



BENCHMARK SURVEY 2024

Best Practices for Implementing High-Impact
Family Engagement in schools and districts

Background

For the past 10 years, TalkingPoints, an edtech nonprofit backed by leading philanthropic [funders](#), has partnered with districts to create a research-based family engagement platform focused on impacting student outcomes and building teacher, administrator and family capacity.

During this time, TalkingPoints has observed an evolution in family engagement, where more school districts are blending in-person and digital family engagement practices to consistently partner with more families and build trusting, asset-based relationships that lead to improved outcomes.

To gain further insight into this transformation, TalkingPoints teamed up with Edge Research to conduct this survey and explore how districts implement family engagement practices and their impact on student outcomes. Our goal was to better understand:

- How schools and districts assess the effectiveness of their family engagement practices in improving student outcomes.
- The family engagement strategies and practices educators find most valuable.
- Key challenges that families and educators face in achieving effective engagement.
- Educators' perspectives on the effectiveness of in-person and digital engagement methods in driving student success.

Methodology

The survey was fielded by Edge Research in October, 2024, with 679 respondents. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Respondents included:

- 494 TalkingPoints Users (includes Teachers, School and District Administrators)
- 185 Teachers, School and District Administrators from other sources
- 679 respondents across three titles

Profile of Respondents

Survey respondents were spread across elementary, middle and high schools and came from schools and districts of all sizes. Most respondents had worked in schools and districts for over 6 years, with 38+ percent having worked for over 20 years in education.

- 44 percent were from urban districts, 41 percent were from suburban districts and 15 percent were from rural/small-town districts.
- 52 percent were from districts with a 25 percent or higher percentage of EL students.

		TEACHERS	SCHOOL ADMINS	DISTRICT ADMINS
Students They Oversee/Teach	Elementary School	43%	51%	71%
	Middle School	30%	26%	35%
	High School	30%	40%	32%
School Size	< 500	25%	31%	-
	500 - 999	41%	34%	-
	1,000 - 1,499	14%	16%	-
	1,500 - 2,999	16%	11%	-
	3,000 - 4,999	3%	7%	-
	5,000 +	-	1%	-
Years of Experience	5 years or less	10%	5%	11%
	6 - 10 years	21%	21%	15%
	11-20 years	30%	33%	30%
	> 20 years	38%	41%	44%
District Size	< 5,000	11%	25%	34%
	5,000 - 9,999	10%	20%	15%
	10,000 - 14,999	11%	11%	9%
	15,000 - 29,999	14%	14%	13%
	30,000 - 49,999	12%	14%	11%
	50,000 +	22%	15%	12%
	Not sure	20%	2%	6%

Summary of Key Findings

This survey revealed the following insights regarding family engagement practices:

Family engagement is underutilized and has significant growth potential

Few educators rate their district's family engagement efforts as highly effective, indicating a significant opportunity to enhance engagement practices and positively impact student outcomes such as attendance, academic achievement, and well-being.

Growing Role of Digital Engagement

While face-to-face interactions are effective and meaningful, digital engagement methods are becoming increasingly important. These channels help overcome common barriers such as language and availability, scaling engagement to a broader and more inclusive reach. Digital engagement can significantly increase the turnout for in-person events.

Professional Development Gaps

Teachers are on the front lines of family engagement but report receiving minimal professional development on best practices. There is a need for better training to equip educators with the skills and tools to engage effectively with families.

Importance of Accessibility and Clarity

Educators agree that making engagement easy and accessible for both families and teachers is critical. Providing clear, understandable and consistent dialogue with all families and fostering a positive, inclusive tone are essential to effective engagement.

Top Barriers to Engagement

Families face significant challenges, including time constraints, language barriers, and a lack of understanding of the benefits of engagement. Schools and districts struggle with limited time, inadequate translation services, and insufficient staff training.

