Promising Practices for
Family Engagement

Visit http://www.laspdg.org/content.cfm?id=418 to view this resource electronically
Promising Practices for Family Engagement is a collection of family engagement activities and initiatives conducted by 12 districts and 2 mentor districts participating in the Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant (LaSPDG). Each district has a Family Facilitator who conducts 15 hours of activities annually and has contributed at least one activity to this resource. The purpose of this resource is to increase awareness of involvement activities throughout the state, generate ideas for family engagement initiatives, and encourage replication of effective practices that strengthen partnerships with families.

The activities are organized by Foundation strategies and LaSPDG’s 4 Domains of Family Engagement: Communication, Family Support, Decision Making, and Partnerships.

- **Foundations** - Organizing a structure that supports effective Family Engagement initiatives
- **Domain 1: Communication** – strategies and methods that are two-way, varied, and supportive of student learning
- **Domain 2: Family Support** – initiatives that assist families as they engage in their child’s learning and reflects the diversity of the students, families and the community
- **Domain 3: Decision-Making** - practices that engage families as decision making partners, and keep families current with changes in decisions relevant to student learning and growth
- **Domain 4: Partnerships** - efforts that engage families and the community beyond the school’s walls, and support a variety of stakeholders to contribute in a variety of ways

**Each Promising Practice Includes:**
Name of strategy or initiative, the contributing district, a brief narrative about the initiative, and the name of the contributing Family Facilitator with contact information.

**How to access Promising Practices:**
Visit [http://www.laspdg.org/content.cfm?id=418](http://www.laspdg.org/content.cfm?id=418) to access Promising Practices for Family Engagement. You can select to download the resource by district, or the entire resource.

**About LaSPDG**
LaSPDG is a Louisiana Department of Education grant (LDOE) funded by the Office of Special Education (OSEP) and executed by staff at Louisiana State University (LSU). The purpose of the grant is to develop a system of professional development and support based on state, district, and school needs to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The SPDG four focus areas relate to the use and effectiveness of (1) Data Based Decision-Making, (2) Inclusive Practices, (3) Family Engagement, and (4) Culturally Responsive Practices. For more information, please visit [www.laspdg.org](http://www.laspdg.org) or contact Pamdora Williams at pwilli@lsu.edu.
Lead Teachers Leading Families

Sabine Parish Schools
Many, La.

Each school in Sabine Parish has identified a master teacher to serve as Lead Teacher. Lead Teachers work as liaisons between the district office and the school. In addition to supporting inclusion teachers, they are also responsible for conducting family engagement events.

Family Engagement coordinators at the district level work in collaboration with Lead Teachers to manage a district-wide approach for engaging families, collect data on topics to present, increase family attendance to functions, and keep families informed and connected to state and local resources.

The District Leadership team supports Lead Teachers by scheduling monthly meetings to discuss topics related to Special Education and Family Engagement.

The District Level Team has seen the benefits of having Lead Teachers in each school and will continue to support the efforts to engage Sabine’s families.

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Connecting Families through Facebook

Vermilion Parish Schools
Abbeville, La.

Through a collaborative effort between the Vermilion Parish School System and Autism Speaks, facilitators have designed, developed and launched “Autism Strong Vermilion 411”. It is a Facebook page for families of students with autism and other disabilities. The idea was birthed out of the need for a place online as a “go-to” spot for families to receive updated activities and information regarding autism.

The page is updated and monitored jointly by the district’s Family Facilitator and a family member. The content includes information of interest to families on topics such as: upcoming presentations by guest speakers, tips, the newest breakthroughs in organic remedies that may help, links to blogs, links to resources, state initiatives, videos, etc.

It was important to collaborators to use the power of technology to provide this type of platform and forum to reach and connect families who may not be able to participate in school events.

The webpage continues to increase in followers. Both district leaders and families believe that through the creation of this Facebook page, family engagement has been enhanced and has increased. Also, there is a bridge in the gap between families, the Autism Society and Vermilion Parish School System.

This resource can be accessed at https://www.facebook.com/autismstrongvermilion411/?fref=nf

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Applying Focused Communication Strategies to Reach More Families

East Baton Rouge Parish Schools
Baton Rouge, La.

In review of the last several years, East Baton Rouge Parish Schools has seen increased attendance rates for family engagement activities by 50% for Culturally Responsive Practices and 100% for Inclusive Practices focus areas.

The increase in attendance can be contributed to a variety of factors, which included the family facilitator making adjustments to standard methods of communication and outreach efforts.

