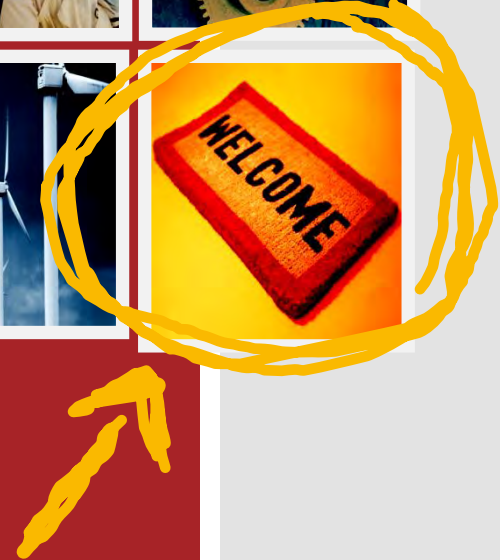# Creating the Welcoming Environment

Webinar Series from ISBE's Draft Family Engagement Framework Guide

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Why are We Here Today?

Participants will <u>discover</u> the plethora of innovative strategies, tools and web based resources available by ISBE through the Family Engagement Tool and Illinoisparents.org website <u>to support implementation of building a welcoming and supportive environment</u>.

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Our Presenters

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How to Participate in Today's Webinar

Questions:
The presenter will respond to your questions during the presentation at identified times.
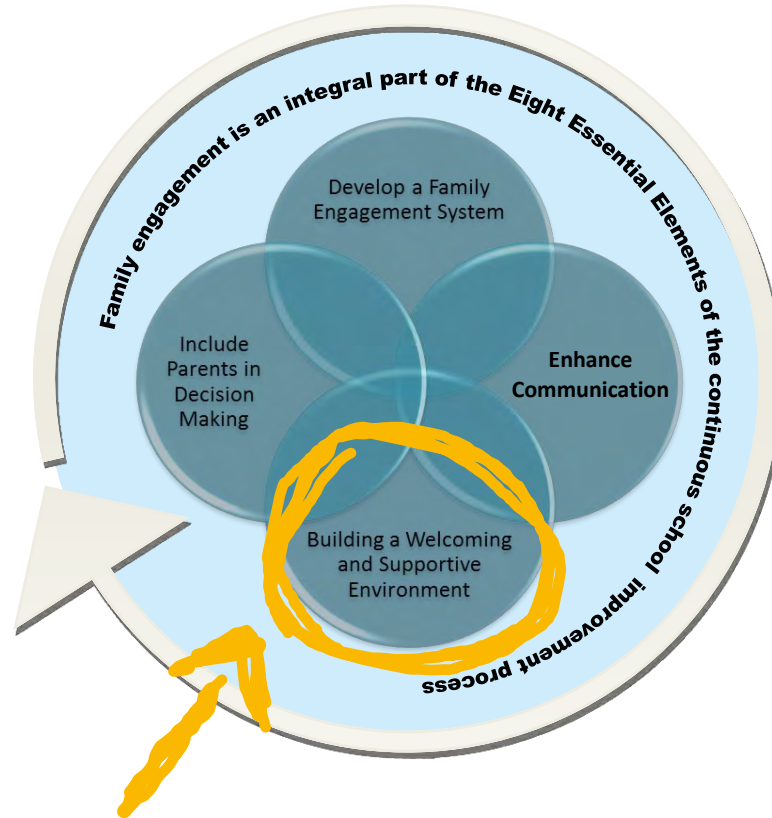
Participation instructions:
Type your question/comments into the Question Box

ISBE Family Engagement Framework Guide Overview

Family engagement is an integral part of the Eight Essential Elements of the continuous school improvement process

- Develop a Family Engagement System
- Include Parents in Decision Making
- Enhance Communication
- Building a Welcoming and Supportive Environment

- Districts and schools partner with families
- Families are engaged on a regular basis and are seen across the 8 Essential Elements
- When critical stakeholders partner, educational systems are stronger and more effective

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Evidence-Based Practice:
The Research Review

Family Engagement Standards of Effective Practice

Principle 2:
Build a Welcoming Environment

District and school personnel foster a welcoming environment for families that is responsive to student and family needs.

Standards:
2A. District and school personnel, families, and community members acknowledge a shared responsibility for the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development of youth.

2B. District and school personnel develop relational trust with families and community members.
- 2B.1. District and school personnel listen to family and community members and respect their opinions.
- 2B.2. District and school personnel show personal regard for their students, their families and the community.
- 2B.4. District and school personnel have the knowledge, skill, and capacity to follow through on their commitments.
- 2B.5. District and school personnel demonstrate integrity by being transparent, acting in an ethical manner, and following through on commitments.