Leadership and accountability for engagement efforts are unclear

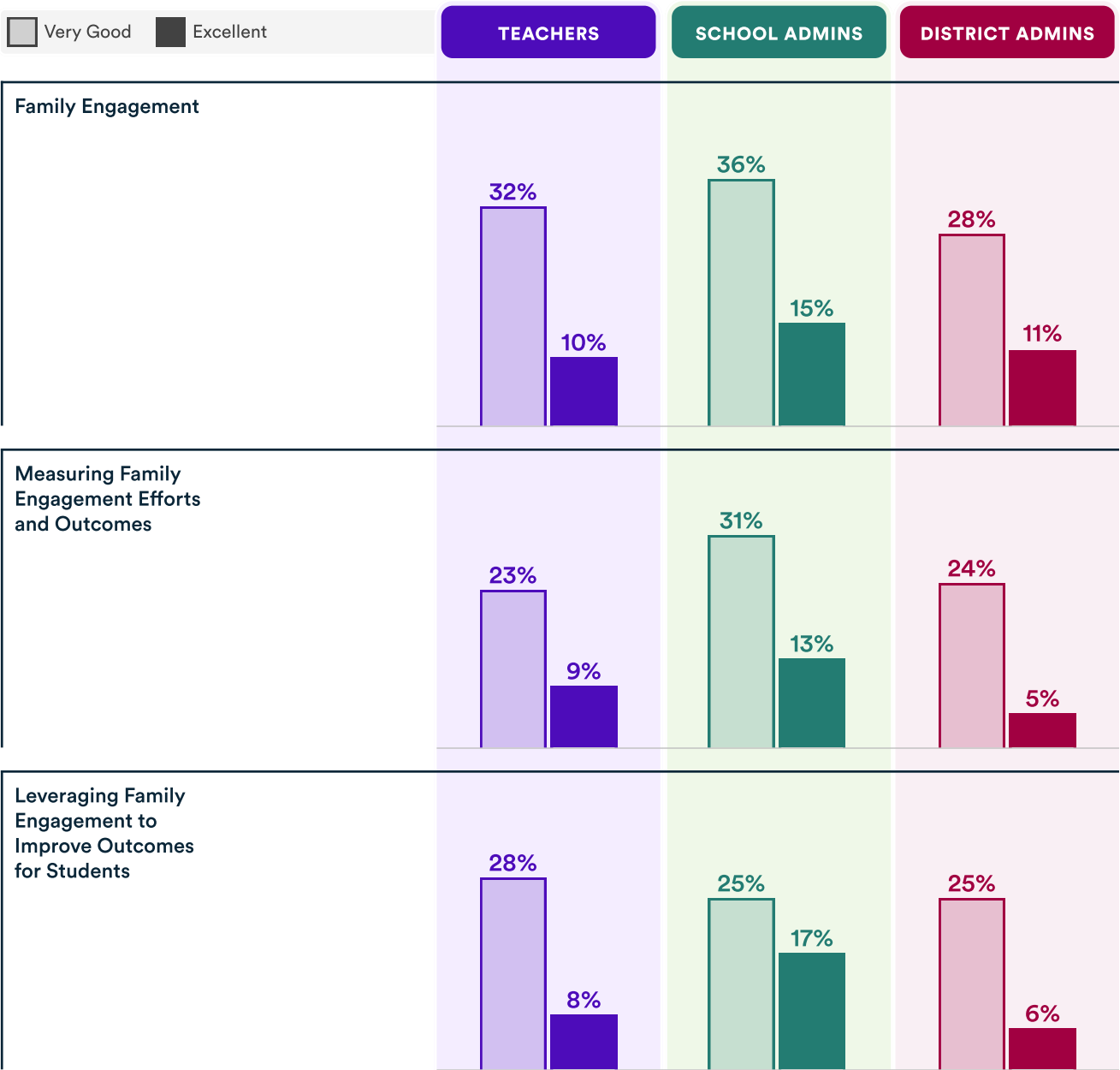
Many teachers are uncertain about where family engagement leadership falls within their district's organizational structure, highlighting the need for clearer roles and responsibilities to drive engagement success.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES AND PRIORITIES

Schools/Districts Rate Family Engagement Practices

Few rate their school/district as excellent on engagement efforts, measurement, or outcomes—only half or fewer give a rating of at least very good.