Reflecting on family feedback provided insight for topics, preferred locations and times for workshops, etc. to best meet the needs of families.

Collaborating with staff of other departments, such as Title One, have provided the opportunity to make connections with families during functions such as the annual Expo.

At the first event of the school year, families are presented with a calendar of events. This allows them to save the date and plan accordingly. Contact information was also captured at the events that allowed the Family Facilitator to utilize the district-wide calling system to send out reminders prior to the events.

Through analyzing family feedback and adjusting communication efforts, East Baton Rouge Schools has had the opportunity to reach more families, build relationships and develop partnerships.

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Men At Work!
Calcasieu Parish Schools
Lake Charles, La.

Dolby Elementary School with the support of a Watch Dog Dad group, the school hosted “Men at Work! Learning with Legos” night. The purpose of the night was to give dads a chance to work with their children on math skills using Legos. This enabled the students to learn about math concepts in a fun and non-threatening environment.

Many dads were excited about the night. Both dads and granddads shared that they had Legos as kids, but didn’t realize all the connections that could be made while playing and having fun. We found activities, ipad apps, and center type games that the dads rotated through for the event. Students learned about part, part totals, building square numbers, fractions, and addition and subtraction through the stations. Time was also used to help with any math homework questions.

The following website was used as a resource to build station rotations:
http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-

teaching/2013/12/using-lego-build-math-

concepts. The groups rotated through 4 different stations at the event. There were activities selected for Pre-K – 2nd and then 3rd-5th. Several parents had kids at both grade levels so they worked different activities with each of their students. Dads were provided with a packet of the activities that were shared in the stations.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the activities and discussing math and building strategies with their kids. This night gave dads and students a chance to connect and learn through play. The following day, the 4 winners of the Lego kits were announced on our KIDS T.V. news station in the morning.

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Domain 2: Family Support
Parent University was held twice in the 2015-2016 school year and combined parent training opportunities with relationship building activities for families, students and teachers. Parent University in the fall, families gained knowledge of the curriculum by teacher demonstration lessons. They demonstrated strategies that families could use when supporting their child’s learning at home. Afterwards, families were rejoined with their child to practice the skill. During the spring Parent University, coordinators focused on families’ knowledge of science and test prep. Afterwards, families and students enjoyed Sci-Tech activities and science projects developed by their child. Families also learned about the importance of using People First Language and took the pledge. Signed pledges were taped to a bulletin board and is currently hanging in the cafeteria as a reminder.

There were two challenges to think through in planning Parent University. First, how to obtain teacher buy-in. To help with the teachers’ commute to the rural part of the district, buses were rented allowing teachers to park their cars in a central location and board the bus which took them to the school. Families and students greeted teachers as they arrived. The second challenge to consider was how to incentivize parents to participate. Coordinators planned the training about understanding the curriculum embedded in a fun event (i.e. Parent/Student Bingo). Both Parent University events were very well attended and the feedback from the families was positive.

Amanda Galonek
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When families of students with disabilities are knowledgeable, aware and connected to supporting services, it helps them better support their child in becoming independent individuals. Louisiana offers a variety of resources outside of the school system that strive to provide these services to students. However, families may not be aware of the opportunities available.

Considering the need for families to be aware and connected to these resources, Family Facilitators with Firstline RSD and Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center collaborated to develop “Family to Family: A Resource Guide for Individuals with Disabilities”. This is a one-page flyer with information about supports available and how to contact these organizations. The guide is organized in a family-friendly format and addresses 5 areas that may be of interest to families. Those areas are initial steps, home resources, recreation, financial, and employment.

The flyer has been shared with Family Facilitators throughout the state. Most have customized the flyer to include local services. Also, it has been shared with families during family events and during IEP meetings. These two events are ideal opportunities to reach families and bring awareness to additional services that strive to meet the needs of their child.

Lynne Farlough and Donnica Conway
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Parents Brunches are organized 4-5 times per year for families and gives them an opportunity to learn about different topics while enjoying lunch with staff in the district.

When the new Arts Academy opened, families were invited to hear about how the district intended to support students and families with changes in the curriculum. For elementary grades, the Arts Academy’s overall purpose is to embed hands-on arts and technology strategies that would raise test scores. In High School, the focus is on the transition to college or to a career.

Parent Brunches are held five times per year and lasts approximately two hours. Families are provided with information about how to help their child at home, and then have time to enjoy lunch with district staff members. Topics vary depending on the needs for families and the district. A recent Parent Brunch focused on developing families’ awareness of changes in student assessments (PAARC).

