PBIS Forum 17 Practice Brief:
Defining and Promoting Family Engagement in School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Overview of Family Engagement

Family engagement is defined as the "beliefs, attitudes, and activities of families to support their children's learning" (Weiss, Lopez, Kreider, & Chatman-Nelson, 2014, p.viii). A review of responses gathered during the a roundtable dialogue on family engagement at the 2017 PBIS Leadership Forum highlighted the differences between how educators and parents view parents' participation in their children's education. Educators were asked about goals of family engagement. The top four goals educators reported their teachers had for families were to (a) be involved in education (e.g., attend events), (b) support teacher decisions without questioning, (c) communicate, and (d) help children attend school. Conversely, the top four goals educators reported their families had for teachers were (a) safety (e.g., physical and emotional security); (b) learning; (c) being treated kindly, respectfully, and fairly; and (d) communication. These descriptions are consistent with terms "Schoolcentric" and "Communitycentric" that describe educator and parent or community stakeholder perspectives, respectively (McIntosh & Rose, 2016). A schoolcentric perspective may include parent involvement "…in activities that are structured and defined by schools" (Lawson, 2003, p.79). A communitycentric perspective may refer to "parents who must work long hours to ensure that their children's basic needs are met while safeguarding them from getting involved in unsafe activities like gangs and drugs" (Lawson, 2003, p. 91). Although schoolcentric and community centric viewpoints focus on children, family engagement that contributes to positive student outcomes is grounded in authentic participation built on trust, communication, shared responsibility and decision making between home and school (Weiss et al., 2014). This Practice Brief illustrates the components and benefits of family engagement within the PBIS framework based on Weiss et al. (2014) and takes into consideration educators' and parents' views of engagement (Lawson, 2003).

Research Support for Family Engagement

There are numerous benefits associated with family engagement in education, including but not limited to the following:

- higher levels of academic achievement (across SES levels, race/ethnicity, or parental education)
- improved attendance
- self-esteem
- fewer disciplinary problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017)

Family engagement is associated with development of early literacy skills (Caspe & Lopez, 2017). Interventions developed within the context of home-school collaboration are associated with improvements in behavior and the parent-teacher relationship (Sheridan et al., 2012). Finally, family engagement can lead to implementation of culturally-responsive interventions and systems in schools (Garbacz et al., 2017).

Core Features

Core features of family engagement in PBIS are those that are hypothesized to produce improvements in valued outcomes (Embry & Biglan, 2008; Horner & Sugai, 2015). Specific features emanate from conceptual frameworks to organize family engagement in PBIS (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002; Garbacz et al., 2016; Minch, Vatland, Winneker, Gaunt, & Williams, 2015) and core properties of family engagement (Christenson

S. Andrew Garbacz, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jennifer J. Rose, Loyola University Chicago; Mark D. Weist, University of South Carolina; Kent McIntosh, University of Oregon

& Sheridan, 2001). Research investigating family engagement in PBIS is progressing apace, but much work is still needed to empirically determine the core features of family engagement in PBIS.

Based on the research and conceptual work to date, Garbacz (in press) identified three core features of family engagement in PBIS based on existing related frameworks and models (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Fette et al., 2009; Horner, 2017). The core features of family engagement must be considered within a culturally responsive framework and implemented so all families have equitable opportunities to engage in ways that are consistent with their cultural and familial values and beliefs (Leverson, Smith, McIntosh, Rose, & Pinkleman, 2016; Mapp & Hong, 2010). First, families should participate in PBIS through activities such as participating in school meetings, co-developing plans, and helping to increase understanding of school expectations for children and families. Second, families use PBIS at home. The school can develop a home PBIS matrix to support families in teaching and acknowledging expectations at home. In addition, families can create an approach for learning at home to occur. Third, families and school staff communicate effectively. Schools inform families about child needs, and schools and families discuss strategies to support and align academic and behavior systems across school and home.