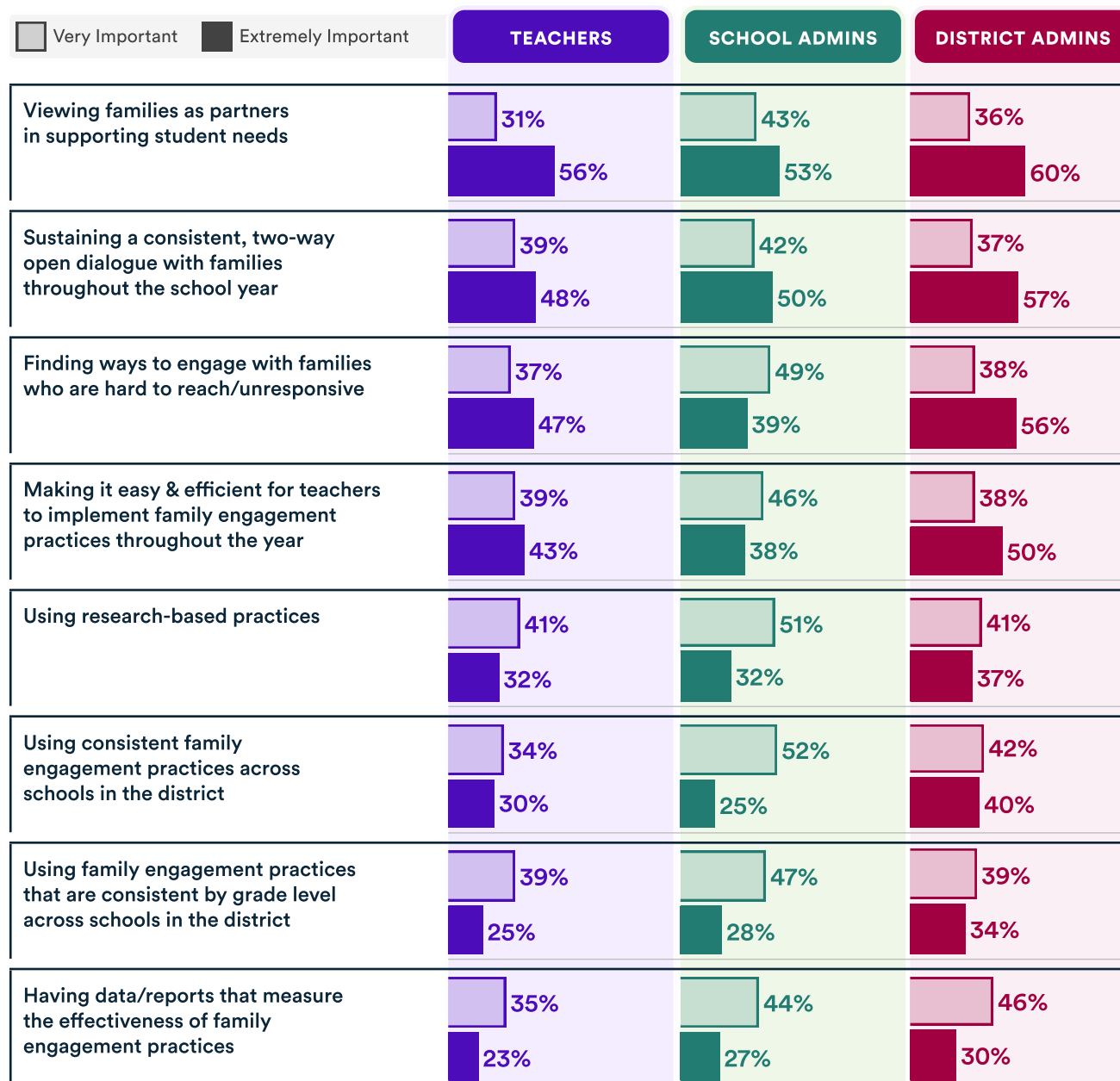
RATING THEIR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES



Family Engagement Strategies

Partnership, open dialogue, engaging all families, and making it easy for both educators and families are key strategies.

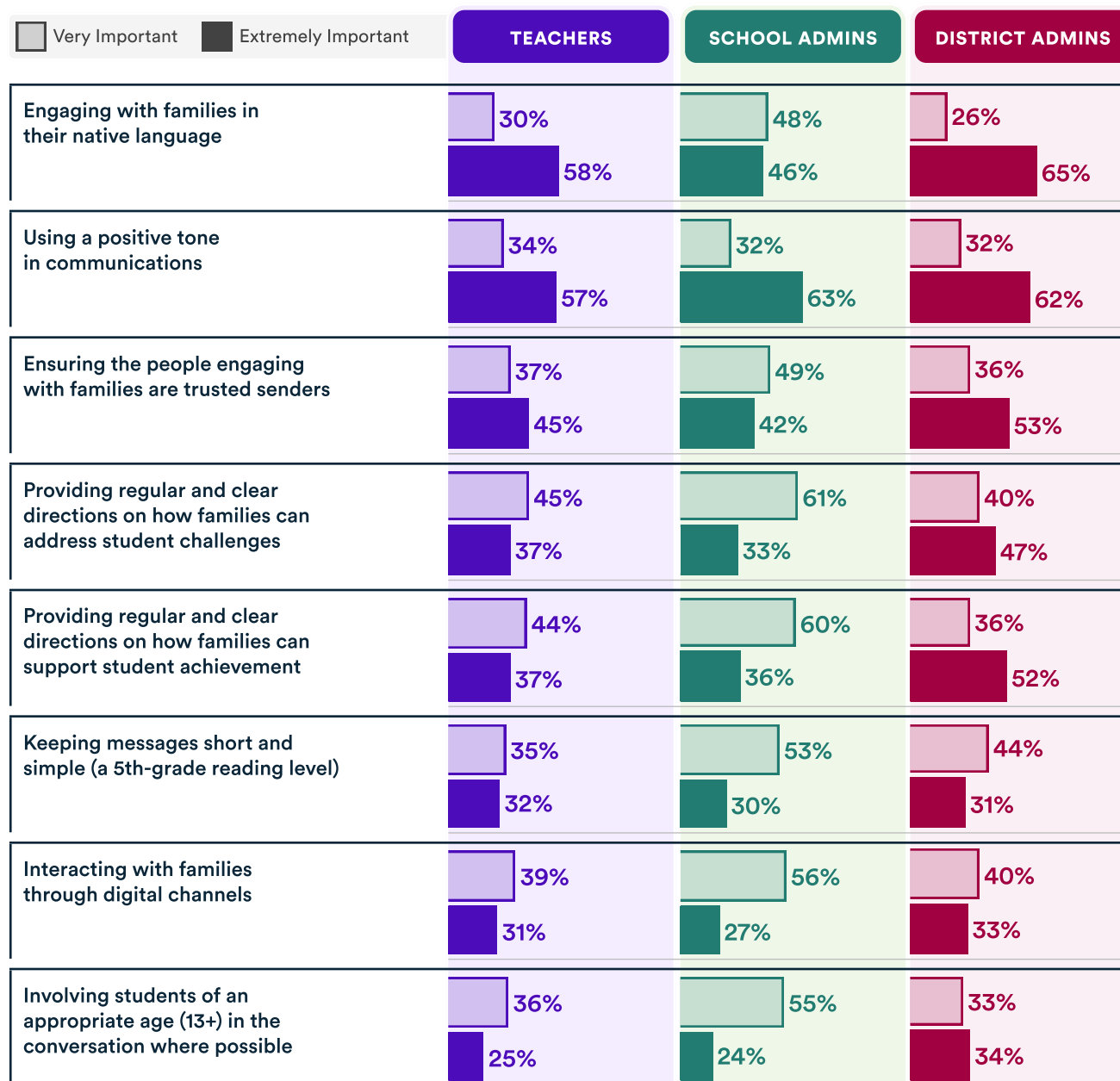
IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIES



