn't want to say or take any action he didn't want to take. He was in complete control of the conversation. Almost without knowing it, an hour went by, and the gentleman was asked if he would return the following week. He agreed.

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hours of conversation flew by. After several weeks, he realized he felt a bit better but really couldn't put his finger on why. At his next appointment with the counselor, he decided to ask.

He walked into the meeting, sat down, and asked the counselor the question he had been pondering.

"You feel better because you have discovered the secret," the counselor said.

"The secret? The secret to what?" The gentleman was a bit irritated at the answer given to him.

"The secret to success," answered the counselor. He walked over to his desk and picked up a picture frame and handed it to the gentlemen.

"Please read this out loud, if you will," said the counselor. The gentleman looked at the frame. Inside the frame there was no picture and really no sentence or recognizable word to read. He simply saw the following:

YAGOTTAWANNA

When the gentlemen read it out loud, at that instant, he realized what the word was and what it meant.

"One's personal desire to make a difficult change starts with the very simple idea that we *want* to make the change. Without the intrinsic desire, whatever our goal, it most likely will remain elusive. You have decided to make the change. Therefore, you are." The counselor sat back waiting for a response.

"Yagottawanna, eh?" said the gentleman. "That simple?"

"That simple." The counselor smiled and said not another word. Neither did the gentleman.

The secret to successful family engagement starts with the simple notion that we desire to engage families because we believe that doing so will have a positive impact on the children we serve.

Yagottawanna. It really is that simple.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CARING

There is no question that we have many mountains to climb with regard to reforming and improving our public schools. It seems to be a reasonable conclusion, though, that the mountain that is the easiest to climb is the one that convinces families that we care about them.

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their children. Why? Because we do care! I do not recall ever meeting educators who said they simply didn't care about the children they were teaching. Further, convincing families that we care about their children is budget neutral.

The importance of caring is best summarized by another short story. This time, two neighbors, one of whom is a teacher at the local school, are discussing a decision by one of them to move his child from the local public school to a newly organized charter school.

Tom was a staunch supporter of public schools and would be the last one to abandon them. But Tom did just that. Tom removed his children from the local public school and enrolled them in a newly opened charter school. Bill, his friend who was a teacher in the local public school, knew the risks of engaging in a conversation with Tom about his decision but ultimately could not ignore the situation.

"I must admit, you caught me by surprise with your decision about the charter school," Bill said.

"There was a big part of me that was afraid to tell you, given your career and commitment to public schools," Tom responded rather sheepishly. "I want you to know that this was not a decision that we came to lightly."

Bill asked a series of questions to determine the rationale for the decision. "What is it about the education that your kids are getting at their present school that concerns you?" Bill asked. "Or is it a safety issue? I know how much the safety of children weighs on the minds of all parents." Bill thought that if he continued to share potential reasons for the switch, the conversation would go a bit better and he would be closer to understanding the basis for Tom's decision.

"I can't say that I am unhappy with the education my kids are getting. Then again, I really can't judge whether or not what they are getting is appropriate. As far as safety goes, I am more than convinced that the principal and the staff have a good plan for security. I really don't worry about my kids when they are in school."

Bill decided to prod a bit further. "I hear all the time from parents that the lack of challenging curriculum is a real issue. Is that a problem for you?"

"Absolutely not," Tom said. "Sometimes I feel like they are overly challenged and don't have time just to be kids."

"I realize that your kids are tested to death. You do know that the charter schools may require the same kind of testing, don't you?" Bill thought for sure he would hit upon the rationale his friend used to make this decision. Copyrighted Material, www.corwin.com.

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Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles

"I am not happy about the testing, but I am smart enough to know that the teachers didn't create this situation. We have our government to thank for that."

Bill paused a moment, a bit confused and wondering how he got this far down the rabbit hole of questions without hitting upon the reasons for the move. "So, let me see if I understand this," Bill started. "You are not unhappy with the education your children are getting and you feel the school is a safe place. You are not trying to escape testing or the laws that govern education. I have to tell you, I am at a loss for why you are moving your children. It sounds like we are doing a pretty good job." As soon as Bill heard his answer, it made perfect sense.

"No, it's none of that. It's just that I feel that the charter school will care more about my children than their present school." Bill asked Tom to elaborate. "I need to know that somebody cares about my kids. I never really hear anything about what goes on in school and outside of typed notes about field trips, money owed, and the need for more tissues and hand sanitizer in the classroom, I don't ever hear anything. I go to the conference every year and it's pretty much the same thing—impersonal, scripted, and irrelevant.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Reflect on the conversation between Tom and Bill. How did it make you feel?
2. Do you think that this story, which is fictional, could actually occur?
3. Where do you think your school/district is with regard to the issue of caring?
4. What systems could have altered Tom's decision to remove his children from the public school?
5. How do you show families that you care? What more can you do?
6. What ideas can you take away from this story and implement in your school?

