2022 Thought Leader Conversation Series
Pursuing Equity at the Intersection of Language, Culture, and Disability
Authentic Engagement of Families, Schools, and Community Partnerships

September 7, 2022
Welcome to this session on Authentic Engagement of Families, Schools, and Community Partnerships

When solving problems, dig at the roots instead of just hacking at the leaves.

Anthony J. D’Angelo
Welcome & Introduction to NCSI

The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) supports states to transform systems to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.
Welcome & Introduction to NCSI continued

We are committed to helping state agencies and their stakeholders understand the intersection of language, culture, and disability in education in order to resolve inequities that disadvantage students designated as English learners with disabilities or those who may be identified as needing special education services.
Session Agenda

• Introducing Our Thought Leaders
• Framing Today’s Session
• Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships
• Levels of Interaction Between Schools, Families, and Community Partnerships
• Essential Conditions Needed to Foster Authentic Engagement Between Families and Education Entities
• Practical Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families
• Future TLC Sessions
Introducing Our Thought Leaders
Today’s Thought Leaders

Dr. Julie Esparza Brown, Special Education, Portland State University

Dr. María Cioè-Peña, University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Cristina Santamaría Graff, Student Support and Diversity, Indiana University and Purdue University

Ximena Hurtado, Lee County School District

Debra Jennings, National Center for Systemic Improvement

Mireika Kobayashi, Cincinnati Public Schools
Session Objectives

Participants will:

• Learn about the systemic barriers that exist for families and community partners of students designated as English learners with disabilities

• Recognize the importance of honoring families as knowledgeable and valued members of their child’s educational team

• Explore meaningful and authentic ways to engage families and communities
Framing Today’s Session

This session centers families as experts and will explore the varying degrees of interaction between schools, families, and communities and the capacity building needed to advance levels of engagement to more authentic, deeper levels of interaction.
Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships
Family Experiences

• “Unless you’re an IEP mom, you have no idea what it’s like to dread every single interaction you have with the school”

• “The daily planner with a list of things the kid did wrong and nothing in 12 days of what they did well. I had even messaged [the teacher] this AM saying handle with care today.”
Family Experiences Continued

• “I was talking to María’s class teacher—, then I was talking to the speech therapist, so, María’s teacher left. They weren't all there until the end, no. [...] they finished what they had to say [and] left.” - Ana

• We sit. They tell me what the speech teacher says, and they tell me what his level is. [...] It will be] Short. Yes, because they are very organized, and they already have what they are going to talk about. They already have it there, in the moment. - Paty
“We know our kids have issues. I know what each of my kids brings and doesn’t bring to the classroom. But let’s help them grow together. My kids haven’t even been around other kids for almost 3 years. It’s why we put in an extensive reintegration plan. The worst comment one day was she is fidgeting with her fidget toy. Ahhhhh!!!! I’m done!!”
[My daughter goes with me [as an interpreter] to the meetings. There isn’t always [an official interpreter of the school] No. No. . . .Yes [I know it’s my right], but sometimes like there’s nobody available, for anything. So, I take my daughter, just in case. But it seems to me that it is not the same, right? As if it were us [speaking at the meeting].] - Sara
Family Experiences Continued (3)

“Since my daughter was born (and I was new to this country) In my country, we don’t have the same economic situation as you guys and we don’t have same kinds of services. ... So in that point, I felt very lucky. The other side of the coin, I was really, really confused because I didn’t know anything about those kinds of therapies. When the occupational therapist came into my home I didn’t know what expect, what is she going to work with? One of the things that we face as a Latina, we don’t know what those services mean. I have to learn in what way those services help my daughter.”
Family Experiences Continued (4)

“Navigating the school system was very confusing and complicated for me. Why?

• I did not know about special education law.
• I did not know about my rights and responsibilities.
• I did not know about related services that all the schools have to provide to the children according to their needs.
• I had never heard about IEP support
• I did not know that parents and schools are equal partners on the case conference committee and both share decision making authority.”
Family Experiences Continued (5)

“I did not swim the Rio Bravo to come here the Land of the Free and the Brave and the Land of Opportunity to see my child fail.” [This Latina/Mexicana parent worked with another Mexican mother who actually did swim across the Rio Bravo with her child with disabilities).
Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships

School/education partnerships with families of students designated as English learners with disabilities have faced many challenges for both families and educators.
Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships continued

For families, these challenges include:

- Little to no exposure of family engagement with educational entities at all levels (schools, districts, state departments)

