



District Leader Toolkit to Build Strong District- Parent Partnerships

*Four Practices to Engage Today's Parents
and Get Ahead of Parent Concerns*



Four Practices to Build a Positive Parent¹ Community



Toolkit Overview

Strong district-parent relationships are essential for student success, employee morale, and community engagement. Unfortunately, district leaders report that building positive relationships with parents is not as straightforward as it once was. Today’s parents expect more from their local school district.

As part of our research on [preventing district flashpoints](#), EAB surfaced four best practices that district leaders can implement immediately to build positive parent communities, help prevent escalatory behavior, and reduce the impact of controversial issues in the district.

To get started, implement these four practices in the order they appear below.

Practice 1

Parent Feedback Survey

Practice Overview	3
Template for Parent Feedback Survey	4
Guide for Survey Follow-Up	5

Practice 2

Shared Statement of Parent Expectations

Practice Overview	6
Template for Shared Statement of Parent Expectations	7

Practice 3

Parent Representative Program

Practice Overview	8
Training Guide for Parent Representatives	9

Practice 4

Classroom Transparency Courses

Practice Overview	10
Planning Worksheet for Classroom Transparency Courses	11

1) Throughout this toolkit, “Parents” will be used as a single term to refer to any parent, guardian, or responsible adult of a student in the district.



For more guidance on developing effective strategies to respond to district-wide flashpoints, visit the [Preparing for District Flashpoints Resource Center](#).

Practice 1: Parent Pulse Survey

Gather Quick Parent Feedback to Elevate Unknown Concerns

Problem to Solve

Districts often report only receiving feedback from a vocal minority of parents who are quick to express their unhappiness with new policies or decisions. As a result, district leaders miss opportunities to surface key parent concerns across the entire parent community.

Practice Overview

Distribute a short pulse survey to parents to solicit feedback on their everyday experience in the district. A quick 5-question survey provides a systematic way of elevating unanswered questions and acts as a launching point for acting on parents' most common concerns.

- STEP 1** Using the template on page 4, design the survey to be quick and simple to complete (ideally 5-10 questions) so that even the busiest of parents can respond. Design the survey using an online platform (e.g., google forms) for quick deployment.
- STEP 2** Email the survey directly to parents' inboxes, rather than directing them to an online portal or secondary site.
- STEP 3** Allocate time for district leadership to review results and prioritize how best to respond to individual issues. Refer to the analysis process on page 5 to systematically review and organize the survey responses by common themes or trends that emerge.
- STEP 4** Use district newsletters, emails, or other preferred communication methods to share survey results and show that the district is responding to parent feedback. Include 1-2 key concerns that the district is working to address, as well as highlighting positive comments.

Essential Ingredients

Sample Questions

1. *On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your child/ren's current experience in <District Name>?*

Very dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

2. *Please provide additional comments about your response to the question above.*

3. *The district is responsive to my child/ren's individual needs.*

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree



A Light Lift

Parents should be able to complete the survey in under 2-minutes.



Inclusive

Help more parents complete the survey by using parent representatives to actively promote survey completion within various parent communities and networks.



Repeated

Survey parents once a semester to obtain timely feedback without risking survey burnout.



Shared Back

Look for larger trends and share common themes in follow-up communications to parents.

Template to Build a Parent Pulse Survey

Instructions

Refer to the complete example below as you build your districts' pulse survey. Modify the questions and format to fit the needs of your district and chosen survey platform. This example is modeled after a paper handout, but EAB recommends distributing this survey via digital platforms like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms.

Your Name (optional): _____

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your child/ren's current experience in <District Name>?

Very Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

2. Please provide additional comments about your response to the question above.

3. The district is responsive to my child/ren's individual needs.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

4. Please provide additional comments about your agreement with the statement above.

5. I am confident in the district's ability to support the learning and development of my child/ren.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

