

WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

“Case Studies to Engage Every Family is a valuable tool for all educators! The case studies allow us to apply theory to our own experiences so we can begin to be problem solvers. Constantino’s systematic approach helps educators to fully understand that only when we change our thoughts and beliefs about what real engagement means, will we begin to see results.”

—Shannon Lang, Coordinator

Title I, Part A Parent and Family Engagement Statewide Initiative
Region 16 Educational Service Center
Amarillo, TX

“Steven M. and Margaret E. Constantino have a finger on the pulse of today’s challenging educational landscape. These case studies challenge our thinking for how we can more effectively engage families. Each case study provides a unique true-to-life scenario with thought-provoking questions to help foster educator–family relationships.”

—Paula Huffman, Principal

Enon Elementary
Chesterfield, VA

“Strong family-school-community partnerships are more important than ever. However, most educators are not sure how to do it well or where to begin. This is the perfect guide, offering practical examples of how to bring the Five Simple Principles to life. These case studies resonate because they reflect common challenges. I encourage you to read it again and again.”

**—S. Kwesi Rollins, Senior Vice President
for Leadership & Engagement**

Institute for Educational Leadership
Washington, DC

“The book offers a variety of examples that allow educators to make connections to their own practice.”

—Heath Peine, Executive Director

Student Support Services
Wichita, KS

“These case studies are detailed, thoughtful, realistic, and nuanced enough to allow for the types of rich discussions and thoughtful reflection that can change the climate and culture of a school and the nature of school-family partnerships. The step-by-step process makes it easy to analyze the scenarios and apply the principles to real-life interactions with families.”

**—Patricia Weinzapfel, Nationally Recognized School–Home
Communication Expert and Author**

Former Family Engagement School District Leader
Evansville, IN

“A companion piece to *Engage Every Family*, this book provides the what and the how of engaging families in the educational process. In every case study, I recognized a scenario I have experienced in my ten years as a family engagement specialist. Reading this work built my capacity to strengthen authentic family engagement for EVERY family.”

—Megan Roedl, Family Engagement Specialist

Lawrenceville, GA

“This is an extraordinary inclusion of scenarios relevant to diverse school communities.”

—Cathern Wildey, Adjunct Professor of Education

Southeastern University
Holiday, FL

Case Studies to Engage Every Family

*For our son, Matthew,
who teaches us about love, laughter, and what it means to be a family.*

Case Studies to Engage Every Family

Implementing the
Five Simple Principles

Steven M. Constantino

Margaret E. Constantino

Foreword by Darla Edwards





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Foreword

Over my twenty years in education, I have been tremendously inspired by Dr. Steve Constantino's expertise and knowledge in family engagement. As a former Title I school principal, I saw the results of Dr. Constantino's work firsthand as we implemented his strategies to dramatically impact family and school partnerships. As a guide and mentor, he has shown me the critical role that leaders play in setting the vision and direction for increasing equitable family engagement. His work demonstrates that when families are valued as equal partners in their child's education, students are more successful in school.

As an educational consultant and co-founder of Successful Innovations, I have devoted over a decade to developing resources and professional learning opportunities to strengthen family and school partnerships. One of the most impactful professional learning opportunities that we co-host is the National Family Engagement Summit. Each October, we bring hundreds of family-facing professionals and administrators together for a multi-day learning experience focused exclusively on creating stronger, more equitable and beneficial connections between families and schools.

Starting with our first summit, we have been honored to collaborate with Dr. Constantino. He is a highly sought-after expert researcher and practitioner in the field, and our attendees look forward to gaining new knowledge, skills, and strategies from his informative presentations. Through his powerful keynote and breakout sessions, he has encouraged summit participants to reflect on their current practices. He has equipped them with strategies and novel ideas to profoundly impact their school cultures by providing the conditions necessary for nurturing and sustaining continuous family engagement. Dr. Constantino's value is reflected in the year-over-year growth of the National Family Engagement Summit, with attendees from all over the nation and the world making the trek to hear him speak.

I am more excited than ever that Dr. Margaret Constantino is co-authoring this book. She is a renowned practitioner and researcher who I highly respect and admire. Her expertise on supporting families of students with disabilities is extremely valuable to the field and fills a void that family-facing professionals will appreciate. She is emerging as a force to be reckoned with in the family engagement field. I am beyond grateful that our summit participants will now have the opportunity to learn from her and gain actionable strategies to support them in their work.

I am so excited about this book because the authors provide case studies that delve deeper into how five key principles can prepare readers with

Case Studies to Engage Every Family

the knowledge and confidence needed to optimally engage families. This is such a powerful resource for schools, districts, and teacher preparation programs. Reading this book, I feel like the authors have cracked the code of the family engagement puzzle, putting the pieces of a coherent strategy firmly into place. There is no other resource that provides such a detailed and practical approach to prepare readers to navigate the often unpredictable and turbulent situations they may encounter when dealing with families.

The book you hold in your hands is a true game changer for the field of family engagement. I am grateful to Dr. Steve Constantino and Dr. Margaret Constantino for giving us such a valuable resource that will inspire every educator with the realization that it is indeed truly possible to engage every family.

—Darla Edwards

President/Co-founder, Successful Innovations

Co-host, National Family Engagement Summit

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Preface

Engagement is joy. Engagement is inspiration. Engagement is life.

Think about the word *engagement* and what it means to you on a personal level. Maybe it's a marriage proposal or sharing your life with your soul-mate. It can also be as simple as talking to family members on FaceTime each day or sharing dinner with good friends, or even a night on the town. Walking the beach or a mountain trail with someone you care for, listening to a friend in need, being there for someone else: In all these situations, you are engaged in important relationships that mean something to you. These types of relationships—relationships that feed the soul—and the ensuing engagements are important to all of us and must exist for us to live a full and rewarding life.

