CONVIVÊNCIA ESCOLAR: POSITIONING FAMILIES AS PARTNERS IN STRENGTHENING EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND SCHOOLS IN BRAZIL

BY: LAURA NÓRA AND EMILY MARKOVICH MORRIS

CONTRIBUTIONS: CAROLINA DE OLIVEIRA CAMPOS AND VIDA MARINA BARRETO LEITE (VOZES DA EDUCAÇÃO), RICHAA HOYSALA (CENTER FOR UNIVERSAL EDUCATION)

Executive summary

In Brazil, education frameworks across national, state, and municipality systems acknowledge the critical role that families and communities play in young people's education. The envisioned role of families in these education frameworks is largely decisionmaking, through their participation on school committees and in ensuring students are attending school. Yet, the responsibilities of families in these education frameworks often lack clarity, detail, and actionable guidance on how to build strong family, school, and community partnerships. Strong partnerships help ensure inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education and support students and schools to thrive.[1]

To better understand how education leaders can support families, communities, and school partnerships in Brazil, community-based and participatory research was conducted in government primary schools in three states—Ceará, Goiás, and Paraná. This research was co-led by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution and Vozes da Educação in Ceará and Paraná and Avante Mobilização Social e Educação in Goiás. The purpose of this policy brief is to provide findings and recommendations for education leaders and representatives from government, civil society institutions, and community organizations in Brazil on how to strengthen family, school, and community partnership education frameworks and practices at the national, state, and municipal levels.

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1   Emily M. Morris and Laura Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education* (Brookings Institution, 2024), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/six-global-lessons-on-how-family-school-and-community-engagement-can-transform-education/.; Rebecca Winthrop et al, *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement* (Brookings Institution, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/collaborating-to-transform-and-improve-education-systems-a-playbook-for-family-school-engagement/.

TABLE 1

Five key findings and recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
1. National, state, and municipal education frameworks often envision the role of families in engaging with schools as contributing to decision making and leadership, particularly through 'democratic management.' Yet, the frameworks lack a clear and detailed description of how families can contribute to decision making and leadership in practice, and how they can contribute to other critical forms of family, school, and community engagement.	**1. For national, state, and municipal education leaders** Ensure national, state, and municipal frameworks have clear roles and responsibilities for families that are both implementable and inclusive of all families. This includes clear guidance on how to implement 'democratic management' in schools and other forms of decisionmaking and leadership.
2. There is a disconnect between how educators and families perceive family, school, and community engagement. Educators largely defined engagement as attending school events. In contrast, families saw supporting learning at home as the main form of engagement that involves all families.	**2. For state and municipal education leaders** Support schools to create shared visions and plans for family, school, and community engagement that encompass all the ways that families support their children's learning, including in the home. Schools need to go beyond solely hosting family-facing events and ensure that forms of engagement are inclusive of all families, including the most marginalized.
3. There are different kinds of barriers preventing families from being more engaged with schools. Barriers can be structural (school-facing), situational, (family-facing), and a combination of the two. According to families, the main barriers they faced in engaging with schools are lack of time and financial constraints. Educators perceived that families also lacked interest in engaging with schools. Differences in perspectives on barriers to family engagement have led to a blame game between educators and families that inhibit strong partnerships.	**3. For state, municipal, school, and community leaders** Identify and design inclusive and evidence-based family, school, and community engagement strategies that are tailored to the needs and aspirations of diverse families, educators, and students and that intentionally break barriers to engagement.
4. Educators and families have different levels of trust in one another. Educators reported low to moderate trust with families, whereas families cited higher levels of trust with educators. Educators and families wanted more opportunities for meaningful interactions and to build trust.	**4. For state, municipal, school, and community leaders** Prioritize efforts to build relational trust between families, educators, and students. Relational trust is critical to ensuring that educational frameworks, practices, and partnerships are successful and sustainable.
5. Schools often lack the human and financial resources and tools to implement inclusive and sustainable family, school, and community partnerships.	**5. For state, municipal, school, and community leaders** Support educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to develop partnerships with families, including ensuring that a designated individual at the school is trained to engage families effectively.