Family and School Indicators of Family Engagement

Indicators of family engagement have been defined using the following terms: "parenting," "communicating," "supporting school," "learning at home," "decision making," and "collaborating with community" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p.22). Traditionally, family engagement has been tied to school-centered activities without consideration of the possible role of families as equal partners in the educational process (Weiss et al., 2014). Thinking about family engagement as a partnership encourages examination of how schools incorporate families into the decision making process and the extent to which families feel welcome within their children's schools. Some important indicators of a school's commitment to family engagement include (a) employing administrators and staff who support inclusivity and shared decision making; (b) understanding that some parents lack knowledge about the educational system and are willing to do the outreach to disseminate this information; (c) understanding that parents face work-family conflicts that may make attendance at traditional school events difficult, (d) and thinking 'outside of the box' regarding interacting with families. In turn, indicators of families being engaged in school include parents (a) conveying high expectations for learning and behavior, (b) assuring their children are ready to learn on all school days (e.g., rested, well fed, appropriately dressed), and (c) keeping up with and being involved in school events. Family and school indicators must be considered when examining whether the core features of family engagement in PBIS.

Family Engagement Measures

Developing a plan for measuring family engagement in PBIS is essential to identify strengths and needs, develop goals, create an action plan, and measure progress toward goals. Assessing school readiness to implement a schoolwide family engagement program is an important first step (Fosco et al., 2014). After readiness is established, school personnel and family members collaboratively identify valued outcomes. Once the family engagement systems and practices are developed and implemented, progress towards valued outcomes is measured. Valued outcomes will be unique to each school and family, but may include child behavior at home and school, family engagement, parent-teacher relationships, parent knowledge of PBIS and use of problem solving approaches, and improved school climate. In addition, it may be useful to examine

S. Andrew Garbacz, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jennifer J. Rose, Loyola University Chicago; Mark D. Weist, University of South Carolina; Kent McIntosh, University of Oregon

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family and school staff satisfaction with the family engagement approaches. Table 1 includes domains that may be measured along with measures for consideration. Many of these measures allow for parents and educators to report from their perspective. When measures do not have parallel forms, they can be adapted so similar information can be gathered from different perspectives. There are several measures available; thus, Table 1 is meant to offer examples of domains and measures that could be examined and are readily available.

Table 1. *Family Engagement Measurement Strategies*

Domain of Measurement	Name of Measure	Reference
Readiness	*Inventory for Creating School-Family Connections: Approach, Attitudes, Atmosphere, and Actions*	Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. Available from https://www.extension.umn.edu/family/school-success/professionals/tools/creating-constructive-connections/
Family survey	*Stakeholder Input and Satisfaction Survey*	Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on PBIS (2017). *Stakeholder input and satisfaction survey – Family (SISS Family).* Available from http://www.pbis.org
Family Engagement	*Parent and Teacher Involvement Measure – Teacher*	Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (1991). *Parent and teacher involvement measure – teacher.* Retrieved from http://www.fasttrackproject.org
School Climate	*School Climate Survey Suite*	La Salle, T. P., McIntosh, K., & Eliason, B. M. (2016). School climate survey suite administration manual. Eugene, OR: OSEP Technical Assistance Center of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. University of Oregon.

Strategies to Address Common Barriers to Family Engagement

Trust is an integral element to fostering family engagement (Weiss et al., 2014). However, in communities where parents have a history of negative interactions with the school system dating back to their own schooling, the process of building a trusting relationship seems daunting, if not impossible. Furthermore, parents may not view their child's academic performance or behavior in the same light as educators. Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) is a solution-focused problem-solving model that provides a framework for home-school collaboration at Tier III. Three guiding principles drive the focus of CBC: (a) build parent and teacher competences and skills in evidence-based practices, (b) develop and strengthen family-school partnerships, and (c) promote positive outcomes for children (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). CBC is a natural fit within the context of PBIS because the consultation model is an integration of behavior and ecological systems theories (Wilkinson, 2006). The focus on data-based decision making and delivery of consistent messages across school and home is an added value of CBC (Garbacz et al., 2015). CBC is effective in addressing a range of student concerns ranging from behavior (e.g., disruptive,

S. Andrew Garbacz, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jennifer J. Rose, Loyola University Chicago; Mark D. Weist, University of South Carolina; Kent McIntosh, University of Oregon