6. Please provide additional comments about your agreement with the statement above.

7. I would like the district to provide me with more information about:

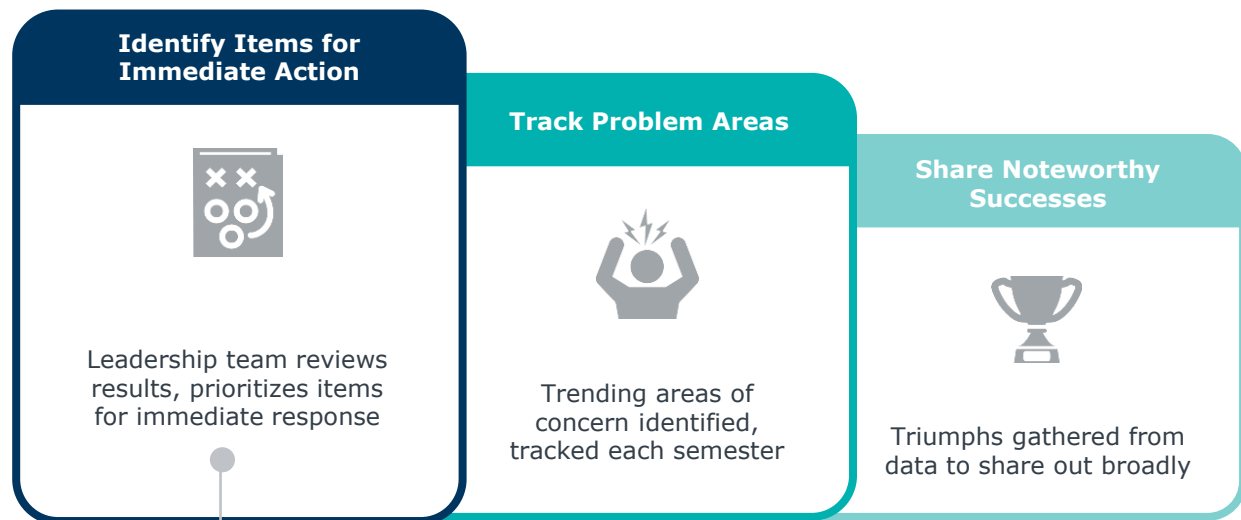
Guide for Survey Analysis and Follow-Up

Instructions

Refer to the recommendations below for analyzing and following up on parent pulse survey responses after the survey closes.

How to Assess Survey Results

- 1 Review survey results, paying specific attention to the concerns raised by parents answering a 3 or lower on the Likert scale (i.e., in Question 1 on the template). Sort concerns into common themes, recurring issues, or areas where a significant number of parents have made comments.
- 2 Prioritize the identified concerns based on their potential impact on district outcomes (e.g., student well-being, learning outcomes). Consider the urgency and feasibility of addressing each concern based on district resources and capacity.
- 3 Develop a clear action plan outlining the steps to address each identified concern. Break down the plan into specific tasks, assign responsibilities across the district leadership team, and establish timelines.
- 4 Clearly and promptly communicate to parents their concerns have been heard and are being addressed. Provide updates on district efforts to ensure transparency.
- 5 Collaborate with relevant stakeholders based on concern and seek their input on finding potential solutions. For individualized parent concerns, reach out to the concerned parent directly.



Example: Quick Action Taken to Address Student Mental Health

- Parent feedback expressed concern over rising student stress, declining mental health
- District implements new [Relationship Mapping](#) strategy to increase student wellbeing
- Positive response reflected in future feedback surveys, student attendance

Practice 2: Shared Statement of Parent Expectations

Partner with Parents to Develop Expectations for Behavior and Communication

Problem to Solve

Typically, districts use broad mission statements, athletic codes of conduct, or disciplinary meetings to communicate parent behavioral expectations. But these communication strategies are vague, infrequent, and do not include the voice or sponsorship of parents themselves, often resulting in reactive, escalatory communications between parents and the school district.

Practice Overview

Partner with parents to codify a shared set of expectations for behavior and communication. A formal statement proactively defines roles and responsibilities for parents, based on shared values between parents and the district, to support effective district-parent partnerships.

- STEP 1** Determine the parent group that will sponsor the creation of shared statement of expectations. This parent group will work with the district to build the statement and assist in sharing it with the parent community following its approval.
- STEP 2** Use the template on page 7 to build the shared statement of expectations. Encourage the parent group to reference and borrow language from other district publications for the statement (i.e., strategic plan, employee handbook, etc.).
- STEP 3** Once the statement is finalized, present the statement to the broader district community through a dedicated email, letter, or other communication. Invite administrators and teachers to share the statement in beginning-of-the-school-year activities, such as a Back-to-School night or parent-teacher conference.

Essential Ingredients

Excerpt from example statement:

Dupont School District¹ Parent Statement of Shared Expectations

As parents and guardians in the Dupont community, we affirm the following:

Leading by Example: We will model respect at all Dupont Academic, Athletic, and Arts Events and agree to support our students with positive encouragement, treat those within and outside our school community with respect as representatives of Dupont School District.

Interacting with Teachers and Staff: We strive for effective, ongoing, two-way communication that includes:



Parent-Driven

Dupont's statement is developed and approved by the Parent Association.



Proactive

A formalized statement allows Dupont to set a proactive, positive vision for parent behavior.