2C. District and school personnel reach out to families to support student learning and healthy development.

2D. District and school personnel are responsive to student and family needs.
- 2D.1. District and school personnel learn about the children and families in the community.
- 2D.2. District and school personnel effectively engage parents from diverse backgrounds.
- 2.D.3. District and school personnel utilize a strength-based approach when responding to student and family needs.

2E. District and school personnel share student accomplishments with his/her family.

Notes

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What Do We Mean by Creating a Welcoming and Supportive Environment?

District and school personnel are **responsive to student and family needs**

Stakeholders acknowledge a **shared responsibility** for student achievement and healthy development

District and school personnel develop **relational trust** with families and community members.

District and school personnel **reach out to families** to support student learning and healthy development.

District and school personnel foster a welcoming environment for families that is responsive to student and family needs.

District and school personnel **share student accomplishments** with his/her family.

Alignment with the Continuous School Improvement Process

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

COMMUNITY & FAMILY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CURRICULUM

CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT

LEADERSHIP

We engage families as partners in all aspects of building effective schools

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Family Engagement Tool

A Tool to Assess and Plan

Purpose

The Family Engagement Tool guides a <u>school-based team</u> through an inventory and self-assessment of parent involvement policies and practices.

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A Tool to Assess and Plan

Time Commitment
The time investment necessary to complete the analysis process is approximately 5 to 6 hours.

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Additional Resources

Resource Menu

| Home | Shared Leadership | Goals and Roles | Communication | Education | Connection | Additional Resources |

Connection...

Face-to-face association; forming common understanding; engaging in common experiences

Connections at School

- **Parent Rooms**—Often equipped with books, parenting materials, and information on how to support learning beyond the classroom hours, parent rooms can also provide space for parent workshops and a place where parent groups can meet. There are plenty of ideas to consider in this section when establishing a parent room at your school.

  🎞 **Parent Room**

- **Open House**—Open house is the perfect opportunity to convey to parents that success in school depends largely on what goes on at home. Use our tips and tools to help you get these important learning conversations started with families.

  🎞 **Open House**

- **Parent-Teacher—Student Conferences**-A Parent-Teacher-Student Conference is the best opportunity to get all the invested parties to the table joined in one conversation about student progress. These conferences can be very effective if a few principles are followed. Use these tips and ideas to organize your conferences and help to move conversations toward unified strategies centered on unified goals.

- **Family Nights**—Common experiences work to strengthen relationships. When families and schools come together while reinforcing one or more of the school community's goals, the experience becomes especially valuable. There are plenty of ideas and tips in this section to help your school organize family nights with a focus on your school's goals.

  🎞 **Family-School Nights**

- **Creating a Welcoming Place with Welcoming Place Walk-Through and Checklist**—The school must be a safe and orderly environment where learning can take place. Procedures should be established and other elements in place that make a visit to the school a pleasant experience for families and other visitors while keeping students safe. Our tips and ideas will give you plenty to consider in creating a Welcoming Place at your school.

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A Web of Resources

Provided by Illinois State Board of Education in partnership with Academic Development Institute and Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative at UIUC

A Welcoming Place

A <u>safe place</u> for students and teachers and

An <u>orderly place</u> where learning can happen.

Characteristics of a Welcoming Place

Characteristics:

1. The school telephones are answered by staff who are pleasant, cheerful, and helpful.
2. All staff- including teachers, teachers' aides, clerks, custodians, cooks and others-greet visitors in the hallway in a pleasant helpful manner, to solicit their needs, and to direct them to the office.
3. Office staff greet visitors promptly, cheerfully and helpfully.
4. There are written procedures regarding visits by parents to their children's classroom.

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Characteristics of a Welcoming Place

Characteristics continued:

5. The signs that greet visitors outside the door and in the hallways are friendly while also being clear about the expectation that visitors register in the office.
6. The school provides special attention to welcome families that are new to the school.
7. The school has clear expectations of all school staff that they address students and parents respectfully.
8. The school makes every effort to minimize interruptions in the classrooms, including the frequency of announcements.

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Creating a Welcoming Place

Training for Support Staff:

Procedures 101

- Discuss the importance of parents in the work of the school.
- Discuss friendly and helpful ways to answer the telephone.
- Discuss greeting visitors, listening to them, and offering help.