The research was conducted between September 2022 and August 2024 with over 1,360 families and educators, including school leaders, teachers, and staff, in 16 primary schools. Additionally, a document analysis on the roles and responsibilities of families in nine national, state, and municipal education frameworks was conducted to identify how decisionmakers envision family engagement and where current approaches could be strengthened. The primary research with families and schools utilized the Conversation Starter Tools, a mixed-methods approach developed by CUE in collaboration with Vozes da Educação and other global civil society organization partners.

This policy brief supports education leaders, school teams, and civil society organizations in recognizing families as an important asset to schools and critical to student learning, development, and wellbeing. Family, school, and community engagement is critical across a child's education trajectory of learning. This research was conducted with primary schools and findings are directly intended for this age group. However, recommendations on the importance of building a shared vision and relational trust with families are also relevant to students in early childhood as well as middle and high schools across Brazil's states.

Introduction to family, school, and community engagement in Brazil

Family, school, and community engagement encompasses the many ways that families, educators, and community groups work together to promote student learning and development and to support schools to thrive. Family, school, and community engagement varies depending on the context, but the intention is to support greater collaborations and partnerships that ensure teaching and learning is equitable, inclusive, high quality, and relevant.[2] Family, school, and community engagement plays a crucial role in fostering positive student, family, educator, and school outcomes.[3] For students, active family, school, and community engagement can lead to improved academic performance, enhanced social and emotional wellbeing, and higher school retention and completion rates.[4] When there are strong family, school, and community partnerships, families feel included and welcomed and are better equipped to support their children's learning and collaborate with schools. Families include all individuals who play a leading role in caregiving their children and goes beyond biological relationships, including caregivers, guardians, and extended family members—from grandparents to aunts, uncles, or cousins.[5] Educators also benefit as well from strong family, school, and community partnerships, as families are positioned as valuable assets rather than as barriers to collaboration, resulting in greater professional satisfaction and success. Education systems also benefit from stronger partnerships, as they create the conditions necessary for meaningful and sustainable reforms and transformations.[6]

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2   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education.*

3   Geert Driessen, Frederik Smit, and Peter Sleegers, "Parental Involvement and Educational Achievement," *British Educational Research Journal* 31, no. 4 (2005): 509–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920500148713.; Leilane Henriette Barreto Chiappetta-Santana, Ana Deyvis Santos Araújo Jesuino, and Ariela Raissa Lima-Costa,"Learning Motivation, Socioemotional Skills and School Achievement in Elementary School Students," *Paideía Ribeirão Preto* 32, (2022), https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4327e3232.; Mauricio Saracostti et al, "Influence of Family Involvement and Children's Socioemotional Development on the Learning Outcomes of Chilean Students," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, (2019): 335, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00335.

4   Abdul Waheed Mughal, Jo Aldridge, and Mark Monaghan, "Perspectives of Dropped-Out Children on Their Dropping Out from Public Secondary Schools in Rural Pakistan," *International Journal of Educational Development* 66, (2019): 52–61, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.02.004.; Loizos Symeou, Raquel-Amaya Martínez-González, and Lucía Álvarez-Blanco."Dropping out of High School in Cyprus: Do Parents and the Family Matter?" I*nternational Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 19, no 1 (2012): 113–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2012.717899.

5   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

6   Winthrop et al, *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems*.

In Brazil, documented efforts to engage families and communities in education are often ad hoc as opposed to an intentional and integral part of the Brazilian education system. At the time this research was conducted, there were no known civil society organizations or government institutions working at the national or state levels that fully dedicated their work and mission to improving and strengthening family, school, and community engagement. Additionally, there was little to no pre-service or in-service professional development provided to education leaders, teachers, and staff on how to build intentional and sustainable partnerships with diverse families in their schools.