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anxious, depressive) to academic concerns (Sheridan et al., 2012; Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001) and with students from culturally-linguistically diverse backgrounds (Garbacz et al., 2017). Schools may consider tapping into community partners to connect with families, especially for newcomer families who are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system (Lopez & Weiss, 2014). Including parents who represent the school and its PBIS systems as members of school committees can be welcoming for parents who may be intimidated by joining organizations whose membership is not inclusive. In addition, information could be gathered from parents through surveys to learn about their work schedules and current efforts to support their children's learning. Then, information from surveys can be used to schedule meetings during times and at locations that are convenient for parents and address topics that are relevant to them. Finally, educators can reflect honestly on their own biases regarding families and family engagement, especially families from backgrounds that differ from their own. Unconscious imposition of one's values can have the unintentional effect of pushing some families away (Leverson et al., 2016).

Family Engagement for Underserved Families

Research supports the relationship between family engagement and academic achievement for children from underserved families. However, because these families face multiple life obstacles (e.g., work schedules that conflict with the school day, transportation issues, economic challenges, community violence, language barriers), connecting with these families can be challenging. Too frequently when parents attend teacher conferences, they are overwhelmed with information that is not decipherable to the layperson (e.g., standardized test scores). Or, they face a barrage of information about their child's academic and/or behavioral challenges. Minkel (2017) provided three suggestions of how educators can help the experience of meeting with the teacher be more welcoming for underserved families. First, start with emphasis of the child's strengths. Begin any meeting on a positive note and convey positive impressions and feelings of genuinely caring for the child. Second, listen to families. Do not assume that because they don't make school events that they're not interested in their child's education. A conversation where a parent feels safe can lead to sharing information that can help you better support their child's learning. Third, ensure that your classroom reflects the culture of your students and your instruction includes opportunities for them to make connections between their lives and the curriculum.

Family Engagement Approaches at Tier I, II, and III

Family engagement integrated in PBIS follows from the valued outcomes and are aligned with core features (Dishion, 2011; Garbacz, in press; Garbacz et al., 2016) and includes families engaging in School-wide PBIS, using evidence-based positive behavior support approaches at home, and communicating effectively at Tiers I, II, and III. At Tier I, families are co-equal stakeholders and partner with school staff to identify, develop, and refine School-wide PBIS. Families should be included in PBIS events and efforts should be made to increase their knowledge about School-wide PBIS approaches. A home matrix and associated technical assistance can help extend the evidence-based positive behavior support practices from school to the home and equip families with knowledge and skills to support their child's academic and social/emotional/behavioral success. The consistency across home and school builds home-school congruence so that children experience home and school as well as the transition across settings as positive, safe, predictable, and congruent (Crosnoe, 2015; Garbacz, in press). Effective communication between families and school staff holds together and enhances family engagement practices. Effective family engagement communication systems are multidirectional (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan, Rispoli, & Holmes, 2013) and

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proactive (Dishion, 2011; Smolkowski et al., 2017; Stormshak et al., 2016) so that families and school staff can initiate dialogue and all parties have equitable access to information and other resources (Garbacz et al., 2016). For example, parents are co-equal stakeholders on school teams and families create mailings with school teams. In addition, material that is sent home or posted electronically provides all families equal opportunity to share back with school staff (Garbacz et al., 2016; Mapp & Hong, 2010).

Tier I family engagement is the foundation for Tier II and III approaches. Thus, it is hypothesized that the effectiveness of Tier II and III family engagement efforts are strengthened in the presence of effective Tier I efforts (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2002). At Tier II, families can participate in developing, co-implementing, and communicating about progress using school-home behavior support plans, such as Check-in/Check-out (Dishion, 2011; Smolkowski et al., 2017). In this way, families are brought in when plans are conceived and engaged as partners throughout implementation and evaluation. In addition, depending on valued outcomes, Tier II can include skill training groups for children experiencing externalizing and internalizing concerns (Eiraldi et al., 2016). Families can participate in select group sessions and engage with their children and school staff outside of group sessions.