Additionally, a variety of community and state organizations (i.e. Louisiana State Department of Education, Families Helping Families, Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, etc.) have presented content to the families.

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Focused Family Night
Union Parish Schools
Farmerville, La.

Teachers and administrators at Union Parish Elementary School plan Family Nights several times per school year. When families arrive, they are separated by grade level. Once in their groups, parents and families participate in a demonstration lesson that highlights a strategy that is relevant to what students are learning at the time. Teachers walk families through the different components of the lesson and share techniques along the way.

A Focused Family Night was at Union Parish Elementary and it supported families in the understanding and implementation of Eureka Math Strategies. Families were able to witness a demonstration lesson by teachers. In addition to strategies, they were exposed math vocabulary that is critical to the changes in the math curriculum. For example, instead of using “add” families are encouraged to use the term “compose” when helping their child solve equations. Parents and families were also exposed to teachers’ techniques and strategies that were modified for use during homework. At the end of the session, families were given packets that outline the strategies learned during the demonstration lesson as a takeaway.

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Motivate Families by Knowing their Needs

West Baton Rouge Parish Schools
Port Allen, La.

Determining what families need was helpful in motivating West Baton Rouge’s families to participate in an event called “Becoming Involved in Your Child’s IEP”. Based on analysis of the Needs Assessment, two areas to address became evident: learning how IEP goals/objectives are determined and learning how to become more involved in the IEP process/meeting.

The special education director and Family Facilitator met to discuss how the district should meet those needs. It was decided that a lead special education teacher from each school level would present families with information on these topics.

Three lead teachers were selected and planning meetings were conducted to determine specific content to be covered. The lead teachers also shared input on subtopics they thought would benefit our families.

During the event, each family member received a sample IEP. Teachers led a discussion on the parts of the IEP, the role of families during a meeting and suggestions on how families could give their input during IEP meetings. Families also received a tool to help families get organized and prepare for attending IEP meetings.

Families seemed receptive and comfortable in the group. The event was rich with questions, dialogue and parent-to-parent sharing of strategies and resources. Families left the event with more knowledge and a sense of confidence in their role in the IEP process/meeting.

Coordinators concluded that starting with family needs helped to motivate their participation and validated input. District leaders are confident that this cohort of families received the necessary support. Therefore, they look forward to seeing an increase in families’ active participation during meetings and hearing testimonials of an increased ability to support learning and progress at home.

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Jamie Caballero
Family Facilitator

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Morehouse Parish Schools hosted a series of learning opportunities for families called Saturday Parent Academy. During the 2015-2016, Morehouse Parish Schools hosted 3 Parent Academies, one in the fall and two in the spring. Each event was 4 hours of content and activities.

Family feedback and trend data reflected that Morehouse’s families prefer school events to be held on Saturdays. This allows for longer blocks of time for more content to be covered in one setting. With this in mind, the Family Facilitator and coordinators planned opportunities for families to receive information on varied topics such as Homework tips, technology to enhance home learning, understanding PARCC results, Common Core in ELA and Math, DIBELS, etc. All topics addressed the needs of families and enhanced their ability to support their child at home.

The event which had the most impact was the 3rd event. This one blended school and community. One of the presenters was an Occupational Therapist. She shared the Brain Gym program and other brain-based activities to keep students focused and ready to learn. Through a collaboration between school and community, the other presenter was a DARE officer. This officer conducted a presentation on Social Media Safety and Concerns. All information shared during the event was well received and useful to participants.

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District leaders in Title One and Family Facilitators in Acadia Parish have worked together to establish a cohort of family members to serve as Acadia Parish Parent Advisory Council.

The council consists of one representative from each elementary Title One school, a family member of a child with a disability, and a family member that speak languages other than English.

These members are tasked with providing input for decision making and on the quality of family engagement and support provided to families.

Accommodations, such as interpreters and materials printed in different languages, are made available to families as well.

The council meets in the fall and one in the spring and they are charged with providing feedback to the district on family engagement in the district.

One of the tasks of this team of families is to complete Family Involvement evaluation surveys through Title One.

This evaluation provides district leaders with feedback on the effectiveness of parental involvement efforts that is focused on categories such as parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration.

After analyzing the results, facilitators compile a summary of the feedback and give it to principals during leadership meetings.

As the summary report becomes available in late summer, school leadership teams use the feedback to inform schools’ decision making and to select family engagement initiatives throughout the year.

The Family Facilitator will continue to support this decision making structure and work to enhance it.