Since 2022, CUE has partnered with schools, civil society organizations and funders in Brazil to build a foundation for family, school, and community partnership research, peer learning, and collective action across the country. CUE has worked with Associação Vaga Lume, Avante Mobilização Social e Educação, Itaú Social, Nova Escola, and Vozes da Educação to establish the Brazil Family Engagement in Education Network (Rede de Engajamento Famílias e Comunidades na Educação, or Brazil FEEN). This research is the result of the network's commitment to advancing knowledge and practice on the importance of family, school, and community engagement, as well as promoting social transformation and quality education. This network is a branch of CUE's Global Family Engagement in Education Network, a peer learning community of practice convened by CUE that includes representatives from civil society and community organizations, government and education leaders, and research and higher education institutions from six continents. The insights learned in Brazil have contributed to global research and learning across the Global Family Engagement in Education Network.

Family, school, and community engagement in education frameworks

Family engagement is recognized as essential to young people's learning and development in Brazil's national, state, and municipal education frameworks. The roles and responsibilities of families and communities, however, vary across frameworks. In this brief, five different possible roles and responsibilities of families are analyzed in nine education frameworks. This analysis sheds light on how education leaders and decisionmakers envision family, school and community engagement and the political will and support offered to schools and education institutions to build family engagement and partnerships.

Roles and responsibilities of families were analyzed in nine education frameworks at national, state, and municipal levels.[7] These education frameworks are the governing education laws, government public policies, sectoral programs/plans, and civil society advocacy frameworks for Brazil's education system. The three national education frameworks—National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (1996), National Education Plan (2014), Education Now (2022)—govern public education in Brazil and/or have become a reference to several stakeholders. State Education Plans (PEEs) and Municipal Education Plans (PMEs) were analyzed for three states and three municipalities; their function is to establish education goals and strategies governing local schools and education efforts. Across all the frameworks, the roles of families and communities fell predominantly into four categories: implementation of policies and practices, decisionmaking and leadership, being informed, and shifting mindsets. The most common being implementation of policies and practices and decisionmaking and leadership.

The role that families play in monitoring their child's attendance and in ensuring student success was mentioned at least once across all nine frameworks and is an example of how families are critical for implementation of

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7   The *Education and Family Program*, a national education program implemented 2021-2023, had a component on family engagement. It was not analyzed here because it was discontinued in 2023 and there was not clear documentation on the implementation or evaluation of the program. In August 2024, the national government replaced the discontinued program by the new *School and Community Program*, which is still in its implementation phase.

Roles and responsibilities of families in education frameworks

1. **Implementation of policies and practices:** Utilizes families to implement education policies and frameworks, and/or to promote decentralization of education systems. This includes enlisting families in supporting learning at home, enhancing families' communication with teachers and school leaders, and encouraging active participation and volunteerism in school events and activities.

2. **Decisionmaking and leadership:** Involves families in school decisions and governance bodies through various committees, associations, and boards, and/or in accountability and advocacy efforts.

3. **Being informed:** Ensures families and communities are aware of key education policies, practices, responsibilities, and rights, such as the right of all children to a quality education and healthy nutrition at home.

4. **Providing resources:** Designates parents/caregivers as contributors of financial and in-kind materials and services to schools. This includes any financial or in-kind contributions to teaching, learning, infrastructure, supplies and equipment, management, and other critical areas.

5. **Shifting mindsets:** Mobilizes families, schools, and communities to work together to promote inclusion and reduce stigma and norms prohibiting marginalized children and families from participating in schools. Shifting mindsets also includes intentional efforts to promote positive attitudes and beliefs about family, school, and community partnerships.

policies and practices. In the National Education Plan (2014), schools are expected to "encourage the participation of parents or caregivers in monitoring their children's school activities by strengthening relationships between schools and families."[8] Family participation in decisionmaking and leadership was also noted across the nine frameworks; families were expected to serve on school committees such as 'conselhos escolares,' or school councils. Family participation in school decisionmaking and leadership was often described as 'democratic management.' 'Democratic management' is not clearly or consistently defined across education frameworks, but it implies that parents/caregivers should play an important advisory and leadership role in school committees. This expectation of families' participation in the schools' decision making through 'democratic management' was first mentioned in the National Constitution from 1988 as one of the principles guiding public education in the country and has been reproduced across education frameworks. According to the Ministry of Education's regulations, school committees should be "made up of parents, student representatives, teachers, staff, community members and school principals."[9] Families play "key roles in decisionmaking, providing advice, and mobilizing the community, all of which are essential for the 'democratic management' of public schools."[10]

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8   Ministry of Education. *Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE)* [National Education Plan] (Government of Brazil, 2014). https://pne.mec.gov.br/18-planossubnacionais-de-educacao/543-plano-nacional-de-educacao-lei-n-13-005-2014.