- Some family engagement practices are rooted in White dominant culture, supporting middle-class families comprised of two parents that do not consider the needs of families who do not fit this traditional description
  
  - Parent participation in U.S. schools has been influenced greatly by White, middle-class values (Banks, 1998; Berger, 1991)
Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships Continued (1)

For families, these challenges include:

• Negative experiences with partnerships due to negative past experiences with schools and education systems
• Feelings of unwantedness or exclusion due to not being invited to contribute to their children’s education
• Feeling disrespected, unheard, and unvalued
• Culturally and linguistically diverse parents are often treated like empty vessels based on biases (e.g., racism, ableism) and stereotypes developed about the student and their family
Current Challenges with Family-Education Partnerships Continued (2)

For families, these challenges include:

- Little to no exposure to strong example of family engagement with families who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse
- Little to no training in engaging and partnering with families who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse
- Beliefs that do not value partnership with families as an essential practice
- Deficit mindsets that focus on language and ability differences rather than uplifting the assets students and families bring
- Blaming families and students for not being successful
Levels of Interaction Between Educational Entities, Families, and Community Partnerships
Levels of Interaction between Schools, Families, and Community Partnerships

- Given the challenges experienced by families and educational entities, it is important to explore the types of interactions that families and communities experience with schools, districts, and states.

- These levels of interaction are based on the collaborative work of a group comprised of families, educators, professionals from other child/youth serving systems, advocates, policymakers, and national and community partners.

- Although these levels of interactions may be perceived as satisfactory and inclusive of family engagement because they involve some type of communication or engagement with families, we have to understand that these interactions are NOT linear and each should encompass elements of humanization.
Levels of Interaction between Schools, Families, and Community Partnerships continued
**Informing**: sharing or disseminating information with others who care about the issue

- *Often one-way communication*
- Schools, districts, and SEAs often engage with families in an informing manner by ensuring materials and information are translated into home languages and accessible reading levels, also considering multiple modes of communication.
- Families of students identified as English learners with disabilities are often informed through initial communications in their home language through the initial evaluation process when their children are being identified for bilingual and/or special education services.
- Educators should expand engagement to include educating families and community partners with whom they are connected about the processes of bilingual and special education as well as what it may even mean to have a disability, as this may be new information to many families.
- It is important to acknowledge the family in its entirety.
Informing: sharing or disseminating information with others who care about the issue continued

• Siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and others are part of the village that raises, cares for, and uplifts the family unit and the student.

• The definition of a minority family is much broader than is typically acknowledged by the dominant culture.

• All family members should be considered “experts” and be invited to educational meetings, given an authoritative voice in decision-making and invited to capacity-building opportunities that typically only include parents.

• This inclusion assures that the barriers to meaningful and authentic stakeholder engagement are minimized.
Informing: sharing or disseminating information with others who care about the issue continued (1)

- Simple communication is not enough. Families need to be involved with the decision-making process from its inception through personal representation, individual expression, implementation, and action.
- Informing families what their roles may be in these processes are critical elements for schools, districts, and SEAs to consider as well.
- Also inform families of the resources that are available to support them in these roles, including OSEP-funded parent centers, disability groups and trusted community partners.
Networking: asking others what they think about the issue and listening to what they say

- Two-way communication
- Networking often happens at the school, district, and SEA levels as educators converse with families and community partners to receive input about certain issues.
- Authentic engagement means that families and others representing the voices of the students most impacted and/or underserved are intentionally included in these discussions.
- For families of students identified as English learners with disabilities, networking also happens through IEP meetings.
Networking: asking others what they think about the issue and listening to what they say continued

• Many educators believe that having families at the table during IEP meetings is sufficient. It is important to ensure families understand the full extent and reason for these meetings and are included as valued team members who bring a great deal of knowledge about their children.

• Families should also know that they can (and should) invite someone from their own network of support to attend IEP meetings with them.

• It is important that qualified and unbiased translators are in the room to mediate conversations between families and educators, ensuring the input from families is included in the actual IEP.
Collaborating: engaging people in trying to do something of value and working together around the issues

- Communication between all engaged parties can result in meaningful changes
- Collaboration between families and schools happens more often than collaboration between families and staff at the district and state levels.
- Collaboration in IEP meetings should include families of students identified as English learners with disabilities, communities, and education entities co-constructing a plan that is centered on the needs of the child. However, this does not occur in many instances when translators, families, and community partners are absent from these meetings.
Collaborating: engaging people in trying to do something of value and working together around the issues continued

• State and district leaders also have important roles in fostering collaboration with families and community partners to work together on school- and/or district-wide issues.