We all crave engagement and relationships. We tend to be at our worst when we do not experience the joy and inspiration that real engagement brings. Isolation is not natural. Isolation can lead to stress and fear. If conflict dominates our relationships, those relationships become toxic and sooner or later dissolve or, worse, continue in an antagonistic fashion. We are at our worst when we are cut off from those important relationships in which we desire to engage. And if all we know is conflict, then we do not know the joy and inspiration of engaging with others. While we by no means are human behavior specialists, we do know this: Engagement is life. Isolation is a death knell. Education is a people business, and engaging relationships are at the heart of schooling.

Now, we challenge you to take these thoughts and consider the engagement between you and the families of the students you serve. Do the same positive feelings emerge as when you thought about the relationships that are important to you? Do you covet engagement with the families of the children you serve? Maybe yes. Maybe no. Too often, relationships with families are defined by tension, or conflict and complaint. Misunderstandings spring up and fill space with doubt and concerns.

Worse yet, there are some families with which we have no relationship at all—families that do not participate or respond in any way, regardless of your repeated attempts. In frustration, you might give up. You may tell yourself that these families do not wish to be engaged and therefore your continued efforts will be in vain. However, discontinuing the effort feeds the cycle of disengagement, which at its base harbors doubt, mistrust, and fear. In other words, giving up makes things worse.

Teachers are often wary to contact families with bad academic or behavioral news. Consider for a moment the positive engagement and relationships

you do have with many families. What is the common thread between those relationships? Why do they seem to “work” while others do not? What are your desires when it comes to relationships and the engagement of every family? These reflections will go a long way to aid your success in engaging families.

AUTHENTICITY

What’s the secret to authenticity? Genuineness. Confidence. Realness. Caring. Purpose. It’s a simple recipe. Authenticity emerges from both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, meaning it stems from our self-knowledge and self-concept as well as the response we get from our interactions with others. The beauty of it is that authenticity is not just a quality that only a few of us display, but rather these attributes can be acquired over time. What we have come to know is that the heart of authenticity begins with a strong desire to connect with people, to build trusting relationships, and to then, with new friendships and connections, embrace and enjoy the world around us. We find this idea very inspiring and quite applicable to our sphere of education, student learning, and engaging with every family.

The importance of authentic family engagement should be obvious. We need to be genuine in our desire to engage. We need to be real in our efforts to bridge the divide between us and those who feel disengaged, disenfranchised, or marginalized. We need to be sincere in our care and compassion for students and our empathy for families who, amidst obstacles, try to do right by their children. We must believe that every family shares the desire to have their children exceed them in their quality of life. But most importantly, we must present ourselves authentically.

WHY A COMPANION BOOK?

This book is designed as an accompaniment to *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* (Constantino, 2021), although it can stand on its own as a teaching tool to further your efforts in family engagement. References to information in the original book can be helpful to you in studying the cases but, more importantly, can provide you tools, materials, and ideas to begin to address the challenges you face in your school or district.

This companion book provides an opportunity to use the information to delve into the everyday challenges that educators might face in engaging families, especially those who are disengaged or disenfranchised in some way. The case studies provide an excellent way to understand a problem and apply the necessary treatment to improve engagement.

The idea and premise of this book is simple: Create case studies that mirror everyday challenges for educators; design opportunities to discuss and reflect on the current conditions and circumstances in the context of your school or district; identify strengths and areas for improvement; and then use the best practice ideas to begin to change your current conditions.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The case studies are constructed to match the Five Simple Principles: (1) Create a Culture That Engages Every Family, (2) Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships, (3) Build Family Efficacy, (4) Engage Every Family in Decision Making, and (5) Engage the Greater Community.

Each of the Five Simple Principles is illustrated by four rich case studies (twenty case studies in all). The case studies are designed to mirror challenges at the classroom, school, and district levels. The diversity of the studies, and the challenges they present, will assist you in applying processes and strategies in your own situation. We expect you will recognize some of the actions and behaviors in the vignettes as similar situations are likely occurring every day in your schools. During and after each case study, the individual reader or educator team will find key features that will guide them in thinking critically about the themes raised in the story as well as how to apply the principles to their own school settings. These features are as follows.

Stop and Reflect: Readers are encouraged to pause during the reading to consider key elements of the case. It is important to consider any ideas you have at the beginning of a case study and then determine if your ideas or thoughts have changed by the end of the case study.

Problem Identification: Readers are prompted to clearly identify the root cause of a problem(s). Understanding the root cause of an issue increases the likelihood of permanently resolving the issue rather than merely treating the symptoms.

Advanced Thinking: Questions are posed to encourage reflection and consideration of specific actions, behaviors, and nuances in the case. We encourage you to reflect on or discuss these questions with your colleagues.

Points to Ponder: Elements of best practice are shared to promote deeper thinking about the application of the principles in practice. Points to Ponder are short, bulleted ideas that will assist you in determining a pathway toward success.

Application of Ideas: Your Turn: Readers examine the principles and aspects of each case through the lens of their own context.

Applying processes and strategies to your situation will further enhance your learning and understanding of family engagement.

Many of the cases incorporate more than one of the Five Simple Principles. Questions about the problem presented in each case will allow an opportunity to consider more than one principle.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Educators generally agree that the success of any professional development program abandons the traditional lecture-based process for a more in-depth, embedded, and ongoing experience that supports learning and implementation at a pace suitable to specific situations and moving to a deeper level of understanding and application of concepts presented. Case studies are both a popular and proven method of study that affords educators (and university students) the opportunity to not only understand the theories presented, but also apply those theories to the specifically designed case studies and then compare those case studies to their own experiences. This process allows for a far deeper understanding of the origins of family disengagement and provides real-world examples for discussion and strategy implementation.