At Tier III, family engagement can include families engaging as co-equal stakeholders in individual problem solving and support meetings, such as CBC, designed to identify specific targets of concern at home and school, collect baseline data, set data-based goals for home and school, co-implement behavior support plans, and evaluate progress (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). Such approaches are grounded in a scoped and sequenced ecological paradigm that respects, empowers, and supports parents to make appropriate decisions for their child in collaboration with other relevant providers (Dishion & Stormshak, 2007; Dunst et al., 2007). In the family-school problem-solving process, families and school staff share responsibility for outcomes, support home and school implementation, and make decisions about progress and next steps. Thus, families are engaged in the individual school plans, evidence-based interventions grounded in positive behavior support are implemented at home, and effective communication underlies all activities (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2002; Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008).

Implementation Considerations

Steps of assessing readiness, enhancing family-school collaboration in PBIS, identifying valued outcomes, developing an action plan, and proceeding through initial and sustained implementation are enhanced when following general PBIS implementation guidance. PBIS implementation resources are available elsewhere (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP] Technical Assistance [TA] Center on PBIS, 2015). Included herein is a summary of key resources and an approach to guide sustained implementation for family engagement (see Garbacz, in press). Many key collaborators can assist with proceeding through the stages of implementation (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Horner et al., 2014; Horner, Sugai, & Fixsen, 2017; Spoth, 2007). At the local level, the PBIS Leadership Team should work with family engagement representatives and subcommittees with administrative support to address family engagement goals (Garbacz et al., 2016). The local teams should coordinate and receive implementation support from state PBIS organizations and family-school organizations (Horner et al., 2014; Linse, Salzer, Skadahl, Van Vooren, & Wians, 2013). There are also regional supports, through PBIS networks (Horner et al., 2014), university programs, and research centers (Spoth, 2007). The state and regional organizations, networks, and centers may have resources such as materials, trainings, and consultants, which can support initial implementation and capacity building. There are also national networks. The OSEP TA Center on PBIS has family engagement presentations and materials school teams can use to develop and implement family

S. ANDREW GARBACZ, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON; JENNIFER J. ROSE, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO; MARK D. WEIST, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA; KENT MCINTOSH, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

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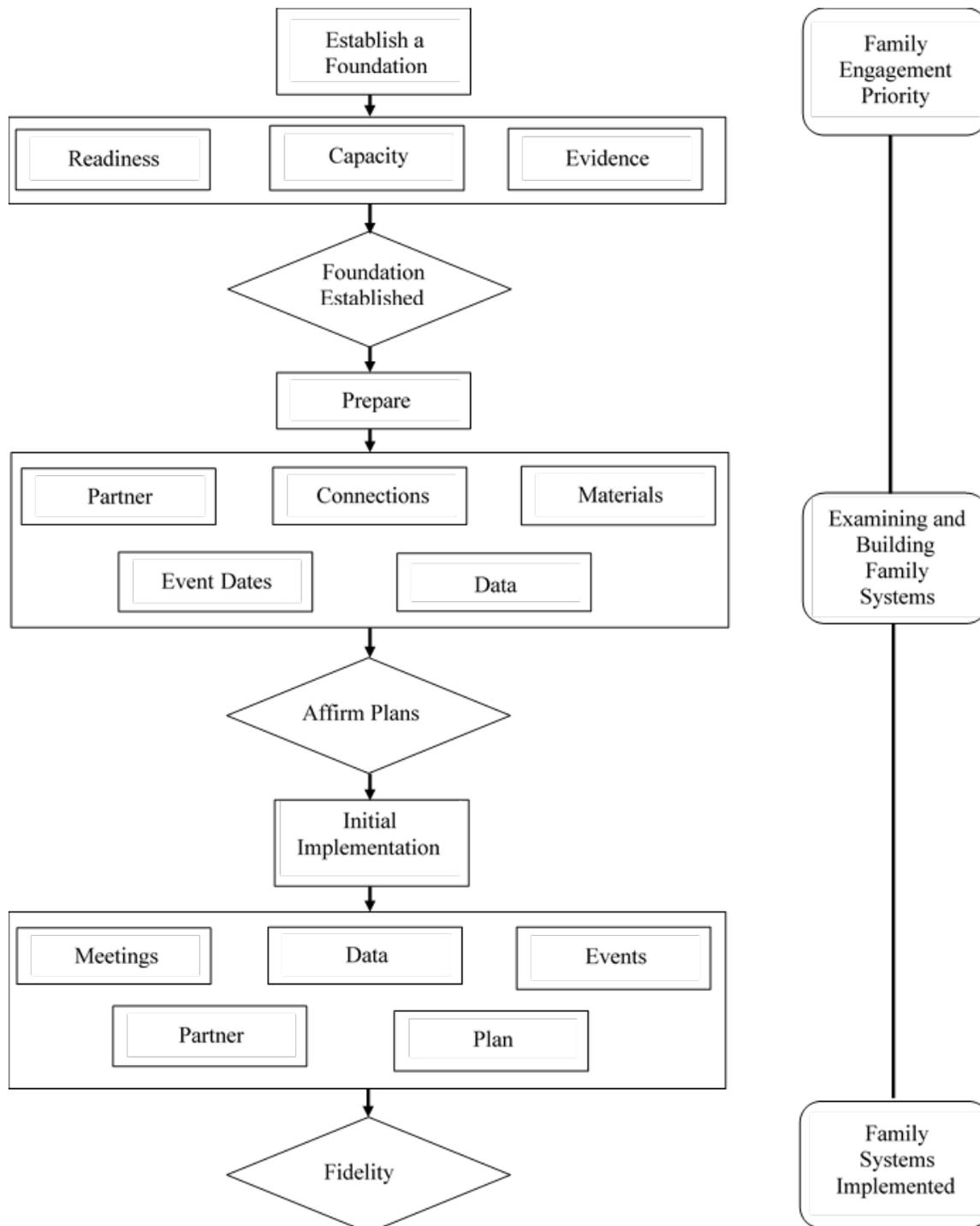# Defining and Promoting Family Engagement in School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