• Educators should value families and communities and their expertise about their children, honoring that expertise and contributions in a genuine way.
Transforming: Doing things The Partnership Way (leading by convening, cross-partnership engagement, consensus building)

• All interested parties work together to ensure the student gets what they need, truly viewing families and community members as partners who are critical to success

• Transformative engagement includes engaging families and communities as partners, system changers, and critical friends.

• Educators should understand that while families may not be familiar with the technical aspects of the system, they do know their children, what does and does not work for them, and their individual and community strengths. We must consider families not only as clients, but as parts of the processes in the system.
Transforming: Doing things *The Partnership Way* (leading by convening, cross-partnership engagement, consensus building) continued

- Schools, districts, and state departments must engage families and communities in transformative ways, understanding that this takes time and is not an easy process.
- Schools, districts, and state departments must unlearn many systemic policies and procedures to begin to authentically engage with families and communities outside of the typical compliance-driven processes.
# Leading by Convening Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADING BY CONVENING - Depth of Interaction Model</th>
<th>Informing Level (Sharing/Sending)</th>
<th>Networking Level (Exchanging)</th>
<th>Collaborating Level (Engaging)</th>
<th>Transforming Level (Committed to Consensus)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions to ask when considering power dynamics with parents/families</td>
<td>Whose knowledge is informing? How is &quot;success&quot; defined?</td>
<td>Is the 'exchange' mutually beneficial? Or is it still unidirectional?</td>
<td>Is collaboration authentic? When parents/families show up &quot;at the table&quot; are their voices truly listened to and acted upon?</td>
<td>Determine what &quot;consensus&quot; means. Is 'consensus' truly transformative for parents/families? What would it look like in schools for us to go beyond consensus to maintain status quo? In what &quot;space&quot; can parents/families drive decision for their children?</td>
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- **Movement of interaction** (consideration of intent, expectations, or overall vision)

Adaptation of "Leading by Convening" Interaction Model to Consider Power Dynamics between Schools and Families by C. Santamaria Graff (2022).
Essential Conditions Needed to Foster Authentic Engagement Between Families and Education Entities
Essential Conditions to Foster Authentic Engagement

For families to authentically engage with educational systems, there are conditions that must be met for this engagement to take place.

Process Conditions

Systemic or Organizational Conditions
## Essential Conditions to Foster Authentic Engagement

### Process Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A mutual trust must be created between families and schools, districts,</td>
<td>A mutual trust must be created between families and schools, districts, and state departments.</td>
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<td>and state departments</td>
<td>Asset-based mindsets and approaches from educators must be used, highlighting the strengths of the child, family, and community when engagement occurs.</td>
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<td>Cultural responsiveness, cultural humility, and respect must be valued and become normal conditions for authentic engagement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moving from compliance-oriented approaches to humanizing the children and families within schools at all levels (school, district, and state level).</td>
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Essential Conditions to Foster Authentic Engagement Continued (1)

Systemic or Organizational Conditions

Authentic engagement with families should be fostered across organizations at all levels and embraced by leadership, understanding that to get to transformative engagement with families, systems must begin to yield to the needs of families and genuinely encourage their participation in their children’s education.

Authentic engagement should be embedded in all strategies considering families of students designated as English learners with disabilities, moving beyond compliance-based approaches that limit how families are included in engagement.

All educators must be supported with thorough professional development in culturally responsive and sustaining methods, understanding how to engage with students, families, and communities at deeper levels.
Practical Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families Continued

Connect family engagement to learning and development

Engage families as co-creators

Honor family funds of knowledge

Create welcoming cultures for families and communities
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families Continued (2)

Connect family engagement to learning and development

• It is necessary that educators and leaders make efforts to understand families’ perspectives about key aspects beyond technical matters.
• Key questions to consider include:
  • How do parents and children understand disability?
  • What are parents’ theories about their role in their children’s schooling?
  • What is their understanding of how children learn to read and learn a second language?
  • How do they conceptualize children’s participation in adult activities and how these views relate to assumptions about authority and proper behavior?
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families Continued (3)

Connect family engagement to learning and development:

• Ask families about their long- and short-term goals for their child, beyond academics inclusive of social and linguistic goals.
• Use student- and family-centered planning during the IEP process.
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families Continued (4)

Engage Families as Co-Creators
Honor Family Funds of Knowledge:

• Family members—including children and youth—participate in multiple activities beyond the home that shape the ways individuals connect learning across multiple settings in strategic ways that are not necessarily determined by demographic and other identity markers.