While we recognize that there will be countless ways in which this book is used, we include one example here to help you and your team get started with authentic family engagement in your school.

Principle 2: Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships

Step 1. Read the description and clarifying statements together as a team.

Principle Description

There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship development creates environments in the school that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective two-way communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to develop relationships based on mutual trust.

Clarifying Statements

2.1 The school creates and maintains a welcoming and respectful environment that is inviting, supportive, and encouraging to every family.

2.2 The school employs strategies that extend opportunities to develop relationships beyond the school walls so that every family can substantially contribute to the education of their children.

2.3 The school ensures that healthy, two-way communication is consistently maintained. A sense of caring to truly collaborate with every family exists as evidenced by numerous mechanisms to allow families to communicate easily and directly with the school.

Step 2. Read the case study and jot down your thoughts based on the prompts.

Case Study Excerpt

Jessica, a fifth grader, slapped another student in the face while waiting in the lunch line. Jessica was swiftly escorted to Principal [Casey] Hiller.

"We don't touch, hit, or hurt other students at this school . . . for any reason," Casey said sternly. Though she tried to explain what happened, Jessica was cut off.

When Jessica's father arrived, Casey explained that his daughter was being suspended for the rest of the school day and all the next day.

"We cannot tolerate this type of behavior regardless of what was said." Casey's tone was firm.

Jessica's father found the punishment to be harsh and asked if the full day of suspension the next day could be negotiated. Casey cited school board policy and the district discipline policy. "I'm sorry," she said to Jessica's father, "but that is the policy." Fearing the effect this suspension would have on his daughter and feeling Casey was unwilling to listen to the source of the problem, he made his way to the superintendent's office.

Stop and Reflect

- *What do you think about the situation and conversation between Casey and Jessica's father? Consider what you might say or do differently.*

It is at this point that you can either make a few notes or take a moment to reflect. This reflection adds dimension to your understanding of family engagement, disengagement, and the practices that are presently in place.

Step 3. Engage in a discussion with your team using the Advanced Thinking questions.

For example, here is one of the questions for this case study.

- I. When was it easy for Jessica's father to communicate? When was it difficult? What could be changed to create a culture of two-way communication?

Whether you use the Stop and Reflect areas or wait and work through the questions at the end of each case study is completely up to your personal preference and learning style. We find, however, that the more we reflect on these types of everyday occurrences, the more likely we are to see different pathways toward a goal of authentic family engagement.

Step 4. Go back and review the description of the principle and clarifying statements; discuss the clarifying statement that seems appropriate.

At whatever juncture you choose, go back and look at the description and clarifying statements of the principle. Do you see anything that supports what you have read?

For this example, clarifying statement 2.3 seems an appropriate one to discuss. Was there a sense of caring to truly collaborate? Was the ability of the parent to freely and comfortably communicate evident in the story? And most importantly, if you don't think this conversation supports the idea presented in the clarifying statement, how could the conversation be changed or altered to support Principle 2: Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships? In other words, how could you rewrite the story to better reflect an outcome supported by the principle?

Step 5. Apply the principle to your own setting.

The last step is to apply what you have discovered to your own school or your own situation. We are sure that while the exact case study you read may not have occurred in your school, chances are you've experienced something like it. The application of knowledge and learning to your own situation is the last and most important step in getting to authentic family engagement. To assist with the application of knowledge, each case study includes Points to Ponder designed to give you insights into the issues and solutions within the case study.

WHY A CASE STUDY APPROACH?

The use of a case study approach to organizational improvement is well documented in both business and education. "A case study is an in-depth study of one person, group, or event" (Cherry, 2022). The ideas, challenges, and situations presented in a case study can be generalized and used as solutions to similar issues facing real-world educators as readers develop a better understanding of the issues and challenges at hand. Case studies are

designed to portray a range of different perspectives on an issue rather than just a single view of an individual; they are an insight into human behavior and can extend an experience or add to existing knowledge (EssayMin, 2018). Case study analysis provides insight into human behaviors that a survey, focus group, or other means of collecting data cannot.

The case studies used in this book are fictional. The theory, idea, or action proposed in the description of the principle is the nucleus on which the case study is constructed. The case studies presented will also be explanatory in nature, which will allow you as the reader to look for factors that allow for certain issues to surface in the case study and determine how you might achieve better or different processes and outcomes than those shared in the case study. The case studies are designed to reflect your own similar experiences so that you can then move to determining solutions and ideas using the information garnered in the description of the Five Simple Principles as well as the ideas and best practices that will accompany each of the chapters. Because the chapters and case studies follow the Five Principles Model, those who are familiar with the model are just that much further along in creating specific and measurable plans to engage every family.

The Five Simple Principles descriptions, clarifying statements, and case studies make for a powerful process to explore the present conditions in your school or district and create an action plan for improvement.

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About the Authors



For more than twenty-five years, **Dr. 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.

Steve'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 experience, make him one of the most sought-after speakers in the field of family engagement.

Steve began his career as an instrumental music teacher and later became an assistant principal, principal, deputy superintendent, and district superintendent. Steve is the former chief academic officer and acting superintendent of public instruction for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Today, Steve is an executive professor at the William & Mary School of Education where he teaches in the Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership Department and continues to travel the globe helping schools, districts, and organizations to engage every family.