Family Engagement Tactics

Language and tone are the top tactics for all audiences, but clarity and trust are also important.

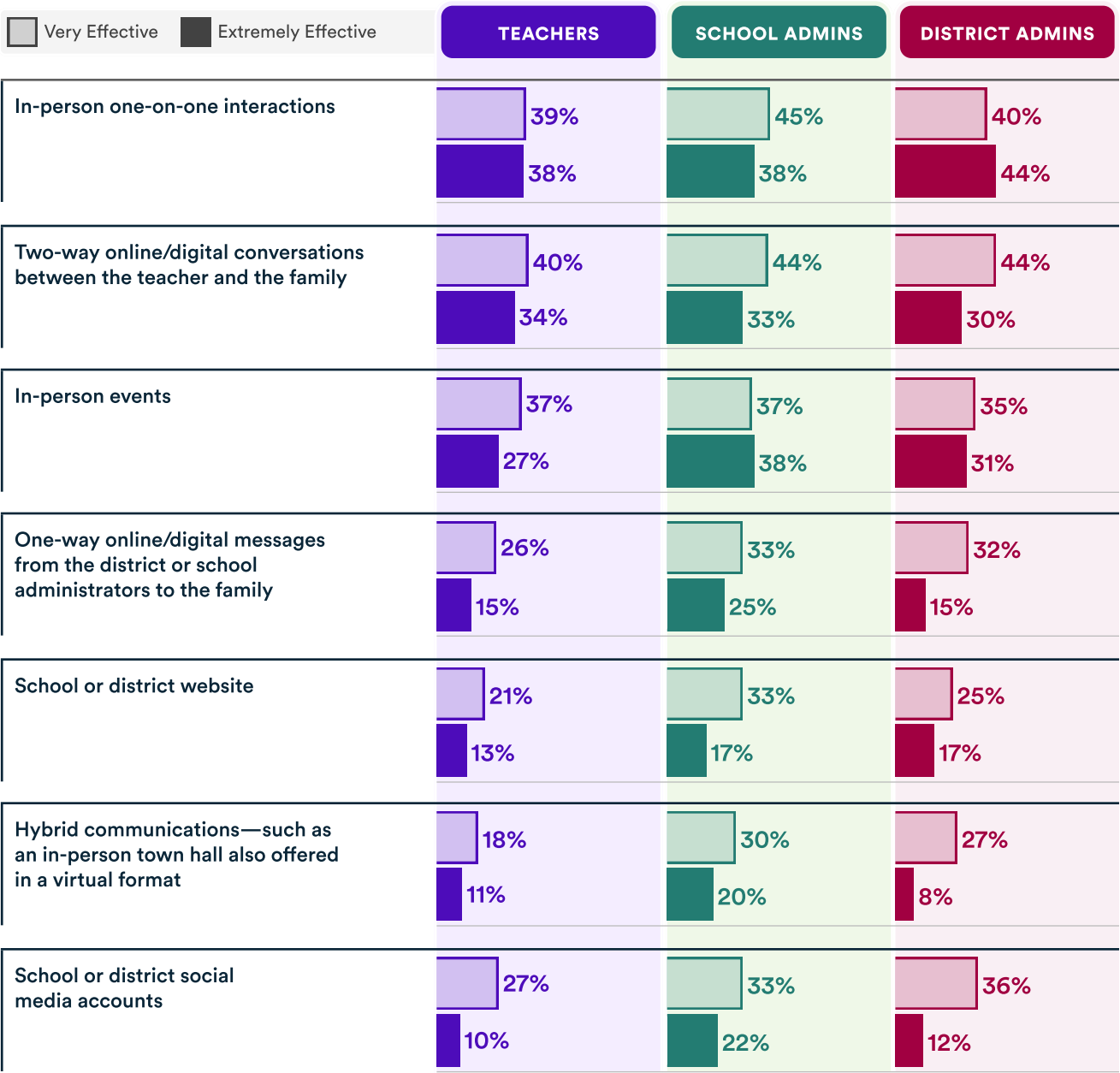
IMPORTANCE OF TACTICS



Family Engagement Channels

In-person interactions are still valued most across audiences, but two-way online digital communication is also a key approach to engaging families.