engagement systems and practices (see http://www.pbis.org). In addition, the Family-School-Community Alliance (FSCA) was developed following an e-book on family engagement in PBIS and related multi-tiered systems of support (Weist, Garbacz, Lane, & Kincaid, 2017). The FSCA is open to families, education staff and diverse stakeholder groups to participate in ongoing family engagement initiatives to advance family engagement research and practice in PBIS, access resources, attend meetings, and collaborate with others interested in family engagement.

An implementation flowchart is depicted in Figure 1 that moves from a school identifying family engagement as a priority through initial implementation. Implementation guidance for specific components of family engagement is available in other locations (see Garbacz, in press; Garbacz et al., 2016; Minch et al., 2015). What follows are considerations for family engagement implementation based on PBIS implementation guidance and stages of implementation (Horner et al., 2017; Fixsen et al., 2005; OSEP TA Center on PBIS, 2015). After a school community identifies family engagement as a priority, a foundation is created. To build the foundation, school personnel conduct readiness assessments (e.g., school faculty attitudes about family engagement), which is followed by capacity building. While building a foundation, school personnel work with other experts (e.g., state consultants) to identify sources of evidence (see Table 1 on page 3). After a foundation is established, school personnel partner with families to prepare plans. Preparation includes developing partnerships with families, creating connections with state, regional, and national organizations, developing (or adapting) materials, setting dates for family PBIS events, and developing data systems based on evidence for valued outcomes (Garbacz, in press). Once plans are prepared, they may be affirmed by school and/or district leadership. This may be an appropriate time for the PBIS team to ask state PBIS coaches to review plans. After plans are affirmed, the PBIS team together with families implement the family engagement systems and practices. During the first year of implementation, meetings are held, data are reviewed, family-school-community events occur, school staff and families partner, and an action plan for the next year based on progress towards goals is created. Initial implementation may be examined relative to the implemented systems and practices. For example, the leadership team could examine whether each family engagement strategy was implemented, partially implemented, or not implemented to take stock of progress toward implementing the family engagement priorities (Garbacz, McIntosh, Vatland, Minch, & Eagle, in press).

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Figure 1. *Implementation flowchart of family engagement in PBIS from assessing readiness and establishing a foundation to initial implementation.*

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S. Andrew Garbacz, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jennifer J. Rose, Loyola University Chicago; Mark D. Weist, University of South Carolina; Kent McIntosh, University of Oregon