9   "School Councils (National Program for Strengthening School Councils)," Ministério da Educação Nacional, last modified March 13, http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/tags/tag/32663.

10   Ministry of Education Ministério da Educação Nacional "School Councils (National Program for Strengthening School Councils)."

TABLE 2

Roles and responsibilities of families by education framework

Education framework	Roles and responsibilities of families
National	
National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) (1996): Law that governs the organization and operation of Brazil's education system.	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decisionmaking and leadership • Being informed
National Education Plan (PNE) (2014): National plan that establishes guidelines, goals, and strategies for the education sector.	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decisionmaking and leadership • Shifting mindsets
Education Now (2022): Framework developed by a national civil society organization to serve as guidance for the formulation of national and state education plans.	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decisionmaking and leadership
State (Ceará, Goiás, Paraná)	
State Education Plans (PEEs) (2016, 2015, 2015): Plans for how national policies, goals, and strategies will be implemented by state governments.	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decisionmaking and leadership • Shifting mindsets
Municipal (Cruz, Londrina, Luziânia)	
Municipal Education Plans (PMEs) (2015, 2015, 2015): Plans for how municipal policies, goals, and strategies will be implemented by municipality governments.	• Implementation of policies and practices • Decisionmaking and leadership • Shifting mindsets

The third most frequently mentioned role and responsibility of families was shifting mindsets, which was highlighted in seven education frameworks at the national, state, and municipal levels. Shifting mindsets reflected the expectation that families and schools should partner to ensure students from marginalized groups, including residents of rural areas, indigenous, and quilombola[11] communities, had access to education and were enrolled in school. Only one of the nine frameworks, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (1996), suggested that families were responsible for being informed, which in this context meant understanding schools' mission, values, and pedagogical approach. There was no mention of providing resources in any of the frameworks, or the expectation that families would contribute financial and in-kind materials and services to schools.[12] Although it is reaffirming that families play a role in education policy and practice at national, state, and municipal levels, education frameworks lack practical guidance on how schools can effectively implement and strengthen partnerships in ways that are evidence-informed, intentional, and sustainable.

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11   Quilombola communities were founded by formerly enslaved people and are spaces of memory, culture, and resilience. Flavio Gomes, "Quilombos, Hotbeds of Afro-Brazilian Resistance," *UNESCO Courier*, last modified July 3, https://courier.unesco.org/en/articles/quilombos-hotbeds-afro-brazilian-resistance.

12   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN NATIONAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS

The **National Education Guidelines and Framework Law** (1996, Law No. 9,394) is the basis of Brazil's education system, and covers early childhood through higher education. It establishes the principles and objectives for all levels of education and provides a legal framework that guides the development, regulation, and improvement of education provision across the national, state, and municipal levels. Within this Law, the roles and responsibilities of families are threefold. First, families are tasked with the implementation of policies and programs by monitoring students' attendance and performance, as well as ensuring that their children and youth are enrolled in school and maintaining communication with educators. Schools are tasked with establishing connections with families and their surrounding communities to create conditions for social integration. For example, in the case of early childhood education, teaching and learning should be "complementing the action of the family and the community"[13] in the development of their children. Families are expected to collaborate with teachers in activities developed by schools in all stages of a child's education, though no specific activities, strategies, or examples on engagement activities are provided.

Second, according to the Law, schools are required to inform families about the school's Political Pedagogical Plan (PPP), or Projeto Político-Pedagógico. The PPP is a document that details the teaching and learning process and the expectations for the relationships between school staff and families; it is expected to define a school's mission, values, philosophy, identity, and pedagogical proposal approaches and to ensure families are being informed.

