

BUILDING TRUST WITH FAMILIES

About this Exploration Lab

TOPIC Identify the barriers to building trust with families, then discuss practices and potential solutions.

DATE 2/16/2022 **# OF PARTICIPANTS** 142 **LENGTH** 2 hours **FACILITATOR(S)** Dana Beck
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Exploration Labs are one of [NCCEP's strategies](#) to encourage the GEAR UP community to network, share, learn, and solve problems. Participants contribute ideas to crowdsource promising practices and potential solutions. The collective input of the group is synthesized in this brief Lab Report.

The challenge

Building trust with families is an essential and often overlooked element of successful family engagement.

WHY BUILDING TRUST IS IMPORTANT

Taking the time to develop trust creates an environment in which families can be confident that the information you are sharing with them is accurate and you have their best interest in mind.

- “Families tend to open up, share, and show a much greater comfort level in communicating.”
- “I witnessed academic improvement in students whose parents were participating in engagement activities.”
- “Undocumented parents allowed me to assist them and the student with financial aid.”

WHY FAMILIES MIGHT BE RELUCTANT TO TRUST

Participants identified myriad reasons why families might not trust GEAR UP programs or staff, including:

- Cultural differences and/or language barriers
- Distrust or bad experiences with school system
- Not familiar with the program, what it represents and what it can do
- No relationship with GEAR UP staff; perceived as outsiders to the community
- Too busy with jobs or other obligations
- Communication methods and/or programming that is not accessible or welcoming
- Schools are not supportive of GEAR UP
- Intimidated by anything related to college
- Frequent staff turnover

“ Parents who trust start to recruit other families and encourage participation. Parent peer groups are vital! ”

Ways to build trust with families

After identifying the reasons why families might not trust GEAR UP programs or staff, participants discussed solutions that have worked for them and brainstormed new ideas to try (in blue). Common suggestions are in **bold**.



BE WELCOMING AND ACCESSIBLE

- Create a safe space with an open door policy for families to feel welcome
- Be available and consistent
- Stay open to suggestions
- **Meet people where they are comfortable and connect in places they already go** (sporting events, in the community, at churches, etc.)
- Offer virtual programming options
- **Table at school events with GEAR UP information**
- Get a Family Engagement Bus to go to parents



COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

- **Communicate in multiple ways** (auto-dialers, email, personal phone calls, text messages, Google Classroom, flyers, etc.)
- **Reach out to parents when students do something awesome**, not just about issues/problems/concerns
- Follow up with families to build accountability
- Translate communications
- Communicate one-on-one
- Send positive postcards home
- A real conversation is always better than an email or text!



Receiving positive feedback [about their student] has engaged parents in new ways and led to others becoming more involved as well.



GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- **Share your own story** with parents; make yourself relatable
- **Ask families to share their story:**
 - What are the three things your family values the most?
 - What are the three things you want to instill in your student?
 - Encourage parents to bring family photos to show their student's support system
- Learn about family dynamics from students while giving out and getting permission slips. Ask questions like: "Who will be signing your permission slip? Who do you live with? What did your mom think about this trip?"
- **Make personal phone calls**
- Do home visits
- Send a monthly newsletter through Smore to students, families and staff – it includes some translation and accessibility features
- Use Remind, One Call Now or SignalVine platforms to text
- Use social media to get attention from students and parents
- Make communication simple/easy to understand for parents to engage



DESIGN PROGRAMS FOR SUCCESS

- **Get students involved** or have them plan the event and parents will come
- Have families support the event planning, and parents will always recruit other parents
- Offer babysitting and dinner
- Provide bilingual meetings and information
- Have students help translate to their parents
- Always combine parent and student programming
- **Survey parents** and provide programs on topics they need help with
- Provide one-on-one advising and direct help
- Have parents fill out surveys after events for feedback on future activities
- Give time for informal conversations and questions
- Shorten events due to parents' tight schedules
- Provide Individual appointment times for parents



PARENT PROGRAMMING IDEAS

- Parent advocacy group
- **In-person college field trips with families and students**
- “Coffee with GEAR UP” to ask parents directly what they need from staff
- **Parent appreciation night to show gratitude**
- Student Empowerment Tailgate Series during football season
- **Parent ambassadors or peer groups led by parents**
- Invite parents to a closing ceremony at the end of summer programs
- New school welcome meetings with personal tours for students and families
- **Invite alumni and their parents to share their stories with current parents**
- Bring a parent to school day
- Career exploration events that engage community



COLLABORATE WITH SCHOOL AND OTHER ORGS

- Use campus events to reach parents
- **Partner with the school, community, and other organizations for events**
- Meet with family at schoolwide events
- Ask administrators/school staff to participate in events
- Reach out to PTA
- Provide wraparound services
- Give postcards or magnets with contact information
- Join school open house and back to school events
- Join city events, particularly cultural events/holidays to be a community presence

Additional NCCEP resources

[Family Engagement Starter Kit for All](#) [free]

An introduction into five elements of family engagement in GEAR UP, this toolkit provides ideas and resources to kick off or revamp your family engagement programming.

[Study Lab](#) [\$]

Brief online courses for GEAR UP professionals. Explore topics specifically for family engagement specialists including communication and commitment to diversity.