• This point reminds us that families’ assets are derived not only from demographic and identity markers, but from their adaptive and strategic engagement with life demands and goals across multiple contexts.
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families (6)

Honor Family Funds of Knowledge:

- The idea of family routines as sites of learning and identity formation are grounded in an instrumental view of cultural practices that help to avoid fixed and monolithic visions of families defined solely by their demographics, such as ethnicity, language, national origin, socioeconomic status, etc.

- This is an important concept because we often hear advice about acknowledging families’ expertise in ways that can be unwittingly framed in stereotypical ways—which is even the case when we apply funds of knowledge, which has clear ethnographic roots.
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families (7)

Honor Family Funds of Knowledge:

An implication of these assumptions is that educators and school leaders will benefit from adopting an ethnographic stance when collaborating with families. The goal is to gain a situated understanding of families’ practices that may be mediated not only by their identity affinities (ethnicity, race, language, etc.), but also by situational demands in their contexts (e.g., work, safety, transnational networks) as well as institutional forces. In other words, families’ practices, actions, beliefs, and values are not solely shaped by demographics.
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families (8)

Create Welcoming Cultures for Families and Communities:

• Understand the communication needs of families and prove quality communication.
  — Some people think translations are enough, but more is needed.
  • On a general level, the difference between interpretation and translation is that interpretation deals with spoken language in real time, while translation focuses on written content.
  • This difference is important to note because those who are acting dually as interpreters/translators need to have high contextual and academic knowledge and proficiency in both languages to navigate effective communication.
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families (9)

Create Welcoming Cultures for Families and Communities:

- Families should be educated about certain processes in their home language.
  - For example, parents should understand the ways in which special education and bilingual education services are implemented.
  - The language of special education is very technical and includes many terms that do not translate into other languages.
  - Spanish Translation of IDEA terms: https://www.parentcenterhub.org/osep-spanish-glossary/
  - Korean Translation of IDEA terms: https://www.parentcenterhub.org/korean-english-glossary-overview/
Ways to Increase Authentic Partnerships with Families (10)

Create Welcoming Cultures for Families and Communities:
• Families should be educated about certain processes in their home language.
• Many parents are not engaged because translation services are not accessible and teachers assume the families’ absence is due to a lack of care, which is not the case.
• Expand methods of communication to use tools such as pre-recorded videos in families’ home languages explaining to them various processes as well as offering information to them on how to engage more with their community.
• Educators at all levels (school, district, and state) must ensure they are using personnel trained in interpreting and/or translating rather than simply designating an untrained bilingual community member (i.e., bilingual teacher, staff, service provider, and/or administrator).
There came a woman; She seems to like her job very much…she told me that I stayed just watching and listening. She gave opinions, and she stood as if she were on my side, asking them. [...]She gave many suggestions. I didn't know I could make that suggestion. The way I see it, she helped me a lot. [edited for brevity] – Carlota

“In my experience, the best experiences for my son, were when myself and the teacher and other partners within the school were able to work together and to really figure out what was better for him and help him get success.”
Session Evaluation

- We appreciate your feedback on our session today so we can continuously improve.
- Link to the evaluation is in the chat box or use the QR code presented.
- The evaluation link will also be emailed to registrants.

https://meadowscenter.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6QpAsmafMSYkQ2a
Thought Leader Conversation (TLC) Sessions

• Research-Informed Practices
  October 19, 1:00–2:30 p.m. EST

• Systems Coherence
  November 30, 1:00–2:30 p.m. EST
Where to Find TLC Information

Materials including the PowerPoint and recording from today’s session will be posted to the NCSI website under “News & Events.”

ncsi.wested.org
Where to Find TLC Information Continued

• Registration information for future sessions will be posted to ncsi.wested.org
• Please sign up for our mailing list to receive emails about future TLC sessions and registration details: ncsi@wested.org
Gratitude

• Thank you to our Thought Leaders for initiating and framing this important conversation.

• Thank you to all of you for your commitment to creating inclusive, equitable systems that support all students to succeed and thrive.
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WestEd is the lead organization for NCSI. For more information about the work of WestEd, NCSI, and their partners, please visit www.ncsi.wested.org and www.wested.org

NCSI includes staff from the OSEP funded Parent Training and Information Center and Regional Parent TA Centers and the OESE funded Statewide Family Engagement Centers.