Third, families are expected to participate in decision making and leadership. The Law states that families should serve as "members of the institutional, local and regional community in deliberative collegiate bodies,"[14] which is a form of 'democratic management.' Article 14 of the Law tasks state and municipal education systems with defining the rules and mechanisms of 'democratic management' according to their own contexts. Although 'democratic management' is used three times in the Law, it is not clearly defined.

The **National Education Plan (PNE)** (2014) outlines the goals, strategies, and guidelines for the country's education system for the years between 2014 and 2024. It designates roles and responsibilities for families in six out of the Plan's 20 goals. Within this Plan, families are tasked with three main roles. First, in implementing policies and programs, which refers to monitoring student attendance and participation in other school-related activities like the Law. The second role and responsibility of families is participating in decision making and leadership through school committees, the development of schools' PPPs and school management plans, and assessing teachers' and school leaders' performance. Third, families are expected to support shifting mindsets and helping schools develop teaching and learning approaches that take into consideration the specific needs of children with disabilities and those in rural, indigenous, and quilombola communities. This Plan mandates that "states, the federal district, and municipalities must prepare their corresponding education plans, or adapt the plans already approved by law, in accordance with the guidelines, goals, and strategies provided in this plan, within one year from the publication of this Law."[15]

The final national education framework analyzed, **Educação Já** (Education Now) (2022), is a tool for guiding the development of national and state education plans. It was developed by the civil society organization Todos Pela Educação with the contributions of more than 60 educational specialists and professionals, as well as 18 organi-

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13   Ministry of Education, *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* [National Education Guidelines and Framework Law] (Government of Brazil, 1996), 22, https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l9394.htm.

14   Ministry of Education, *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* [National Education Guidelines and Framework Law],39.

15   Ministry of Education, *Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE)* [National Education Plan], 22.

zations from the educational field.[16] The effort is intended to be an evidence-based tool to guide the development of national and state education plans as well as systemic educational reforms. The framework includes ten policy recommendations and education system measures aimed at improving the quality of education and reducing inequalities. In this framework, families are mentioned 17 times and have two roles and responsibilities in three of the ten education system measures: implementing policies and programs and decision making and leadership. Families' roles and responsibilities in decision making and leadership fall under the education system measure School Management (measure five), where it is recommended that families actively participate and engage in their children's schools. Families' role in implementing policies and programs is also mentioned under Early Childhood (measure seven) and Middle School (measure nine) where families' roles in parenting/caregiving and supporting learning at home are described.

The ten educational system measures of Educação Já

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16   Todos Pela Educação, Educação Já 2022: C*ontribuições para a Construção de uma Agenda Ssistêmica na Educação Básica Brasileira* [Education Now 2022: Contributions to the Construction of a Systemic Agenda in Brazilian Basic Education] (Todos Pela Educação, 2022). https://todospelaeducacao.org.br/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/educacaoja2022-abril02-todospelaeducacao.pdf?utm_source=download&utm_id=documento

STATE EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS

State Education Plans (2015, 2016) serve two main functions: adapting the objectives and goals of the National Education Plan to the state's specific context and aligning these goals with municipalities' needs. Although all three State Education Plans delegated the same roles and responsibilities to families as the national plan, these state education frameworks expanded the language and strategies on how families should be involved in implementing policies and programs, decision making and leadership, and shifting mindsets to better fit their state contexts. Yet, the frameworks do not offer a clear vision of how family engagement works in practice. For example, none of the three State Education Plans provide detailed guidance on how to "encourage the participation of parents or caregivers in monitoring their children's school activities by strengthening relations between schools and families."[17]

MUNICIPAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORKS

Municipal Education Plans (2015) aim to establish educational objectives and priorities at the local municipal level, aligning them with the broader goals set by the national and State Education Plans. These municipal plans ensure that educational policies and resources are tailored to address specific community needs, promote equitable access to quality education, and improve student outcomes within the municipality. However, the Municipal Education Plans often replicate the exact language used in the national and state plans and thus designate the same roles and responsibilities to families. None of the three municipal plans analyzed provide contextualized family, school, and community engagement goals or strategies for their communities.