Dr. Margaret E. Constantino is an executive associate professor in the Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership Department and director of the Executive Ed.D. programs at the William & Mary School of Education. Her thirty-year career in education includes classroom experience as a special education teacher in elementary, middle, and high school settings. As a school-level leader, she led the development and implementation of one of the largest International Baccalaureate programs in North

America. She has served as a principal at the elementary and high school levels in both suburban and urban school systems. She also served as director of special education in Cobb County, Georgia, the twenty-fourth-largest school system in the United States. Margaret's teaching and project work crosses doctoral and principal preparation programs, with expertise in innovative leadership, design thinking, action research, special education, equity, and social justice.

Introduction

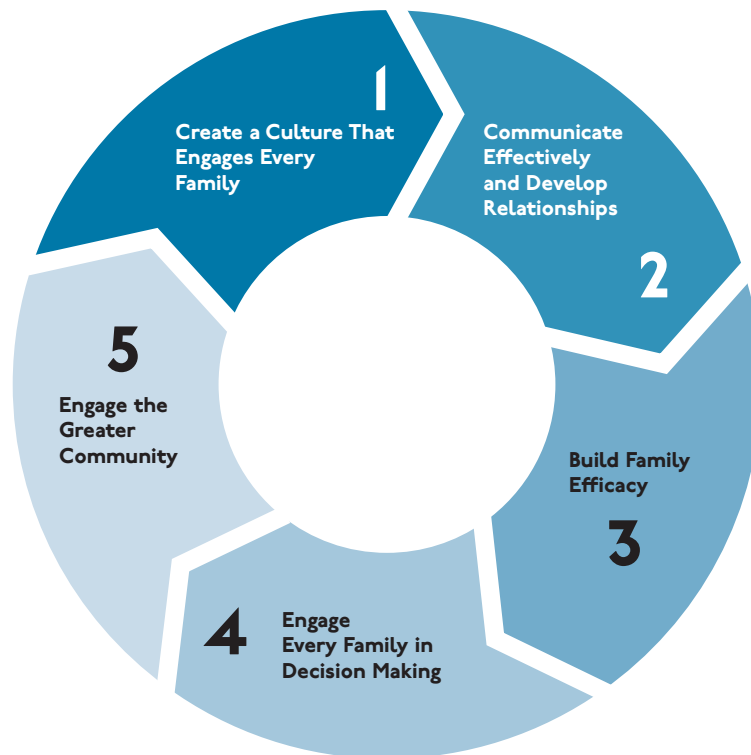
A Quick Review of the Five Simple Principles

This introduction begins with a quick review of the Five Simple Principles. To refresh your memory more thoroughly, we highly recommend that you reread Chapter 5 of *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* (Constantino, 2021).

The research-based Five Simple Principles are meant to help educators expand their capacity to formulate necessary partnerships with every family to promote improved student learning. The principles are a systemic process that can be overlaid onto schools or school districts so that measurable and tangible results can be recorded and celebrated.

THE LOGIC MODEL

The logic model is designed to place into a hierarchal order the principles by which true family engagement and the ultimate development and nurturing of family efficacy can be implemented, measured, and, most importantly, sustained.



PRINCIPLE 1: CREATE A CULTURE THAT ENGAGES EVERY FAMILY

Creating a culture and climate for family engagement is the first and most important step in a process to bring about systemic reform in family engagement. If the collective beliefs, values, assumptions, actions, attitudes, and rituals within an organization are not supportive of engaging every family, then there is little hope that the subsequent strategies will have any lasting effect.

Often, desired change in an organization that is temporary, sporadic, or fleeting has at its root the idea that the change never permeates and alters the culture of the organization. Therefore, the notion of culture as the leading standard is essential for long-term success and growth.

PRINCIPLE 2: COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

When an accepting culture is established and fosters the engagement of every family, the next step is to develop deeper relationships with families. Developing relationships with every family, especially those that are disengaged, is essential in supporting improved student learning. Within the framework of relationships and the trust that ensues lies the important notion of communication. Research supports clear and consistent two-way communication as an important pillar in family engagement practice (Henderson et al., 2007).

Relationships and trust are rooted in distinct, meaningful, and thoughtful systems of two-way communication that relate a value in reaching out and connecting with every family, which implies the importance of listening and feedback. Communication, for purposes of this principle, also includes the important concept of welcoming environments in schools.

PRINCIPLE 3: BUILD FAMILY EFFICACY

Building family efficacy encourages and improves learning outside of school. In simple terms, efficacy is the power of one (or some) to produce an effect. In the Five Simple Principles logic model, the principle of efficacy takes family engagement to a new level and begins to allow a school or district a tangible and concrete approach to implementing processes and collecting data that links family engagement to student achievement.

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. If the culture of the district is not accepting of the idea to engage every family and the communication is poor, thus eroding trusting relationships between families and the school, the results will likely produce little in the way of family efficacy.

PRINCIPLE 4: ENGAGE EVERY FAMILY IN DECISION MAKING

Improvement plans, strategic plans, comprehensive plans, and the idea of school improvement planning has changed over the years and certainly since the advent of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. For many years, schools have sought to include families in decision making at the local school level. Common in many school districts are school board-appointed ad hoc committees or task forces of families and citizens charged with reviewing issues and making sound recommendations to the board. Inherent in all of this is the concept of engaging every family in school-related decision making. On the surface, this can seem to be a daunting and impossible task.

Every family needs a voice in certain school decisions, and school leaders must put into place mechanisms that ensure every voice will be heard. Returning to the logic model, after a culture of engagement is established and a foundation of relationships and efficacy has been built, creating mechanisms for family engagement in decision making enhances and ensures that policies, procedures, and practices have at their core a support mechanism for engaging every family.

PRINCIPLE 5: ENGAGE THE GREATER COMMUNITY

Many family engagement models include the involvement and engagement of the greater community as a conduit to improving schools. 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.

