



TRUST, TRANSPARENCY, and CAPACITY



**RETHINKING FAMILY
ENGAGEMENT**

*Across
Learning
Environments*

TALE Academy 

MODULE 5 - SESSION 2

A CONFERENCE STORY

When education professor Jung-Ah Choi attended her kindergartner's first parent-teacher conference, you can bet she came prepared with questions and discussion points. An academic in the field of education, Choi was excited to enter into a partnership with her son's teacher and looking forward to a conversation centered around learning and development. Skip to the end: the following quotation comes from Choi's article entitled *Why I'm Not Involved: Parent Involvement From a Parent Perspective*:

I left the conference feeling disappointed, humiliated, and dumbfounded. I had expected something fundamentally different. I expected to have a conversation with the teacher. I expected the teacher to ask questions about Michael's family life. I expected a true parent-teacher partnership for the benefit of his education. I expected the teacher to take an interest in my approach to raising Michael. But all I heard from his teachers – that year and the next – was information about where he stood on the spectrum from struggling to smart and where he stood on the obedience spectrum (from disruptive to respectful).

*Jung-Ah Choi, *Why I'm Not Involved: Parent Involvement From a Parent Perspective**

Choi goes on to detail the **implicit bias** that provided a basis for the teacher's assessment of her son's social interactions. She points to the absence of "genuine, **two-way communications**" that particularly hurts immigrant and non-white families like her own. Disinterest in her family's **lifeways** and her son's **funds of knowledge** deeply disappointed a parent who was primed by educational background, training, and disposition to be involved in school. Ultimately, Choi chose to politely bow out of interacting with teachers who did not get to know her or the cultural context in which she was raising her child.

FROM INVOLVEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

When I looked through the list of parent involvement opportunities, I found, to my dismay, almost nothing that would truly support learning.



When Michael first started school, Choi's email inbox was flooded with requests to help with fundraising, chaperoning, and organizing class parties. Choi's disappointment in her school partnership was also connected to the role she was allowed to have in the school. She recalls, "When I looked through the list of parent involvement opportunities, I found, to my dismay, almost nothing that would truly support learning." Under the terms of this "partnership," the teacher did not collaborate with the parent to support family goals, and the parent did not have a meaningful role in supporting school goals. Choi was left wondering, "Parent involvement for what?"

In her study of teacher perceptions of parent involvement, educational researcher Mary Christianakis observed that teachers equated parent involvement with parents providing free labor for teachers – specifically by managing student behavior. The teachers in the study, however, "did not talk about or treat parents as partners or intellectual equals...They did not collaborate with the parents to support home or family goals, as is implied by the term partnership..."

Parents can be viewed as uncaring or incompetent when they do not participate in school-approved parent involvement activities such as volunteering or attending parent-teacher conferences. In this view, parent involvement is a set of actions or behaviors that families must engage in to support their child's education and be seen as caring.

We can think of this as a **deficit-based** view of parent involvement. In this deficit view, parents are socialized as "passive listeners, clients, or fundraisers" to comply with school norms and agendas (Ishimaru et al., 2016). To move beyond a deficit lens, we have to demote traditional parent involvement activities and promote the **lived experience** of families in school environments. To develop a school experience that is respectful, inviting, and constructive, schools and teachers have to move beyond involvement to engagement.

Just as we take responsibility for engaging our students, we also have to take responsibility for engaging families in productive partnerships that support student achievement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

THE FOUNDATIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

Building Trust, Transparency, and Capacity

In a post for [Education Trust](#), Dr. Marissa Alberty writes that the key to mitigating unfinished learning from the 2020–2021 school year is family engagement. She details three principles that can help us move away from the outdated notion of family *involvement* and into the real action of family *engagement*. Each of these principles starts with an understanding that traditional forms of engagement are focused on middle-class, child-rearing values and resources, and may be neither accessible nor desirable for all of our families. Each requires educators to **rethink engagement from something families do to help us to something we do together to help students**. To develop authentic family partnerships that center student learning, Alberty advises us to focus on **building trust, building transparency, and building capacity**.



How TALE Can Help

Teaching across learning environments (TALE) provides us with two lenses:

— ★ ★ ★ —

Where do we see portable practices that can travel across learning environments? Building robust systems around video conferencing, class websites, and family check-in apps such as [Class Dojo](#) can help us shift between learning environments with ready-to-go tools.

Where do we see opportunities to embed promising web-based engagement into our in-person teaching? Tools such as digital surveys, digital scheduling, translation apps, video conferencing, and document collaboration tools help us move from a handful of “involved” families to a classroom full of “engaged” families.

1. TRUST

4

FACTORS THAT FOSTER TRUST IN TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Adapted from: [Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform](#)

Respectful Social Discourse

1

What does it look like?

- Established norms for listening and speaking
- Transparent agenda with time-keeping and facilitation
- Recorded action steps and follow-ups

Portable or integrated TALE practices

- Develop a password-protected [class website](#) where class meeting norms, agendas, and minutes can be housed.
- Create a live document of involvement ideas/a parent "bill of rights" in Google Docs where all families can contribute as ideas come to them.

Personal Regard

2

How is it earned?