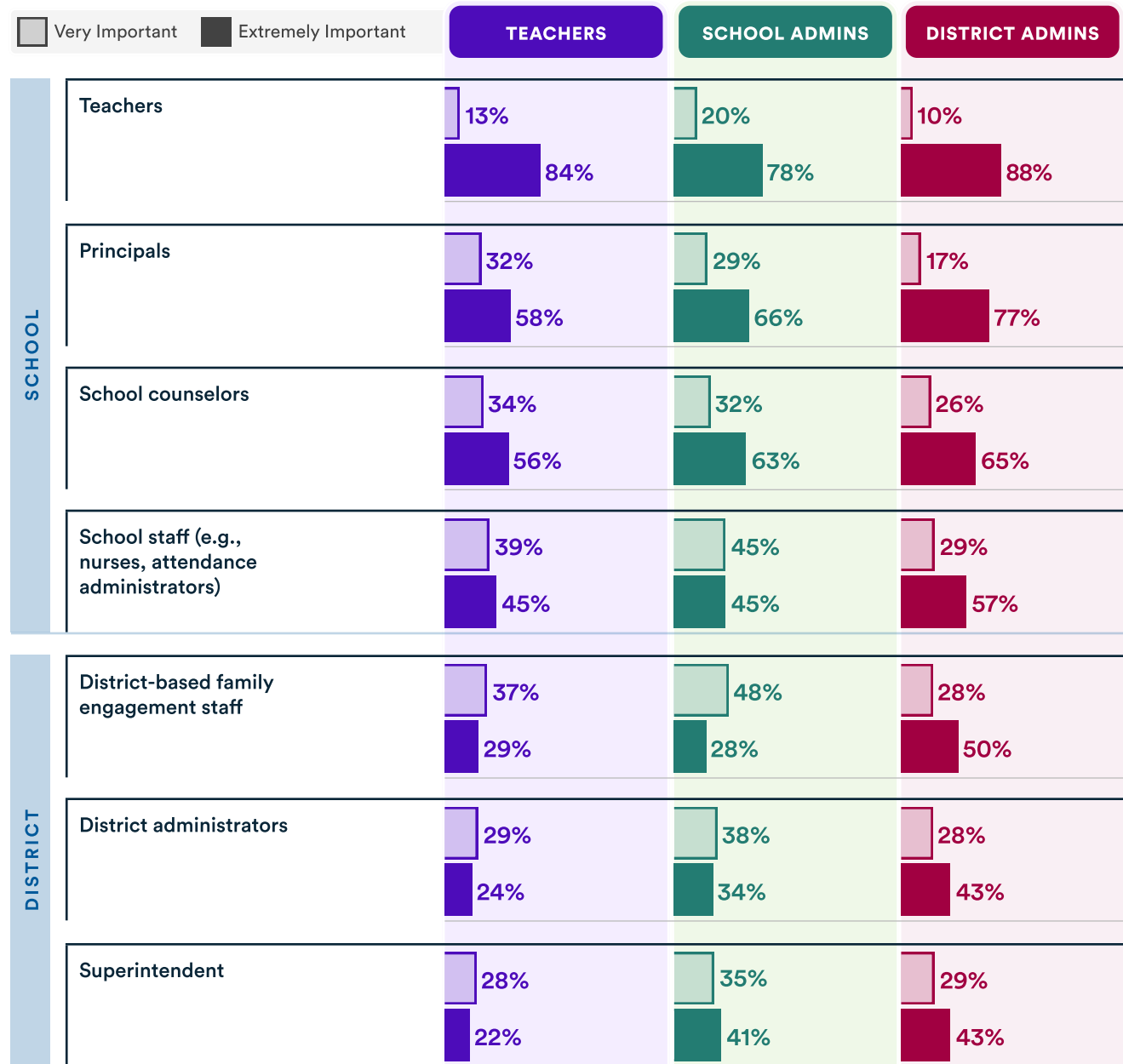
EFFECTIVENESS OF CHANNELS



Who Should be Involved in Family Engagement

Teachers and school-based staff are seen as critical to engagement efforts, with less emphasis on district-level involvement.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUALS ENGAGING DIRECTLY WITH FAMILIES