Without the sequential building of family engagement, the engagement of the greater community makes little sense. Business, civic, and community leaders who cannot determine a specific role for their engagement simply will not become involved in or immerse themselves in the school or

district. Setting the stage with the first four principles is an essential pathway to creating strong and meaningful community engagement.

GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE PRINCIPLES: DESCRIPTIONS AND CLARIFYING STATEMENTS

The key to the Five Simple Principles is the ability to remember them in the correct order and, to the degree possible, implement and evaluate your efforts and success with the same logic model that is prescribed. *Culture, Relationships, Efficacy, Decision Making, and Community*—five simple ideas to which all educators and families can relate and that all can remember.

As cultural underpinnings of your school, these five principles can bring about lasting and effective change in the ability to engage every family. Of course, there is some danger in trying to oversimplify the principles. That could lead to understanding the concept without the ability to truly drill down to the salient points, thus rendering the principles ineffective. As a quick reference, we list here all the principles and their clarifying statements in one place.

Principle I: Create a Culture That Engages Every Family

The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to ensuring the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in artifacts and organizational practices.

I.1 The school has created and sustained a culture that is conducive to family engagement through explicit beliefs, actions, norms, values, and assumptions made about the value of families being engaged with their children's school experiences.

I.2 A culture of family engagement exists within the school such that policies, programs, practices, and procedures specifically connect families with student learning to support increased achievement and enhance student learning and performance.

I.3 A culture of family engagement exists within the school and community that directly and positively impacts the social and emotional growth of all students.

Principle 2: Communicate Effectively and Develop Relationships

There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship development creates environments in the school that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective two-way communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to develop relationships based on mutual trust.

2.1 The school creates and maintains a welcoming and respectful environment that is inviting, supportive, and encouraging to every family.

2.2 The school employs strategies that extend opportunities to develop relationships beyond the school walls so that every family can substantially contribute to the education of their children.

2.3 The school ensures that healthy, two-way communication is consistently maintained. A sense of caring to truly collaborate with every family exists as evidenced by numerous mechanisms to allow families to communicate easily and directly with the school.

Principle 3: Build Family Efficacy

Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student—their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources because they know their children best.

3.1 The school makes a conscious effort to educate families to play a proactive role in the learning life of their child throughout their school career.

3.2 The school is committed to the academic socialization of families and, to that end, develops and deploys strategies that encourage and support family engagement with specific learning in all classrooms.

3.3 Families participate in the development of the student's learning plan, help monitor and assess progress, and provide support for their child's learning.

3.4 Teachers suggest learning strategies and experiential possibilities for families and use their local knowledge, personal skills, assets, and networks in ways that support the school's program.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Principle 4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making

The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, and educators.

4.1 The school creates opportunities for families to lead and participate in school learning, consultative, planning, and social and community events.

4.2 The school ensures that families and students have representation on the school's governing body and relevant decision-making groups.

Principle 5: Engage the Greater Community

The school places a strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families.

The principle also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.

5.1 Partnerships are made with individuals and organizations in work and community places to take on mentoring roles within student internship and work placement programs. The partnerships also have a role to play within other activities, such as community-based learning projects, guest speaker programs, job shadows, apprenticeship opportunities, and tutors.

5.2 Partnerships are made with other learning institutions—schools, technical colleges, universities, and training providers—in order for students to pursue learning opportunities, build their skills, and achieve learning credentials.

5.3 Opportunities evolve from the school for creating and implementing adult learning and community development courses to be run within the school building.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Each of the case studies presented will provide you the opportunity to reflect on similar challenges that you may have experienced or witnessed in your organization. As you create a new process to improve outcomes in family engagement, there are tools and materials available to you that can be used to further your efforts to engage every family. Chapters 6–10 in *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles* (Constantino, 2021) include a deeper discussion of Principles 1–5, along with tools and materials that can be used to strengthen a particular principle in your organization. Refer to these chapters to get more ideas and more information about the Five Simple Principles and how they can be implemented and measured in your school.

Create a Culture That Engages Every Family



Source: Istock.com/SDI Productions

Principle I: The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to ensuring the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in artifacts and organizational practices.

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For more information, materials, and tools to support your work with Principle I, see Chapter 6 in *Engage Every Family* (Constantino, 2021).

CASE STUDY I.1 BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHT

Principal Scully checked himself in the mirror as he tightened his tie and slipped on his jacket. He was wild with excitement as he left his office for the hallway, looking forward to greeting families at back-to-school night. In his third year as principal at Blakely High School, Scully felt confident in his ability to lead change in a school that years ago had shifted from a majority white population of students to a heterogeneous community of immigrant families. The community was largely agricultural and industrial, and over the last decade, the school community had become home to a vibrant Haitian-Creole population of migrant families. Scully's family had emigrated from Ireland, and he had grown up with stories of hardship and the desire for belonging and acceptance. He valued these families as assets within the community and was eager to embrace a school-community partnership.

The faculty was ill prepared to meet the needs of non-English-speaking students and their families while other members of the community showed intolerance toward a changing demographic. Scully worked hard to develop trust with the faculty, and through a focus on teaching and learning, he was confident that things would turn around in the classrooms. While there had been achievement gains since Scully took the helm, the needle was slow to move. Significant gaps in achievement were evident among students with disabilities and the low socioeconomic population as compared to their peers.

Scully worked in earnest to shepherd the faculty toward new and better strategies to meet the needs of their students, many of whom were English language learners, but only a handful of early adopters, mostly novice teachers, were fully on board, and the resisters included a strong group of veteran teachers who shared war stories about “the way things used to be.” Teachers continued to complain that phone calls to parents were unproductive, conferences went unattended, and families were labeled apathetic.