Creating a Welcoming Place

Ask the following questions:

1. Is advance notice required? If so, how much in advance? Whom does the parent call to request a visit? Where does the visitor first report when entering the school?
2. How is the teacher notified?
3. What is the role of the parent when visiting? Where is the parent to sit? How much is the visitor to be involved?
4. What is the role of the teacher?
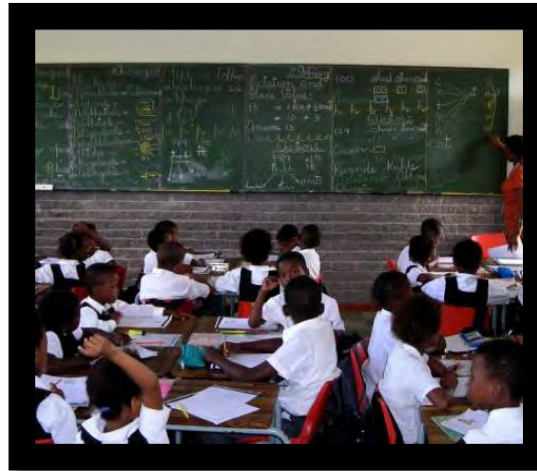
Classroom Visit Guidelines

Procedures include:

➢ A provision that advance permission is requested,

➢ Procedures to notify the teacher,

➢ A friendly hand-out for visiting parents to explain their role in the classroom-where they should sit and what the teacher will expect them to do, and

➢ Guidelines for teachers to greet parents warmly and explain to them what is going on in the classroom.
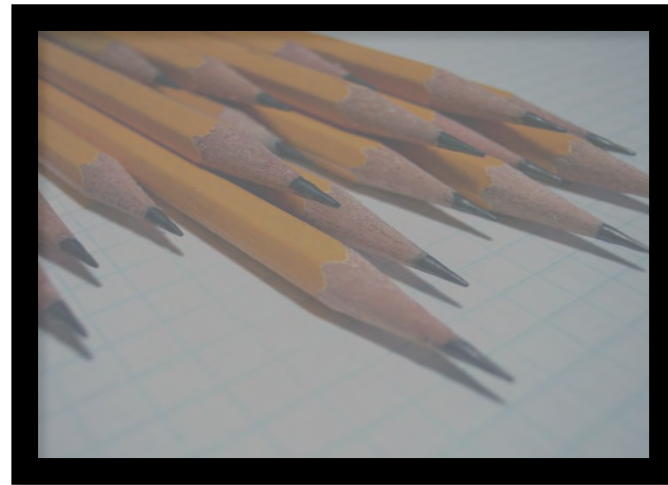
Classroom Visit Guidelines

Classroom Visit Procedures Worksheet

Review the current procedures for parents visiting the classroom using the rubric below.

If the school has no procedures in writing, use the rubric as a resource to develop procedures.

Elements of Classroom Visit Procedures	Score	Criteria for Scoring The classroom visit procedures...
Score Guide: 0 = No evidence of criterion being met, 1 = Evidence that criterion is met		
1. Discusses the importance of parents in their children's learning.		Includes a statement of the importance of parents in their children's learning and the school's encouragement of parent participation.
2. Written in friendly and welcoming language		Is written with parents as the intended audience, in language that is friendly, welcoming, and translated into the major languages spoken by the families in the school.
3. Either states that no advance notice is required or specifies how much advance notice is required.		Explains the school's procedures for scheduling and advance notice for classroom visits.
4. Tells the parent who to call to set up a visit.		Provides the name, position, a telephone number, and email to call/contact to schedule a visit.
5. Tells where the visitor first reports when entering the school.		Gives directions for where the office is located and check in procedures.
6. States how the teacher will be notified of a visit.		Explains how the teacher is notified that a visit has been scheduled or, when advance notice is not required, how the teacher will be informed that the parent is in the office and will soon be

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Classroom Visit Guidelines

Resources for Classroom Visits

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 85 & 90).

Classroom visits give parents a front-row seat on what happens at school. Parents may know something about standards, but they probably don't know what a standards-based classroom looks like. How do teachers structure lessons so that students do research, solve real-world problems, and pursue their own interests? What are the critical thinking skills and how do teachers develop them?

Start the school year with "Check Out the Classroom" days and encourage families to visit throughout the year. For families who can't come during the day, demonstrate lessons at curriculum nights, book fairs, Saturday academies, and other family events. In middle and high schools, parents can "shadow" their students, following them from class to class during a morning or afternoon.

Preparing Parents to Work in the Classroom

Although volunteering in the classroom is a good way to see what students are learning, many parents don't feel confident taking on that task. Mary Lou Amato, a principal in Los Angeles, has this advice: "We had a big push to get parents involved in the classrooms and it didn't work. There were language issues, and parents felt they lacked content knowledge. Then parents came up with an interesting idea: why can't we work in the parent center to support the teachers? This was a big stepping stone to getting parents into the classrooms. The Open Court reading program has take-home books and other things that need to be put together. Parents were proud to do that and bring them to the teacher. They started reading things. They felt productive and that they were doing something important. Then they were ready to go into the classroom."

