



Tabletop Session Summary

July 8, 2021

Partnerships for Family Engagement in High-Needs Communities

Presenters: Dr. Karen Perez Da Silva, [Regional Comprehensive Center 16](#); Dr. Olga Acuña, Dorotea Lopez, Lindsay Garcia, and Arcema Tovar from the [Hillsboro School District \(OR\)](#)

This tabletop discussion offered evidence-based strategies to engage families who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Session Highlights

- » The Hillsboro School District in Oregon is driven by the communities it serves. They have several district-level Parent Advisory Committees (PACs), some of which have organized over the last year and a half. Parents are leaders influencing policy, curriculum, and program development.
- » Existing research on family engagement has supported the idea that connecting with parents as equal partners can have a positive impact on student achievement.
- » At the school level, a PAC at Eastwood Elementary in the Hillsboro School District focused on Latino families and served as a bridge between parents and the school. Having a PAC enabled parents to have a safe space to connect, create their own agenda, and to organize events and conduct meetings in Spanish. Some of their specific recommendations included more bilingual teachers, professional development for staff on culturally relevant pedagogy, more afterschool programs focused on math and reading, and culturally relevant curricula.
- » To form a PAC, it is important to engage a diverse parent group, provide a safe space for different voices to be heard and to contribute to decision-making, and promote collaboration with other parent groups (e.g., the PTA). Establishing a PAC Agreement can help clarify the PAC's role in a school community.
- » Over the last four to five years, parent leaders in the Hillsboro School District have been involved in parent engagement research. The research revealed that the effects of parent engagement go beyond school involvement but also impact parent participation more broadly in their communities.

Shared Resources

- » [Hillsboro School District Family Outreach Liaison Job Description](#)



Questions and Answers on Partnerships for Family Engagement in High-Needs Communities

Can other family members participate in Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings other than parents?

Yes. PAC engagement is about the whole family. PAC members can include grandparents, aunts and uncles, foster parents, and other caregivers.

Can you discuss the Grow Your Own program?

The Grow Your Own Grant Award Program started as the district was struggling to hire dual language teachers. Grow your Own is a pipeline program to recruit students directly from high school to college and provides a summer internship opportunity to small cohorts of 15 students every year. Every summer, students work in the district, teach dual language courses, receive mentorship support, and create lesson plans. They build bridges and relationships with existing students by leading clubs and participating in several other activities. The program has had a great impact. Last year, the first cohort finished college and the district hired four students to become teachers.

Can you talk more about the Family Outreach Liaison position?

The district has a Family Liaison in Title I schools or schools with large Latino student populations. Parent leaders have advocated for having a Liaison in every school, and the district is almost there. Out of 37 schools, about 75 percent of schools have a full-time Family Liaison. As part of their work, they have four hours a week dedicated to reaching out to and supporting families. They connect families with community resources, outside resources, facilitate PAC meetings, etc. Essentially, the Liaisons serve as cultural brokers, supporting and building relationships with families and staff. Their responsibilities are not to take care of the academic issues. Instead, they facilitate communication between teachers and families. There is also an Education Liaison at the district level. It is a paid position, though the pay is higher due to more program management responsibilities.

How did the district initially recruit parents and families to join the PAC?

Historically, the PAC aimed at serving families in the Migrant Education Program. Over time, family engagement specialists and recruiters connected with families and asked them to join the PAC. Now, it is a more structured program, and many parents want to be part of the PAC. There are bylaws and agreements that parents must follow. The group reviews the bylaws each year to keep them updated. They also set goals each year and develop ideas to better support students, as well as to engage school leaders and more families.

Does the district provide resources to remove barriers for families to attend meetings (i.e., childcare, transportation, etc.)?

Yes. The district provides resources to support the school-based PAC meetings and provides workshops for families to attend. The district also provides childcare and bus passes.

At the school level, PACs receive support and funding from the principal's budget and sometimes the PTA when there are joint activities. Central Office PAC leaders are supported via allocations at the district level. Some funding also comes from federal programs like Title I, Migrant Education, and the English Language Learners program. There are also donations directed to family engagement efforts.



Where did the vision and commitment for starting PACs come from? What recommendations would you give to others who want to start a similar model?

The original vision for the PACs started with the Migrant Education Program about 20 years ago. Parents had many questions about access to information and programs available in the district. Parents shared that it was hard to give feedback to the schools and district when they understood so little about the system. Dr. Olga Acuna, Executive Director of Federal Programs, was working with the migrant families at the time and asked families what their needs were. The program started developing and offering workshops to parents about a range of school-related topics such as graduation requirements, the AVID program, report cards, etc. Eventually, the group expanded to ask what the district was doing to support Latino students and families outside of the migrant program.

For schools and districts who are planning similar work, it is important to have the participation of parents who will ask these critical questions. It is equally important to have a leadership that listens and is willing to engage with the families and work collaboratively.

