**Ideas for Engaging Underrepresented Groups:  
Key Strategies for Working with Focused Populations**

Reaching out to focused populations is an essential step in maintaining the strength of a school’s grassroots advocacy. The following are simple steps that schools and parent organizations can take to engage and empower every family:

1. Reflect on practices.
2. Create effective messaging.
3. Promote meaningful family engagement.
4. Create community connections with cultural resources.
5. Serve as an information resource for families, educators, and community groups.

**REFLECT ON PRACTICES**

**Start with a diversity profile** of your families, school and community. In your area, what demographic data are available to help you learn more about school-age children, their families and their neighborhoods? Such information might include income levels, race/ethnicity, family configurations, special needs, religious preferences and geographic distribution. How well does the current membership and leadership of your parent groups reflect these demographics? What other significant differences characterize the children, families, neighborhoods and schools served by your school? Use the **Diversity and Inclusion Worksheet below**.

Then, **define your target audiences**. Which groups are not as well represented in your school structure and practices? Which groups are difficult to reach because of language, geography, cultural perspectives or religious differences, or have been resistant to invitations and outreach?

Next, **evaluate your communication resources, opportunities, and challenges** in reaching out to these focused populations.

* **RESOURCES:** Consider what outreach resources are available from individual volunteers, your schools, and community groups and organizations: talents, materials, money, time, goods, and services. What are the school policies on distributing flyers, displaying posters, and using family listservs?
* **OPPORTUNITIES:** What prescheduled school or community events provide an opportunity for connecting with families, including those from traditionally underrepresented groups?
* **CHALLENGES:** Which languages are used in the schools? Do you have translators (paid or volunteer) for each language present in your community? How do you contact local media (radio, television)? Do you have the money, facilities, and talent to produce messages in both print and digital forms? Which forms of communication are most accessible and useful for your target audience(s)?

**Other questions to ask** when assessing your school’s communication practices include the following:

* Are materials informative, published regularly and accessible by all families?
* Do the school and your parent groups provide opportunities for families and staff to share information in a variety of ways (e.g., email, home visits, phone calls, text messaging, printed materials)?
* Is it easy and convenient for families to contact teachers and provide feedback to the school around policies and issues of concern?

**CREATIVE EFFECTIVE MESSAGING**

Effective messaging requires more than just providing clear, accurate and useful information or persuasive arguments. To be most effective, messages must be adapted to the perspectives, needs and concerns of their target audiences. Groups that have not historically participated in schools may not appreciate the benefits of participating or may not feel a connection to the issues for which the school advocates. Becoming familiar with what matters most to the families and communities you seek to engage will help you adapt your messaging about the school to these audiences.

**PROMOTE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT**

Research shows that there are good reasons to develop family engagement. Across income and background differences, students whose families are engaged are more successful. Family engagement also has been shown to be an essential ingredient in improving schools in urban, low-income areas.

**Create a strategic plan** for engaging all families. The Framework for Family-School Partnerships at **NMENGAGED.com** provides steps and tools to support you in reaching out to a variety of families.

**Create Community Connections**   
Which groups and organizations are active in the neighborhoods served by your school? Not only can partnering with such organizations create greater shared resources and alliances to serve families and schools, but these groups can help connect you with traditionally underrepresented families through their own activities, leaders and members.

Some tips to consider:

* Reach out to social clubs, service agencies, Tribal education departments, Tribal education programs, public libraries and parks, civic organizations, religious organizations, foundations, police and fire stations, hospitals, religious organizations and community service groups.
* In deciding which groups to engage, ask yourself: What can these groups potentially bring to a collaborative relationship with our school and district that would be useful, valuable or a resource in advocating for children? Consider the ways that potential partners’ missions overlap with the school’s goals, as well as any challenges in reaching out to these groups.
* Collaborate with community-based organizations that serve target populations. For example, developing partnerships with organizations that serve diverse families can create important alliances.

**Serve as an Information Resource for Parents, Families, Educators and Community Groups**  
Families and community groups are more likely to partner with your school when they see the benefits that their involvement provides. Some ways you can demonstrate your value to the school and community include the following: Provide information at local events, i.e., sporting events, feast days, and community fairs. Make use of school and/or district position statements and resolutions.

* Distribute information about community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families and educators.
* Provide information to the community, including those without school-age children, about school programs, events, and needs.
* Empower parents with access to conference workshops and virtual learning modules on parenting skills.
* Spread the word about family leadership and training opportunities.