

# SUPPORTING LGBTQ YOUTH THROUGH FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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## Overview

Families play a critical role in a student's social and emotional wellbeing as well as their academic performance.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that students whose parents are involved in their educational achievements are more likely to do better academically regardless of their parent's education level, socioeconomic status, and ethnic or racial background.<sup>2</sup> Additionally higher levels of school connectedness and family acceptance have been shown to reduce the behaviors associated with HIV and STI risk.<sup>3</sup> Engaging families and parents of LGBTQ students could help reduce behavioral risks associated with HIV and STI. Below you'll find strategies and resources to engage LGBTQ families - both LGBTQ identified students and non-LGBTQ students with LGBTQ family members.

## Strategies

Engaging families in a meaningful way goes beyond school events and parent-teacher conferences, family engagement requires parents, students, and staff to have clear expectations on how they are all involved in a student's success in school. *Connect, Engage, and Sustain* is a CDC framework designed for school staff to encourage parental and family engagement in school health.

### Connect

- **Provide multiple means of communication** between schools and parents. Ask parents their preferred method of communication. Ensure families receive written communication in their home language.
- **Emphasize the important role families play** in their child's social wellbeing and academic achievement. Create buy-in by educating parents on how their involvement correlates to student outcomes, link community and family engagement to student outcomes.
- **Focus efforts on relationship building** between community leaders and school district staff. Act as informational hubs for parents, educators, community partners, and volunteers. Hold events that celebrate the diversity of your school district.

### Engage

- **Support parent and caregiver learning** through workshops and classes around LGBTQ issues (i.e. LGBTQ discrimination and bullying, protective factors for LGBTQ youth, coming out, laws and policies that protect LGBTQ students).
- **Collaborate with your district's Office of Family and Community Engagement** around district wide initiatives to engage parents. Make connections to local and online LGBTQ resources for families.
- **Cultivate Parental and Familial Leadership Pipeline** - Identify and work with families who to want serve as leaders within programs or the larger community. Embrace partnerships and be open to sharing power with families. Encourage parents and caregivers to join sexual health advisory committees (SHACs), parent school community councils (PSCCs), and other decision-making groups.

### Sustain

- **Work with parents' busy schedules**, plan activities after rush hour traffic, make workshop classes available online via webinar or livestream, and schedule multiple time slots when needed.
- **Provide incentives** to parent engagement activities with meals and childcare.
- **Build the capacity of your district/school** by providing professional development opportunities around improving family involvement strategies.



## Resources

- **Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health** - A CDC framework for schools to use in engaging parents and families in school health. Strategies were developed and compiled by current experts in the field of family engagement. [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)
- **Promoting Parental Engagement in Schools to Prevent HIV and other STDs Among Teens** - A CDC info sheet for school districts that shares factors and strategies that decrease youth's sexual risk behaviors associated with HIV/STDS. [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/pe-hiv\\_prevention\\_rationale.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/pe-hiv_prevention_rationale.pdf)
- **Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit** - Developed by the National PTA this toolkit provides strategies to engage historically underrepresented groups to participate in PTA. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-pta/files/production/public/2016-Diversity-Toolkit.pdf>
- **Back to School Tool: Building Family Equality in Every Classroom** - Family Equality Council provides a list of strategies for LGBTQ parents and allies to advocate for inclusive schools that meet their needs. [http://www.family-equality.org/\\_asset/w2r1nf/backtoschoolupdate.pdf](http://www.family-equality.org/_asset/w2r1nf/backtoschoolupdate.pdf)
- **Indicators of Family Engagement Survey** - This survey asks school districts to self assess their family engagement practices and to determine if they have the needed structures in place to engage in meaningful parental engagement. [http://signetwork.org/content\\_page\\_assets/content\\_page\\_30/LA\\_SurveySCHOOLOct09.pdf](http://signetwork.org/content_page_assets/content_page_30/LA_SurveySCHOOLOct09.pdf)
- **Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)** - An online network for educational staff dedicated to improving family-school-community partnerships. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators>
- **Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Children** - A guide for families, caretakers, providers, and advocates for LGBT children. It provides basic information on how to support LGBT youth and shares findings from the research of the Family Acceptance Project. <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>
- **Responding to Concerns** - Human Rights Campaign project Welcoming School provides school district staff key talking points on how to address common anti-LGBTQ sentiments from parents. <http://www.welcomingschools.org/research/responding-to-concerns/>
- **Webinar Series: Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School, and Community Engagement** - This nine part webinar series gives an overview to best practices, current research, and new ways for school districts to engage families. [http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement\\_webinars/about.html](http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/about.html)
- **Family Acceptance Project** - A research-based initiative to prevent negative health and mental health outcomes of LGBTQ youth in relation to their families, cultures, and faith communities. <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

## Organizations

**Colage** - Colage is an organization that supports LGBTQ parents to be leaders in their communities by creating a network of LGBTQ parents. <http://www.colage.org/>

**Harvard Family Research Project** - Creates and provides parental involvement strategies to researchers, educators, parents, and school personnel. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement>

**Out Proud Families** - An organization that provides resources and workshops for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ youth. <http://www.outproudfamilies.com/>

## References

1. WH Jaynes *The Relationship Between Parental involvement and Urban Secondary School Student Academic Achievement: Urban education Vol 42, Issue 1, 2007.*
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3. Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, Bauman KE, Harris KM, Jones J, et al. *Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. Journal of the American Medical Association 1997;278(10):823-832.*
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.*

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