Scully was convinced that getting the families of the struggling students into the school more often would help to build better relationships and change strongly held stereotypes. He enlisted a few of the faculty allies in the redesign of the historically poorly attended back-to-school night. Instead of trudging from class to class, families would visit the school for food and fellowship followed by a curriculum fair. He was excited to greet the families as they entered, especially those that would be new to the event.

As Scully walked about, he heard the whispers of the faculty: “This is another waste of resources—no one will show up.” His smile faded as he found the halls empty of all but those families who were always present. He wondered if the naysayers had been right, and he had been wrong. Making his way to the car, he noticed the circling lights of law enforcement vehicles stationed at checkpoints at each end of the street that ran in front of the school. They had been waiting for these families, too.

Stop and Reflect

- How would you describe the culture of Blakely High School?

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1. What problems are presented in the case related to communication? Bias? Relationships? Community culture?

ADVANCED THINKING

1. In what ways does the culture of the school community impact school efforts to engage families in the academic lives of their children?
2. What steps did the school miss in the effort to build relationships with the families of students, and how might the school correct them?
3. How might a collaborative effort between the school and community leaders, such as collective impact, result in a more positive outcome?
4. How might the school and community leaders work collaboratively to build relationships with all families?

POINTS TO PONDER

- While Scully had begun to prepare the faculty and staff to consider parents and families as partners in the academic lives of their children, he had not considered that the greater community didn't hold the same beliefs and values. It is important to keep in mind that not everyone on a school staff or in a school community will suddenly think that engaging families is a good idea.
- Schools are part of a larger community ecosystem. Personal belief systems play a powerful role regarding the desired family engagement outcomes. Families apply the very same thinking. Understanding that perception is reality for most people underscores the need to carefully examine the belief systems of people, organizations, and the school community.
- Redesigning current events and activities to be more engaging for families is only one piece of the puzzle. Many times, school efforts to increase engagement fail because of differing styles and types of communication between schools and families.
- It is a poor assumption to think that because someone is disengaged, the reason is always apathy. Often, those who disengage with schools do so because they do not see the value in their participation, the meaningful nature of what engagement looks like, or how the engagement is relevant to them.

Application of Ideas

Your Turn

Consider the case study you just read and think of a similar situation that you and/or your colleagues may have experienced in your school, district, or community.

Briefly describe the experience/situation:

How did the situation resolve itself? What did you do?

Reference and review the appropriate principle information. For more detailed information, see the corresponding chapter in *Engage Every Family* (Constantino, 2021). Once completed, reflect on your original actions and steps. What changes will you make should an issue like this arise again?

CASE STUDY 1.2 THE CLIQUE

Sylvia Cohen, the new principal at Brookmeade Middle School, was eager to meet as many parents as possible in her first few weeks on the job. An invite appeared in her inbox for the monthly meeting of the parent–teacher organization. Scanning the date and time, she was sure there had been an error—the invitation was for noon at the community country club. Sylvia was surprised when her secretary confirmed that this was the standard meeting time and place, but she was new to the community so perhaps this *was* the best time and place. After all, there would be more room for a large group there than in the available space at the school.

Stop and Reflect

- Do you think having a meeting at noon is an inclusive practice?
- Before reading on, what do you think the result will be?

When Sylvia arrived for the meeting, she was directed to a small table near the back of the club. She was greeted warmly by five women already seated. As they began to chat, Sylvia took note that all the women were like her—white—and were very familiar with each other, referencing shared vacations, visits to each other’s homes, and more.

“You seem to know each other and work well together,” Sylvia noted.

They told Sylvia that they lived in the same community, Barrington Heights, an exclusive neighborhood, and were members of Edgewood Country Club. Sylvia quickly realized that the organization’s board was not representative of the school population. Brookmeade Middle School equally served communities of privilege to the east and older communities of Black families to the west. Most families whose children attended the school did not live in Barrington Heights, and the students’ parents were not likely to be members of this exclusive country club.

“How many members does our organization have?” asked Sylvia.

“Well,” said Dorothy, the treasurer, “we only have fifty families who have paid their ten-dollar membership fee, but we have no active participants who attend meetings. It’s pretty much the five of us who do it all. When the annual election of officers comes around, it’s easy to find a slate of candidates; we just nominate each other! I was president last year.” The ladies chuckled at the comment. Sylvia forced a smile, but inside she was forming more questions.

Stop and Reflect

- Why do you think parents stopped attending these meetings?

“How do you plan to provide effective support to the school with only five active members in the organization?” asked Sylvia.

Dorothy was quick to answer: “We have an art auction each year at the country club, and that raises a significant amount of money. We also do a black-tie ball for Valentine’s Day. Between those two events and the personal donations we and some of our friends make, we have enough money to support the school and its activities. And of course, we support the teachers with lunches, gifts, and treats during teacher appreciation week.”

“How does the parent–teacher organization support learning and student experiences at school?” Sylvia asked. The group sat silently and glanced at each other and then back at Sylvia. They shared that as a group, they believed that it was the responsibility of the school to provide funds for classroom materials and events. They viewed their role as a complement to the existing budget for nonacademic events.

Art auctions? Black-tie balls? Personal donations? Sylvia was beginning to see why the parent–teacher organization membership was small. Sylvia knew that if the organization was going to represent all the families at Brookmeade and make an impact on student experiences in school, then a change had to come. Just what that change was going to be and how to go about it was the question.

Stop and Reflect

- How could this organization better be connected to student learning?

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1. What problems are presented in the case related to school culture?
Communication? Relationship development?