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During the 2015-2016 school year, Natchitoches Parish Schools collaborated with the Natchitoches Parish Sheriff’s Department and Northwest Assistive Technology Center to provide families and educators with information and resources related to social media and free digital books.

Since the Sheriff’s Department Truancy Officer has frequent contact in the schools, she assisted Natchitoches Parish Schools in facilitating contact with the High Tech Crime Unit. The High Tech Crime Unit presented material related to social media including the pros and cons of using such devices. The presentation focused on how seemingly unaware individuals become victims of pedophiles. Since social media is so widely used today, the importance was on real life scenarios involving actual children who have promised their parents they would not meet in person another individual they met online. The parents were present during the “meeting” and the “friend” that the student was to meet was an actual actor.

In relation to free digital books, the Northwest Assistive Technology Center relayed websites to participants that included books that could be utilized. Some of the websites offered books that included text-to-speech software as well as animated talking books. There are even a few websites that offer electronic books in multiple languages. Some of those websites include:

- [http://naturalreaders.com/index.html](http://naturalreaders.com/index.html)
- [https://www.hoopladigital.com](https://www.hoopladigital.com), and
- [http://www.uniteforliteracy.com](http://www.uniteforliteracy.com).

Both of the presentations were well received and thoroughly enjoyed by the attendees.

Adrienne Mustiful, PhD
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To establish partnerships with families and encourage their participation in the decision making process, the Family Facilitator has developed the Very Involved Parents or V.I.P. initiative. During back-to-school events, families received a V.I.P. card and flyer with details. The card contained the date, time and location for family engagement events scheduled throughout the school year. These events were designed to give families an opportunity to receive updates and changes to the curriculum, get assistance on the use of effective strategies at home, give schools their input about initiatives, and to be connected to resources within the community.

At the end of each event, families leave with supplemental tools and materials. If families attend six or more events by the end of the school year, they will receive a specially designed V.I.P. t-shirt.

Over time, the district would like to extend this initiative to include community resources and organizations with the intent of increasing family presence within the schools and throughout the district.

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Click picture to view video
Workshops Hosted by Churches

Caddo Parish Schools
Shreveport, La.

Caddo Parish Schools collaborated with community churches and pastors to organize family workshops located at the church. Workshops were scheduled during times that families would be at the church with their children attending functions such as Vacation Bible School.

Families received content on topics such as Common Core, reading strategies, how to start the school year off right, and assessment. District staff provided the content and materials for the workshops; however, the pastors and church leaders displayed their support by sharing the importance of families partnering with schools.

Families were receptive to the information received by district staff as well as their church leaders. They were appreciative of the fact that school personnel were willing to bring engagement activities into their neighborhood.

Partnering with churches and pastors has given Caddo Parish Schools a unique opportunity to better address their needs.

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Domain 4: Partnerships
Increasing Families’ Attendance!

Madison Parish Schools
Tallulah, Louisiana

Faculty and staff at Tallulah Elementary hosted their annual Family Night with a focus on Literacy Strategies and Instruction. During the event, families were engaged in whole and small group activities around literature such as *The Polar Express.*

To encourage family attendance, faculty and staff included students in the planning and carrying out the activities for the event. Also, to encourage involvement and satisfaction, the students, families and teachers were invited to wear pajamas to the event.

As a result of assigning specific roles for students and adding a novelty element to the event, anticipation was built, attendance increased and families walked away with valuable activities that they can use with their child at home.

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Family, School and Community Partnerships

Natchitoches Parish Schools
Natchitoches, La.

Natchitoches Parish Schools collaborated with Families Helping Families of Region 7 to offer a workshop and training to help families of students with disabilities understand their child’s IEP and to motivate them to remain engaged in their child’s educational. Additionally, families were presented with information on how FHF can support their needs as they partner with schools and the district.

In 2013-2014, Natchitoches Parish Schools also partnered with Northwest Assistive Technology Center to provide families a make and take workshop. This event received positive feedback from families on evaluation.

Upcoming collaborations between Natchitoches Parish Schools and the community include a “Reading on the River” initiative. Guest presenter(s) will come from the Natchitoches Parish Sherriff’s Office to present the topic “Bullying: Things You Should Know”.

Future collaborations will occur between the special education office and other departments within the district’s office. District Instructional Leadership staff and Master Teachers will roll out their “Lunch and Learn Series” to provide families with support on a variety of topics including Common Core. Families will be invited to attend 5 sessions scheduled beginning in November to the month of April.

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