Tied to School Values

The statement's content and language are drawn from existing materials (e.g., district strategic plan), so the Parent Association does not start from scratch.



Communicated Widely to Parents

Dupont shares the statement with parents at parent events, board meetings, and through school-wide communications (e.g., email, newsletter).

1) Anonymized school district

Template to Build a Statement of Parent Expectations

Instructions

First, answer the four guiding questions below to make decisions about which parent group will be involved in drafting the expectations. Then, in partnership with the chosen parent group, refer to the example template below to draft the key messages and language in your shared statement of expectations.

- 1 Which parent group will sponsor the creation of our statement?
- 2 How will we work with this parent group? (A scheduled meeting? When will we meet? Etc.)
- 3 How will we communicate this statement broadly to parents?
- 4 What key messages do we want to communicate in the statement?
Craft your initial ideas following the template below:

[District
Logo]

[District Name] Statement of Shared Parent Expectations

[Write an introductory paragraph here]

Example: *As parents of [District Name], we are dedicated to supporting our students at home, school and in the community, and we affirm the following:*

Leading By Example:

[List parent behavior expectations and key messages that fall under this category]

Example: *We will model respect at all [District Name] Academic, Athletic, and Arts Events and agree to support our students with positive encouragement, treat those within and outside our school community with respect as representatives of [District Name].*

Interacting with Teachers and Staff:

[List parent behavior expectations and key messages that fall under this category]

Example: *We strive for effective, ongoing, two-way communication that includes:*

- *Consistent focus of student achievement and well-being*
- *Courteous and respectful interactions between all stakeholders*
- *Open minded exchange of ideas between student, family, and staff related to achievement, organization and/ or behavior*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

[List parent behavior expectations and key messages that fall under this category]

Example: *We strive to be an inclusive community of parents committed to cultivating an environment in which all members of the community experience a true sense of belonging and are empowered to be active participants, in the life of their school.*

[Insert the **date** this statement was last revised and the **name of the group** sponsoring it]

Practice 3: Parent Representative Program

Leverage Peer Credibility to Influence Positive Parent Behavior

Problem to Solve

There are many parents who want opportunities to help the school community, but they don't have the skills or training to effectively mediate conflict or navigate controversial conversations. Ultimately, this leads to negative voices overpowering positive perspectives in the parent community.

Practice Overview

Establish a parent representative program to delegate formal liaisons between parents and school leaders. Parent representatives create broader awareness of school policies and decisions, and they help school leaders keep a pulse on the community. They mediate parent feedback in-the-moment, then elevate concerns to a school or district leader – essentially buying time to get ahead of the problem.

- STEP 1** Determine who will be your Parent Rep Coordinator. The coordinator liaises between parent reps, parent associations, and district leaders.
- STEP 2** Establish process for selecting parent reps. District leaders can decide if they want to invite parents to participate, or create an application or nomination process for parent reps.
- STEP 3** Define the parent representative role. Distinguish parent rep responsibilities from roles like parent association member or parent volunteers.

Essential Ingredients

Parent Reps Are Distinct from Other Parent Roles



Dedicated to improving discourse and building positive culture



Not responsible for fundraising or classroom-based activities



Formal liaison between parents and administrators



Specially Trained Parents Serve as Reps

Reps receive district- or school-administered training on how to have constructive dialogue in school settings (e.g., in the parking lot of a school athletic event).



Parent Reps Keep Pulse on Community

Parent reps meet regularly with school parent rep coordinator and administrator.



Reps Mediate & Raise Concerns Early

Reps mediate or intervene in parent misunderstandings and elevate emerging concerns to admin.

Step-By-Step Guide for Establishing Parent Representatives

Instructions

Follow the seven steps below to launch a parent representative program in your school or district. These steps are developed from the recommendations of other institutions that have successfully implemented parent representative programs.