ADVANCED THINKING

1. Describe the current culture of the school. What beliefs, values, and assumptions may contribute to this?
2. The power dynamic in the parent–teacher organization is firmly entrenched. Develop a theory of action for Sylvia to engage every family and parent beyond the already engaged group.

POINTS TO PONDER

- In this scenario, the involved parents have seemingly worked in isolation, creating their own priorities and norms for supporting the school. As a new principal, Sylvia will need to reset the organization's focus by reframing involvement to include engagement in school experiences and promote more inclusive representation from the school community.
- Sylvia will have to build relationships with parents and families across the school community and find ways to unite them in a common purpose to support all students.
- School culture affects behavior and achievement of students. If not changed for the better, a school culture can become an obstacle to success and be oppressive for various groups.

Application of Ideas

Your Turn

Consider the case study you just read and think of a similar situation that you and/or your colleagues may have experienced in your school, district, or community.

Briefly describe the experience/situation:

How did the situation resolve itself? What did you do?

Reference and review the appropriate principle information. For more detailed information, see the corresponding chapter in *Engage Every Family* (Constantino, 2021). Once completed, reflect on your original actions and steps. What changes will you make should an issue like this arise again?

CASE STUDY 1.3 WE CAN DO THIS!

"The graduation rate at this high school is abysmal," said the superintendent. "We are putting you in there in hopes there is something you can do. By the way, you will be the third principal in three years." Brad wondered what he had gotten himself into. Union High School enrolled 2,700 students, had a free and reduced lunch rate that topped near 90 percent, and had a graduation index of 60 percent. Brad knew the odds were stacked against him, but he had waited patiently to become a principal, and now was his chance.

Stop and Reflect

- Given the data presented, especially the graduation rate, what course of action might Brad take?

Most of what he heard about the school and its community was not overly positive. Teachers complained of lazy students, and students complained of disinterested teachers. Significant issues with discipline and chronic absenteeism seemed to keep the school from its ability to focus on teaching and learning. But the worst set of data was related to dropout and graduation rates. Almost 40 percent of Union's students either dropped out or did not complete high school in four years. Few students came back for the summer session. Once they were gone, they were gone.

As the school year started, Brad visited classrooms, focusing on teaching and learning, but he could see that there was little student engagement in the classrooms. Students wandered the halls and skipped school. No wonder students weren't graduating on time! By the end of the first month of school, Brad was exhausted . . . but not defeated. He decided that the best way to solve a problem was to go directly to it—and he wanted to know which students were at risk of missing an on-time graduation.

One by one, Brad read the grade reports of the nearly 700 students expected to graduate at the end of the year, identifying the class or classes standing in their way. Among them, Brad identified almost 200 students whose graduation was in jeopardy. As he made the determination, he wrote a personal note to each one.

Dear _____,

I see that you are having a tough time with _____. I know that you might be worried about graduation or even thinking about giving up. Please come to the auditorium next Monday at 8 a.m. so that we can create a plan for your success. I will shake your hand and give you your diploma this June! We can do this!

Brad stuffed each letter in an envelope and mailed it to the student's home, hand-addressed to the student "and family."

Stop and Reflect

- Why do you think this strategy is important to Brad?
- What assumptions did Brad make as he launched his plan?
- Why did Brad hand-address the letters?

Several days later, Brad assembled school counselors and teachers in the auditorium to greet those students who arrived to take him up on his offer. Brad made remarks to a packed room: "I am glad you are all here this morning. I meant what I said in my note to you; I *will* shake your hand at graduation this June. For that to happen, I will need your help. Are you interested?"

The students all shouted, "Yes!"

"Great," continued Brad. "Your counselors and your teachers will create a plan for you to be successful. Your job will be to work that plan. We will create as many opportunities for your success as is possible. But you need to put some skin in the game, too! We can do this!"

The counselors and teachers went to work with their students on creating plans of action for those in attendance. As the last few students filed out and returned to class, Brad asked for the names of the missing students. He would be making calls that evening, and if that failed, then he would make a home visit.

Throughout the remainder of the year, Brad kept tabs on all 200 of the seniors at risk of not graduating, making frequent calls home, sometimes making home visits, and checking weekly grades and attendance. At graduation, almost all the students at risk for not graduating walked across the stage and received their diploma on time. The celebration was grand! But Brad did not give up on the other students who still had work to do, and he made sure that his leadership team reached out to each family to develop a plan for a summer session. For the first time ever, Union High School had a summer graduation and celebrated its first graduating class. As he greeted the families, he noticed they were admiring a cake that one of the parents had made. The icing on the cake read, "We did this!"

Stop and Reflect

- Why do you think Brad made such an effort to contact the students missing from the auditorium meeting?

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1. What problems are presented in the case related to culture?
Communication? Developing relationships?

ADVANCED THINKING

1. What about Brad's approach may have been different from that of other principals? Why do you think his approach was so successful?
2. Brad's action has sent a message to the school community about his beliefs, values, and expectations for student outcomes. In what ways can Brad parlay this into a shared vision and mission for the school?
3. What should the school do to elevate student voices in shaping the school culture?
4. What should Brad do next to build relationships and communicate with the faculty and staff? The families and community?

POINTS TO PONDER

- While Brad's strategy had a positive outcome and presents a quick win, it will take a more strategic approach to reset the culture of the school and unite the school community around a shared moral purpose.
- The student response to opportunities for success dispels the myth that they are unmotivated or apathetic, confirming that a culture, particularly one of low expectations, affects the behavior and achievement of students.
- Challenges to effective and meaningful family engagement exist for schools and families. In this case, the school seemed to fall into a spiral of failure and negative thinking. While some barriers to success exist due to limited resources, most originate from beliefs and perceptions of families, students, and school staff.