"I get a report card with *Es* and *Ss* and really can't tell you what the heck they mean. I guess my kids are doing okay, but I don't know that they are. I don't really trust the teachers or staff to care enough about my kids to tell me the truth or, worse yet, to know if there is a problem. I always feel like teachers are put out when I do call and ask a question. I never get the feeling they really want to talk with me. I always feel like when they hang up the phone, they label me a problem parent."

"Considering that your children have not yet attended the charter school, what is it about the experiences you have already had that makes you think the charter school will be different?" Bill asked, not sure if he wanted to hear the answer.

"When we called the school, the lady who answered the phone was pleasant and helpful. She asked me my name and used my name throughout our short conversation. Over and over she said how happy she was that we were considering their school. Within minutes, we had an appointment to visit the school."

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Playing the devil's advocate, Bill said, "What if you just ran into one friendly person who has been trained in customer service?"

"That would be one more than exists at our present school," Tom shot back. "But it wasn't just the phone call or the information or the visit. From the first phone call, I felt that we were special, that the school staff really wanted us there. What was really amazing is that within twenty-four hours, all five of the people we met, including two teachers, called us to thank us for visiting their school and once again shared their enthusiasm that we might be coming to their school. I have never had this experience in any school my kids attended."

Bill was stunned. Tom's decision to send his children to a charter school had nothing to do with the quality of education or the perception of a safe school environment but had everything to do with whether or not he perceived that the staff cared about his children. It occurred to Bill at that precise moment that this was the real crisis in our educational system.

The importance of caring about the families we serve cannot be overstated. For the Five Simple Principles to truly assist you in your quest, the whole issue of caring must be discussed at the start.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS

Strategies without a process produce sporadic and temporary results.

Schools and districts wishing to improve their quality of experiences for staff, students, families, and communities understand that redesigning internal processes of the organization will ultimately lead to improved performance. Schools and districts will need to create processes that are self-sustaining and capable of delivering the required performance objective.

IDEAS TO PROMOTE CARING TO FAMILIES

1. There is nothing more precious to us than someone using our name correctly. Understand the names of your students and their families, especially if they are different because of blended families. Make every contact a personal contact by using that person's name.
2. When families visit the school, give them two name tags. Allow them to put their name on one and their child's name on the other. You will never have to ask a parent who their child is again. Allowing people to make their own name tags will help you understand how to address them in the future. It also makes life easier for teachers and staff members trying to remember names in blended families.
3. Make your first interaction with a family about them, not about you, your classroom, or the course you teach. Demonstrate your desire to learn about them; their family; their customs, rituals, and challenges; and so forth.
4. Whenever possible, have face-to-face conversations or telephone conversations. In this world of mass communication, much is lost in texts, emails, and 140-character messages.
5. Consider home visits (breathe . . . we'll discuss this in more detail later) to those families who are reluctant to participate.

(Continued)

(Continued)

6. When families are invited to an event, take attendance and pay close attention to those who are not there. Call them and tell them you missed them. Offer to share the information with them in another setting. Do not judge their absence or ask them why they were absent; simply reinforce that the information is important and that you want to share it with them.
7. Smile. Don't allow the few negative experiences you may have had with some families to color your attitude toward others.

I bet you can think of other ideas!
Write them below:

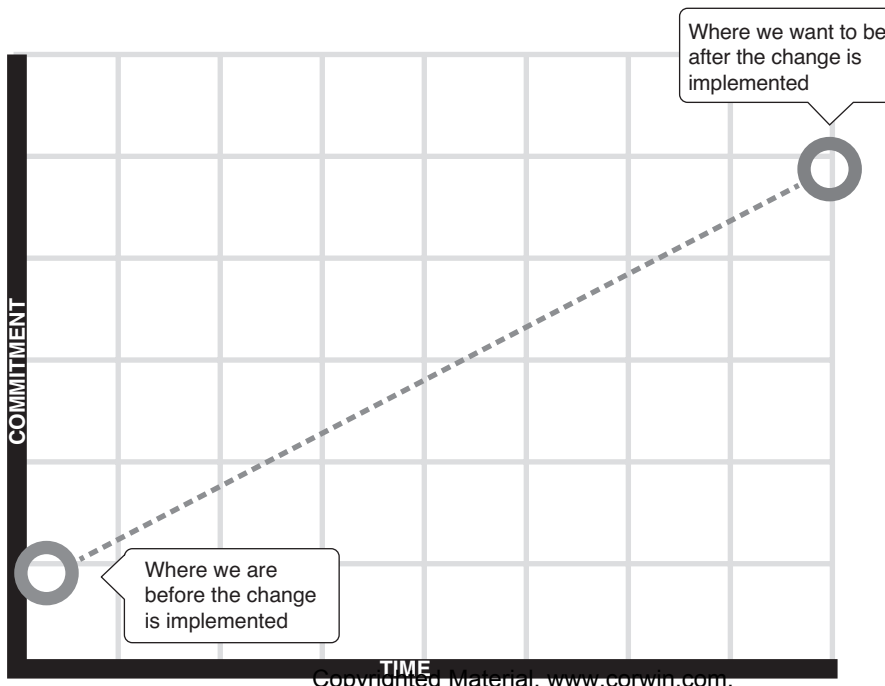
Available for download at <http://www.drsteveconstantino.com>

We tend to make the time to create the necessary processes for goals and ideas we wish to implement. We often forget the natural dips that occur in organizational effectiveness when we introduce change. Consider Figures 1.1 and 1.2, which help us to understand the implementation of a change.