- 1 **Designate a district leader to act as the program coordinator.** Consider delegating this role to someone in the office of Communications or Family Engagement.
- 2 **Define the core mission of the parent representative program.** What purpose will parent representatives serve for your school or district? What is their mission statement? How can the program be tied to existing school/district mission and core values?
- 3 **Determine the number of parent representatives for each school or grade level.** Other institutions with successful programs recommend delegating parent representatives in pairs (e.g., 2 per school, or 2 per grade level) to balance varying skill sets each parent might bring to the table.
- 4 **Draft an official description of the parent representative role.** Answer the following questions in your description:
 1. What is the official name of the role?
 - *Example: "Woodvale School Parent Representative"*
 2. What are the role responsibilities?
 - *Example: "Plan one event per year in coordination with the Office of Family Engagement; Complete monthly feedback reports and send to school leaders to track parent concerns discovered in conversation and at events; Partner with district leaders to facilitate preferred parent communication strategies..."*
 3. What characteristics or qualifications will ensure a parent representative's success in the role?
 - *Example: "Embraces school mission and values; Diplomatic; Level-headed in conversation or crisis; Thoughtful; Warm; Engaging"*
 4. What are the time commitment expectations?
 - *Example: "Attend one training per year (2 hours); Send monthly feedback reports via email (1 hour per month); Plan one event per year (30 hours)"*
- 5 **Choose a method for structured feedback from parent representatives and develop a system for reporting.** As parent reps are fulfilling their role, how should they send information to school or district leaders? When they hear a parent concern or learn an important piece of information, what kind of reporting system should they use with administrators? How often should they elevate their feedback?
- 6 **Have school and district administrators nominate possible parent rep candidates.** Have leaders reach out to engaged parents they believe fulfill the mission of the program (e.g., if part of program's mission is to boost engagement with underrepresented parent groups, are there parents from that group administrators feel would work well in the program?). Invite parents to consider the role via email and provide them the role description.
- 7 **Train parent representatives.** At least once a year, gather all parent representatives together in-person to refresh their skills on topics like:
 - Scaffolding meaningful conversations that initiate and build new parent relationships
 - Redirecting tough conversations
 - Event planning best practices
 - Cultural competency skills based on local demographics

Practice 4: Classroom Transparency Courses

Correct Parent Misperceptions About Their Children’s School Experience

Problem to Solve

District leaders are reporting that many parents have misperceptions about what their students are learning in the classroom. Many parent concerns stem from looking at schools today through their own past experiences, and these parents might not realize that instructional strategies have changed – or that the content their children are learning isn’t so controversial after all.

Practice Overview

Host “classroom transparency courses” for parents so they can see what instruction looks like today, understand how today’s students engage in the classroom, and discuss topics and content that their children are learning.

- STEP 1** Delegate a program coordinator from the district leadership team to own the creation and implementation of classroom transparency courses.
- STEP 2** Instruct the coordinator to use the guide on page 11 to outline the course’s mission and goals specific to the needs of your district and parent community.
- STEP 3** Have the coordinator work with school administrators and teachers to develop clear and concise informational materials tailored to parents, using plain language and avoiding educational jargon.
- STEP 4** The program coordinator facilitates the courses following the materials provided by teachers. If teachers desire to be involved, they may also be included and lead courses, following guidance from union representatives.

Essential Ingredients



Real Content

Class Topics Borrowed from Curricula

Select lessons and topics that showcase engaging instructional strategies or feature newly adopted curricula.

► Benefits

- Confronts potential misperceptions head-on
- Parents learn and discuss instructional strategies together



Immersive Experience

Parents Experience Class through the Eyes of a Student

Provide a discussion-based learning experience where parents can see the value in instructional strategies and curriculum resources used today.

► Benefits

- Parents better understand the role of teachers in the classroom
- Highlights viewpoint diversity



Convenient Offerings

Easy to Participate

Offer classes in the evenings during select parent association meetings or events. Provide a live-stream viewing option, if possible.

► Benefits

- Reaches parents when they are already on campus, or allows them to participate from anywhere through the live-stream

Planning Worksheet for Classroom Transparency Courses

Instructions

Complete the worksheet below to outline the four essential components of planning a classroom transparency course.



Clear Philosophy

- Demonstrate good judgement and expertise to reinforce knowledge, credibility
- Deliberately use transparency courses to establish the district's philosophy on new policies or get ahead of controversy

1 What is the primary goal of hosting these courses in our district?



Varied Content, Representation

- Showcase wide-ranging expertise and knowledge across subjects and departments
- Showcase breadth of expertise through representation from different district administrators, teachers, and staff

2 How will we decide which content areas or instructional strategies to feature? Who will present the content?



Regular Cadence of Offerings

- Provide offerings on a regular basis to show a commitment to consistency that parents can count on
- Establish your district as a reliable source of guidance and expertise

3 How often will we offer classroom transparency courses? Will these events be in-person or virtual?



Branded Program

- Convey intentionality and continuity with a branded program just for parents
- Ensure that transparency courses looks and feels like its own distinct offering from regular parent association meetings

4 What will we name the courses? Will we have a dedicated marketing strategy to increase parent participation? Do we have a dedicated homepage for course information and materials?



202-747-1000 | eab.com

 @eab  @eab_  @WeAreEAB  @eab.life

ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.