

Teachers: Connecting family learning across settings

As a teacher, you not only help children learn in the classroom, but you are integral to supporting their learning across settings: school, home, and other institutions in the community. You can guide parents to discover local resources and activities for their kids that fit their schedules, budgets, and transportation needs.

The Families Learning Across Boundaries (FamLAB) Project recently surveyed 1,550 parents and 600 pre-K through grade 8 teachers in the United States to explore how they support learning across various settings for 3–12-year-olds. Here are some suggestions that build on the important work you are already doing to engage families.

What we found

Parents prefer to communicate with teachers by e-mail, while phone calls, text messages, and one-on-one meetings are tied as their second choices.

What to do

Keep lines of communication with parents open.

While most parents and teachers prefer e-mail, use methods that work best in your context. Besides phone calls, texts, and meetings, you may have other options, including classroom apps like [Class Dojo](#) or [Remind](#). Check with your school's administrators about what tools you can use.

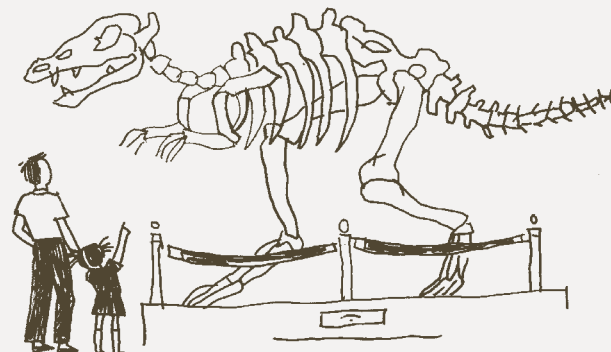
What we found

Over half (56%) of parents believe there aren't enough affordable, convenient activities for their children in their communities. Less than half (41%) of parents regularly ask teachers for tips about extracurriculars for their children.

What to do

Help parents learn about opportunities.

Check with your school's policies for sharing information about children's extracurricular activities; some schools may welcome the opportunity to share local activities with others on bulletin boards or by e-mail. Here is [a template for a spreadsheet](#) that you can use to invite parents to contribute their own suggestions.



What we found

The vast majority of parents report having access to libraries, but only 24% regularly visit them for help finding and selecting activities for their kids.

What to do

Collaborate with school and community libraries.

Invite a librarian or outreach coordinator to an open house to tell parents about upcoming activities and how to stay informed about programs at the library and in the community. Or collaborate with the library to schedule an event where families can learn about library offerings and strategies for finding high-quality programs that fit their needs.

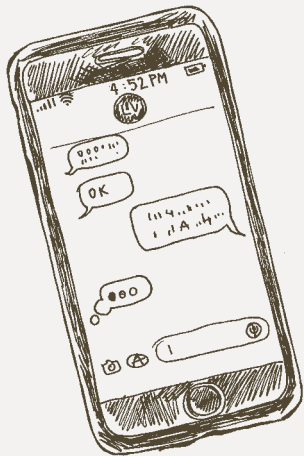
What we found

Many (40%) parents feel like they are different from most other families at their child's school.

What to do

Foster family-to-family engagement.

Many PTAs do a lot of great work to foster a sense of connection to the elementary school community. However, parents of younger children may appreciate more help in meeting other families through opportunities to volunteer for class activities and special programs. Teachers can also play a helpful role by connecting parents whose kids get along especially well or share similar interests.



What we found

Some (21%) teachers feel that it is difficult to relate to many of their students' families.

What to do

Offer opportunities to share family cultural practices or occupations in the classroom.

The entire community benefits from learning more about diverse experiences. Use tools like this Funds of Knowledge' [handout](#) to start these kinds of conversations.

Looking for more ways to build family engagement?

Read *Beyond the Bakesale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies. This book offers checklists to evaluate the strength of family-teacher partnerships at your school and tips for cultivating these relationships.

Consider asking field trip destinations, like museums, for complimentary passes for students to use if they return with their families.

For more about the FamLAB project and findings, visit:

joanganzcooneycenter.org/famlab.

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Joan Ganz Cooney Center

¹ Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.