When we implement a change in an organization, we generally believe that while there may be a few bumps in the road and a few problems to resolve, the change will occur as depicted in Figure 1.1: a slow but steady elevation to our desired state. Unfortunately, this is not usually the case. Change is a messy business. More often than not, it looks more like Figure 1.2.

Change, in any organization, usually plunges some or all of the organization into a chaotic state. More often than not, things get confusing and frustrating before they get better. Then as the change takes hold and the despair turns to acceptance and finally advocacy for the change, the desired state is reached. None of this, however, can be done without explicit processes in place. Strategies without processes do not work.

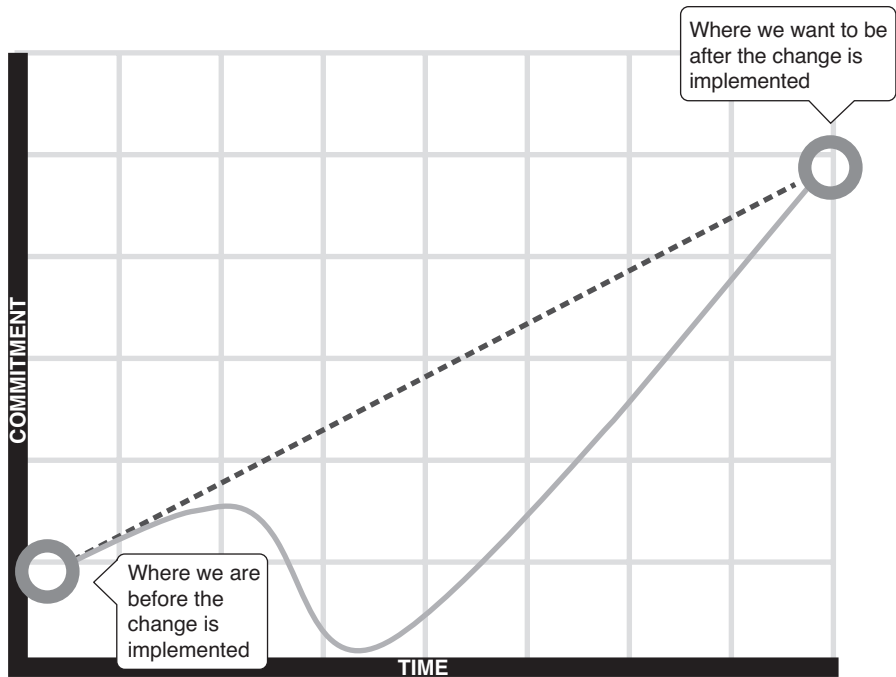
Figure 1.1



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Figure 1.2



ACTIVITY

Process Exercise

Spend some time reviewing how you process change in your organization.

1. Is your organization used to developing processes that are measured and evaluated over time? If not, what do you think will have to occur in order to become process oriented?
2. Is the leadership of your organization truly committed to the work of family engagement? If so, how will that commitment be translated to your entire organization?
3. Are you willing to examine the culture of your organization, both the positive and negative attributes, in order to bring about improvement?

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THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

The ingredients to successfully engage every family are as specific as any favorite recipe. Regardless of how well you implement and evaluate your success, if the support of leadership is missing, the recipe will not turn out as expected. Strong, committed, courageous leadership is essential to long-term success.

Several years ago, a question was asked about successful family engagement programs that had been launched in schools around the country. The question was simple: Was there a commonality between those programs that were successful and those that were not? After pondering this question for a while, the answer was clear: Yes. The commonality was supportive and purposeful leadership. Superintendents and central office staff who stood up and set a vision and direction for a school district that was inclusive of families had better results. Principals and building leaders who championed the cause saw more consistent and better measurable results as well.

Of all of the leadership qualities one can possess, it seems that courage is an absolute necessity if leaders wish to engage every family. Changing the direction of organizations and having the will to make changes that can begin as uncomfortable are essential ingredients in engaging every family. Courage comes from facing and overcoming fear. Many people in organizations fear change. Creating the conditions to engage every family will likely be a significant departure from standard practice at your school or in your district.

In many workshops over the years, some teachers and school staff members have approached me to share two specific ideas: First, they want me to know that the concepts and information I am presenting are ones that they believe in and value. The second statement they make is the alarming one. Often, they tell me that they do not perceive that their leadership (district or building) places value on the topic. I have been repeatedly asked what teachers can do to convince leadership that the practice of family engagement is worthwhile and brings about better achievement. My usual response is to persuade them to try the ideas and share the positive results with their leaders as an effort to begin to change the culture.

With these ideas and the notion that families will choose you, the sky is the limit as to your success in engaging every family.