Highest-Level Focus on Family Engagement

This question asked Teachers, School Administrators and District Administrators to indicate where the highest ranking person leading family engagement efforts reports within the district hierarchy. There is significant variation in where the Family Engagement Leader reports within district leadership, and many teachers are unsure of where this person reports. It is also interesting that 22% of District Administrators were not sure where this person reports.

HIGHEST RANKING PERSON WHO SPENDS MOST OF THEIR TIME ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



In Their Own Words: Other Practices to Consider

- Most districts see family engagement as a goal or box to check off. We need to shift to family engagement as a strategy to reach all of the academic and other outcomes we care about. To do that we need to stop thinking about family engagement as a transaction or event and start thinking about it as an ongoing relationship and authentic partnership with families.
– *District Administrator*
- Create a culture and climate that families want to be involved in school and be more supportive... especially with many students who have not been in school in the U.S. ever, and may not have been in a school in their native country for several years.
– *Teacher*
- Flexible timing and different modes of communication to meet family needs. Identifying and developing other supports that families mention they need - immigration and legal support, childcare, language support, housing, etc.
– *Teacher*
- Involve all families in the school setting. The families that are engaged seem to have high-achieving students. The families of students who struggle tend to be more difficult to reach.
– *District Administrator*

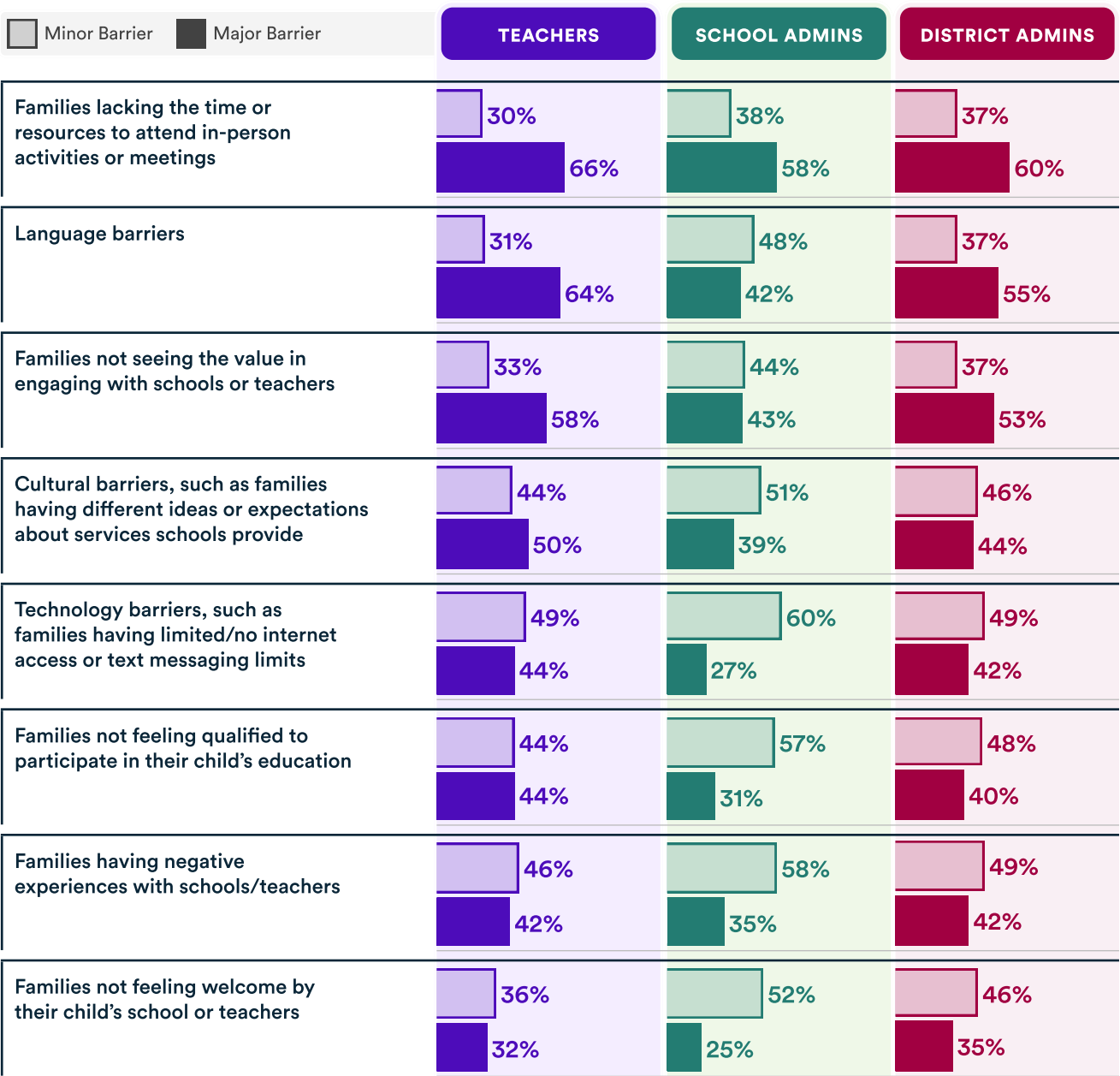


BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Barriers That Families Face

Top barriers for families include time and resource constraints, language issues, and lack of perceived value in family engagement.

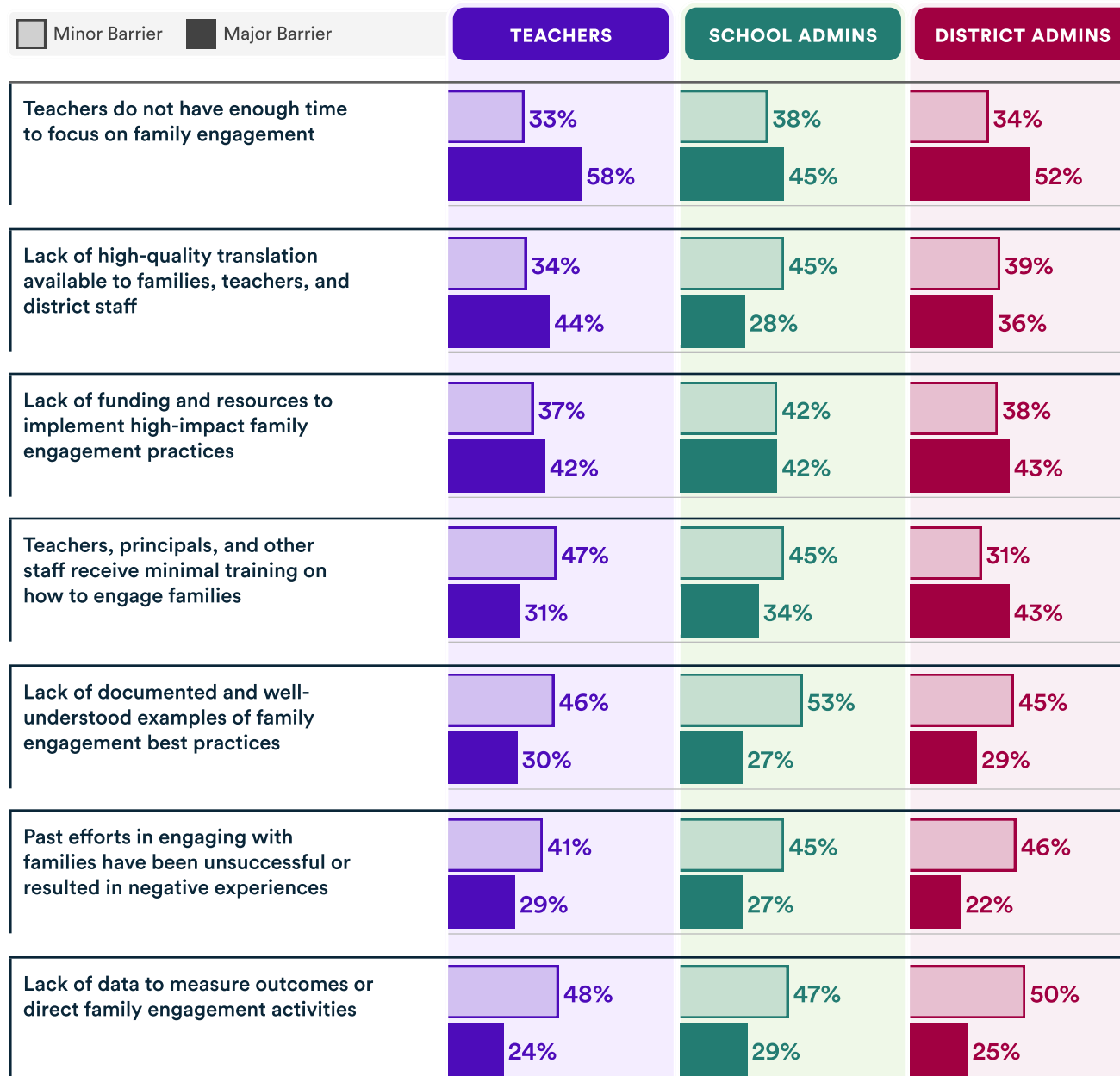
BARRIERS FOR FAMILIES



Barriers That Schools/ Districts Face

Educators identify lack of time, translation services, and funding/resources as significant barriers to implementing family engagement effectively.