Application of Ideas

Your Turn

Consider the case study you just read and think of a similar situation that you and/or your colleagues may have experienced in your school, district, or community.

Briefly describe the experience/situation:

How did the situation resolve itself? What did you do?

Reference and review the appropriate principle information. For more detailed information, see the corresponding chapter in *Engage Every Family* (Constantino, 2021). Once completed, reflect on your original actions and steps. What changes will you make should an issue like this arise again?

CASE STUDY 1.4 THE TROUBLE WITH HENRY

No one can recall exactly when things changed for Henry McMaster. Most recently, Henry had steadily become more of a discipline problem in school with each passing day. At first, the infractions were minor—talking out of turn, showing up to class unprepared, acting somewhat insubordinate toward his teachers. When Henry found himself in trouble, he was sent to the school's main office.

At some point each day, Henry appeared in the main office and sat in a chair closest to the secretary, Camille Larson. Camille was a veteran staff member and had seen countless students sit in the chair and wait for an administrator to call them in. Camille couldn't put her finger on it, but something was different about Henry.

"Oh, Henry, not again!" said Camille. "What happened?"

"I didn't do anything!" Henry shot back.

Camille looked over the top of her glasses. "Henry, students are not sent to the office for doing nothing. Something has happened. Tell me what it was."

Each day it was the same: Henry in the chair and Camille talking with him about that day's infractions. The school administrators tried to help Henry, to no avail. When Henry needed to be picked up from school, either an aunt, another relative, or a neighbor would come to school to take Henry home. For as many times as Henry got himself into trouble, no one had ever seen or talked to either of his parents. But if documents needed to be signed, they were eventually returned signed by Henry's father.

Stop and Reflect

- What reasons or conditions might be in place keeping Henry's father from interacting with school personnel?

Henry was a regular topic of discussion among the student support team. Interventions, placements, changes in schedule—all these strategies were tried, but they all failed. It appeared that the more school staff tried to help Henry, the worse Henry's behavior got.

It was clear to many that Camille had a special bond with Henry. He was always polite with Camille and didn't argue or become angry if she was critical of his behaviors or actions. Henry talked to Camille in a respectful tone and listened and responded when Camille asked him to.

Eventually, Henry found himself in some real trouble. Henry got into a fight in the cafeteria, and this offense, along with his poor discipline record, could lead to Henry's expulsion from school. Henry sat in his usual chair, with tears welling up in his eyes.

"I guess I really did it this time," Henry said. "If I get kicked out, Camille, at least I won't be bothering you anymore."

"Henry, you do not bother me. I wish I could do or say something that would help you have a better experience in school. I worry about you, Henry, I really do." Camille was now almost in tears, too.

The invitation to the hearing was sent home by registered mail, and it was clear that a surrogate or substitute would not suffice. Henry's father was going to have to appear at this meeting if Henry had any chance of remaining in school.

Stop and Reflect

- What do you think of the way Henry's father was informed of the hearing?
- What might be going through Mr. McMaster's mind about this meeting?

Henry's father walked into the main office with Henry. He was dressed in a very expensive business suit and was talking on his cell phone as he entered the office. He looked up, saw Camille, and froze. The expression on his face was one of shock, as if he had seen a ghost. He asked Henry to go ahead into the conference room.

"You are Camille, aren't you?" He stared at Camille as if there were a problem.

"Yes, sir. I am Camille."

"And is this the chair where Henry sits every day after he gets into trouble?" He pointed to the chair in front of Camille's desk.

"Camille," Henry's father began, "I don't know how to say this but to just come right out with it. You could be the twin sister of my late wife. We lost her two years ago. I am beginning to piece this story together, and I may know why Henry finds a way to come and visit you each day."

Tears ran down Camille's cheeks. If she had only known. If anyone had only known.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1. What problems are presented in the case related to culture? Communication? Relationship development?

ADVANCED THINKING

1. Why do you think it took so long to piece together a reason for Henry's behavior?
2. What does this case tell us about the importance of building relationships with students and their families?
3. What could the school have done differently to engage Henry's father before Henry's behavior escalated? What can they do now to build a strong relationship with him?

POINTS TO PONDER

- School cultures that promote the academic socialization of families will be successful in meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students. In this case, Henry's father might have been invited to partner with the school staff to find a catalyst for his behavior and draft a plan for success.
- Henry's unique relationship with Camille shows how the adage is true that one caring adult makes a difference. School leadership must set high expectations for the engagement of every family and, along with staff, enact the beliefs and values of the benefits of engaging every family.
- While not clear in this case, the school's policies and practices might be revised to strengthen the communication between home and school, particularly related to student well-being.

Application of Ideas

Your Turn

Consider the case study you just read and think of a similar situation that you and/or your colleagues may have experienced in your school, district, or community.

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Culture is defined in a variety of ways and most often recognized as the beliefs, values, traditions, and rituals of an organization. A school's culture is evident in why and how things are done as the organization approaches its problems. Culture plays a dominant role in the exemplary performance of an organization (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The major indicators of improved school culture are collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy (Wagner, 2006). The degree to which educators and families work together toward a shared vision of student success is measured by how well they share information and develop connections to the school, and the degree to which all the members of the school community feel a sense of belonging in the organization.

Culture can be experienced through the senses: what people hear, what people see, what is being talked about, what is not being talked about, and how people feel. It is evident in the policies and practices of the school. As you explore your own culture, consider this: There is an important reason that culture is the first principle. Strategies to build communication, efficacy, and community will be influenced by the current culture and the readiness of your school community to embrace authentic family engagement. To sustain the other principles, the school culture must demonstrate consistent, tangible, credible, and measurable evidence that the culture of the school believes in and values the engagement of every family in support of student learning (Constantino, 2021).