- Warm personal style
- Willingness to reach out to families and communities
- Openness to others
- Efforts to establish a positive school/classroom climate

Portable or integrated TALE practices

- Create a digital communication log via [Google Forms](#) that will allow you to track when and how often you have communicated with families. Set a reminder in your phone to follow up.
- Encourage parents to use the [Remind](#) app to message other parents and share ideas (with or without educator involvement).

Competence in Core Responsibilities

3

What does it look like?

- Following up on conversations and interactions
- Fair, efficient, and effective management of classroom/school
- Responsiveness to feedback

Portable or integrated TALE practices

- Use back-to-school night or conferences to inform families of your communication methods and establish personal norms for speaking and listening. These can be done virtually or in person. Include a translator, if needed.
- Ask for feedback using web-based [surveys](#).

Perceptions of Personal Integrity

4

How is it earned?

- A demonstrated commitment to the education and welfare of youth
- A demonstrated commitment to keeping one's word
- Transparency about one's commitments and priorities

Portable or integrated TALE practices

- Tell your families about yourself! Use short (captioned, translated) videos to introduce yourself to families. Consider including details such as your mission and vision for the work you do.
- Use Google guardian accounts to give families access to daily, weekly, or monthly updates on what their student is learning in class.

Trust: We know it when we experience it, but what are the factors that foster trust between schools and families?

In 2003, Barbara Schneider conducted a [longitudinal study](#) of 400 Chicago elementary schools engaged in improvement efforts and found that **relational or social trust** played a central role in the success of such efforts. In schools with high levels of social trust, all parties understood one another's expectations and their own obligations, and the actions of principals, teachers, and parents validated those expectations. Schneider found that elementary schools with high relational trust were much more likely to demonstrate marked improvements in student learning.



Factors that Foster Trust Between Schools and Families

BUILDING TRUST: RESPOND TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

Family engagement professional [Madeleine Case](#) describes an opportunity to build trust that arose from challenges to the security of recent immigrants within her school community. The school's family engagement team held information nights for families to learn about their constitutional rights and assisted them in completing family-preparedness plans in the event of an emergency. The meetings were held in Spanish with translators present to support monolingual English speakers. These actions spoke louder than the words "All are welcome here" and established the school as a trusted resource for the community.

BUILDING TRUST: ELEVATE THE FAMILY VOICE

Holding information nights in the primary language of the community amplified the voices of families who have experienced marginalization in school communities. Holding information nights on subjects such as constitutional rights demonstrated an openness to prioritizing families' needs, perspectives, and priorities for their children. Opening channels of two-way communication to collect family input is not only critical to building trust, it is also a [driver of parent leadership](#) in a school community.

2. TRANSPARENCY

What does it mean to be transparent to our families, and why is it important? Simply put, transparency is the practice of sharing information regarding the school's successes and struggles with families. Think back to Jung-Ah Choi. For her, partnership meant sharing information about learning and culture. When parents like Choi know that their school isn't sharing meaningful information with them, or asking it of them, they may withdraw from engagement. Without family engagement, schools lose insight into factors that drive student performance – like cultural assets, motivation, and personal relevance.

TRANSPARENCY is the practice of sharing information regarding the school's successes and struggles with families.

Data sharing with the intent to create clarity, trust, and accountability is a way to engage parents in the core mission of a school. Parents need information they can use:

- What is their child supposed to be learning?
- Is their learning on track?
- What can they do to help?

The academic parent-teacher teams model (APTT) is a non-bake-sale approach to family engagement. In this model, traditional parent-teacher conferences are replaced by three data-sharing meetings a year. Teachers and parents gather to discuss learning in very specific terms. Each family also participates in a 30-minute coaching session between the teacher, student, and parents. Through this process, families gather concrete information on grade-level learning targets and their children's academic progress. They work with their teacher to learn skills and strategies they can use at home.

The APPT model is a great example of **capacity building**. Research into effective capacity-building interventions identifies "a set of process conditions [which] must be met for adult participants to come away from a learning experience...with new knowledge and the ability and desire to apply it."

The APPT model meets these conditions in the following ways:

- Connecting families to the teaching and learning goals for students
- Focusing on relationship building between home and school
- Empowering families and school staff to be confident, knowledgeable, and informed
- Conducting learning in group settings that promote opportunities for shared learning
- Providing opportunities to practice and apply new skills

3. CAPACITY



FROM CAPACITY TO DUAL CAPACITY

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework looks at capacity building in family engagement as two concurrent streams: capacities that are developed in families and capacities that are developed in school personnel. By providing training and professional development to teachers and families together, both parties can build and apply skills that enable them to be confident, active, and knowledgeable partners in the effort to improve student achievement.

OUTCOMES OF DUAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

Effective School-Family Partnerships

Support School Improvement

Boost Student Achievement

SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS:

- Can honor families' funds of knowledge
- Can bridge family engagement and student learning

FAMILY ROLES:

- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Mentors
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Collaborators

YOUR TURN!

Check out the choice board for this session to learn more about academic parent-teacher teams and dual capacity-building.

Consider how you can build trust, transparency, and capacity in your family relationships across learning environments.

For the microcredential, take a deeper dive into integrating dual capacity-building into your family engagement practice.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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