BARRIERS FOR SCHOOLS/DISTRICTS



Who Participates in Family Engagement Professional Development

43% of teachers reported they rarely or never receive professional development on family engagement, while professional development is more frequent for school and district administrators.

HOW OFTEN RECEIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES



In Their Own Words: Overcoming Barriers

- Families often don't have a seat at the table, especially underrepresented families, even in designing family-centered events.
– *District Administrator*
- District officials do not fully understand the importance of improving family engagement and increasing the usage of tools teachers have found successful. They tend to rely on communicating via email even though parents rarely check or do not have email.
– *Teacher*
- The major shift we made in our District is seeing families as experts and that we need to collaborate with them as equal partners to help us overcome our achievement and opportunity gaps. This helped us overcome gaps created by different languages, lack of communication and lack of trust on the part of our families.
– *District Administrator*
- Teachers may think that communicating with non-English speaking families is someone else's job (such as the EL teacher or bilingual assistant).
– *Teacher*



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

In addition to publishing this Report we have also received feedback from a webinar held in late 2024 to present these findings. Based on the feedback we received from reviewing the data and the webinar, here are some recommendations for school districts to consider in their implementation of family engagement.

Mindset Change

Two mindset changes are the foundation for implementing family engagement that makes a difference in the lives of students, families, teachers and districts:

- Move from goal to strategy - Consider family engagement as a critical strategy that can impact student outcomes, including improved attendance and academics.
- Families as experts and partners - Take an asset-based approach and view families as experts in their student's lives and learning; move away from the "we always know what is best for your child" approach.

Start with Good and Move to Great

Family engagement includes your entire district, from teachers, school and district administrators, counselors, and other staff to every student and their families. It can be overwhelming if you try to accomplish all best practices in the first year. Instead, depending on where your district is in its evolution of family engagement practices, select 2-3 things you can consider in the next year.

For example, if you don't currently have a digital family engagement platform, a district-level leader responsible for family engagement success or a targeted student outcome you can measure, consider starting with these three items as part of your annual plan.

Blend Digital and In-Person Practices

Combining both in-person and digital practices in a hybrid approach will ensure that there is consistent and regular positive engagement occurring between educators and families, creating trust and amplifying the impact of family engagement. Select a digital family engagement platform that has built-in best practices to help build capacity for teachers, administrators and families.

Measure Results

Start with a student outcome that you are already measuring or can measure more easily, such as attendance or scores on state standardized tests. Once you have created and started to implement family engagement practices that support your select student outcome, measure and discuss results and adjustments to practices at minimum each quarter.

Clear Ownership

Have one district leader who is responsible for the success of family engagement, with that person spending 50% or more of their time in this area. This person can work closely with school administrators to build out consistent best practices for each school and across the district that improve each year, rather than these decisions being made (or not made) by individual teachers.

For More Information

TalkingPoints

TalkingPoints is an education technology nonprofit that drives student outcomes by unlocking the superpower of effective family-school partnerships. The TalkingPoints award-winning Universal Family Engagement platform helps educators improve student and district outcomes through scalable, research-based best practices for family engagement. Across districts nationwide, TalkingPoints has empowered more than eight million educators and families, facilitating nearly one billion conversations that drive student success.

Named by [Common Sense Education](#) as “the best overall family communication platform for teachers and schools,” TalkingPoints leads to higher academic performance and lower absenteeism, as shown by [rigorous, externally validated causal research](#).

For additional information on TalkingPoints and their Universal Family Engagement Platform, contact TalkingPoints:

- Visit the website, www.talkingpts.org
- Request a demo, <https://talkingpts.org/demo/>

Edge Research

Edge Research is a woman-owned marketing research company that believes in conducting purposeful and impactful work. Their goal is to blend wisdom, experience, creativity, and innovation to drive change. Education is one of Edge’s key verticals, and their clients in this space include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Communities In Schools, Learning Heroes, and National PTA.

For additional information on this Report and other education research needs, contact Edge Research:

- Pam Loeb | loeb@edgeresearch.com
- Karen Emmerson | emmerson@edgeresearch.com
- Edge Research
1560 Wilson Blvd, Suite 475
Arlington, VA 22209
www.edgeresearch.com



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