By the time students are in middle and high school, many of their mothers are working full time. Instead of volunteering in the classrooms during the day, parents can run a student study center after school. Teachers can help parents develop the program and learning materials such as prac-

A Welcoming Place Plan

The plan offers:

1. A training session for our support staff.
2. A review of our "safe and friendly school" procedures with teachers and parents.
3. A walkthrough, from the parking lot through halls, offices, and classrooms to note signs, decorations, displays of student work, welcoming appearance, and direction.
4. A way to systematically ask parents for feedback on how welcome they feel in the school and ask them for suggestions.
5. Procedures about classroom visits for teachers and parents.
6. A welcome letter for parents who visits classrooms.
7. Ways to welcome families that are new to our school.

http://www.indistar.org/VideoPlayer/Videos.aspx?VideoGroupID=27

Welcoming Place Action Plan

Welcoming Place Action Plan Worksheet

After reviewing the Welcoming Place Walk-Through Report and Next Steps and Priorities, develop a 3-month plan to address the areas in need of improvement.

Welcoming Place Action Plan		
	Target Date	Person Responsible for Monitoring Progress and Reporting Back to SCC:
Checklist item in need of improvement:		
Task 1:		
Task 2:		
Task 3:		
Checklist item in need of improvement:		
Task 1:		
Task 2:		
Task 3:		
Checklist item in need of improvement:		
Task 1:		
Task 2:		
Task 3:		
Checklist item in need of improvement:		

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Questions for Reflections
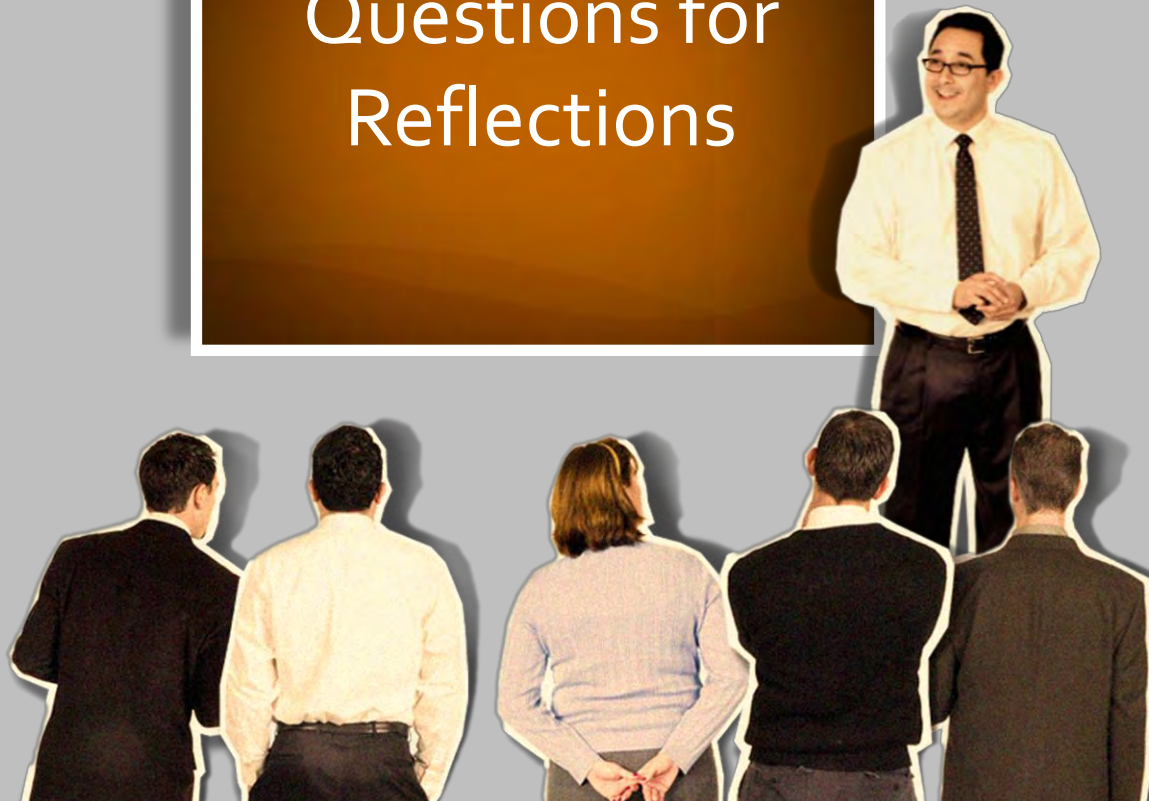
Next Steps: What Will You Do?

Thank you for participating!

We can help you to build strong school communities within the schools you serve.

All webinar sessions are recorded and posted to the *Tool Box* page at *IllinoisParents.org*.

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