This analysis of nine Brazilian education frameworks shows how national, state, and municipal governments envision the roles and responsibilities for families and communities. Although all the frameworks suggest that families are important to education systems and 'democratic management,' none of the frameworks provided clear and concise strategies that schools can use for building and strengthening family, school, and community partnerships. In order to help schools to be inclusive of all families, a clear vision and detailed policy guidance on how schools and families can work together to support student learning and development is essential.

Conversation Starter Tools methodology

The findings and recommendations in this policy brief draw on the document analysis presented above as well as data collected through the Conversation Starter Tools research methodology. The goal of this methodology is to guide schools and civil society organizations in examining the landscape of family, school, and community engagement in their context, and a process by which they can develop greater relational trust and craft a shared vision of how to build stronger family, school, and community partnerships. Family, school, and community engagement strategies relevant to each context emerge through this community-driven research, and strategies are integrated into school practices and policies.
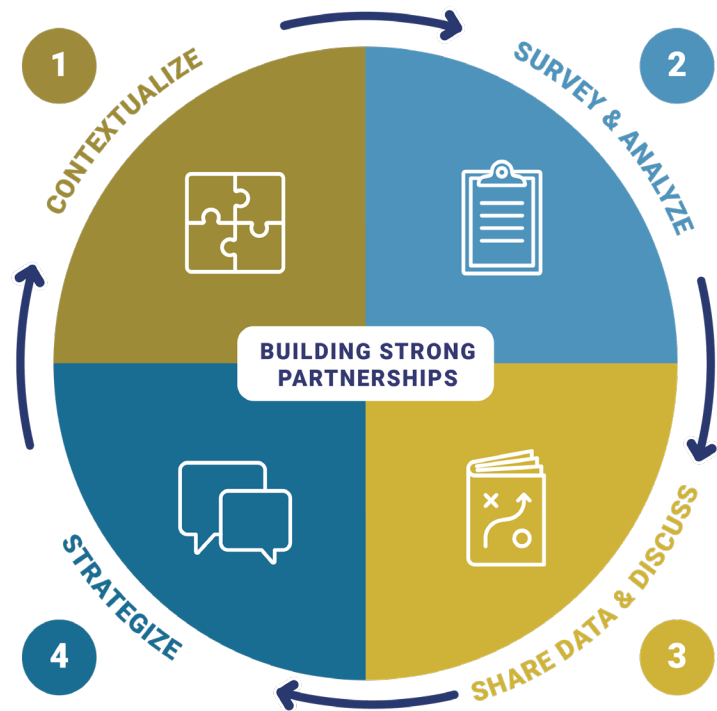
The Conversation Starter Tools were developed by the Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education initiative at CUE in collaboration with school and civil society organization teams around the world, including Vozes da Educação in Brazil. This approach guides school teams through the process of collecting survey data with families, educators, and students, using data as a springboard for dialogues, and ultimately to generate strategies and new directions to support greater family, school, and community engagement. The Conversation Starter Tools suite includes surveys, focus group discussion guides, and other protocols that can be used by school, district,

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17   Government of the State of Paraná. *Plano Estadual de Educação do* Paraná [Paraná's State Education Plan] (Government of the State of Paraná, 2015), 62, https://www.educacao.pr.gov.br/sites/default/arquivos_restritos/files/documento/2020-08/pee_lei_18492_2015.pdf.

and civil society groups to conduct research that fosters data, dialogue, and directions that inform efforts to build greater collaboration and partnerships between families, schools, and communities.[18]

Conversation Starter Tools process

The Conversation Starter Tools research supports school and civil society organization teams in understanding educator, family, and student perspectives on school and experiences with family, school, and community engagement. The mixed-methods approach is not intended to judge or assess schools or districts but to help teams develop strategies that work for their community and foster relational trust between schools and families. School and civil society organization teams use quantitative and qualitative data to inform family, school, and community engagement strategies (policies, practices, programs, and personnel) relevant to the school or district. This methodology was co-developed and piloted by teams in 16 countries.

Between 2022 and 2024, the CST teams surveyed 9,473 families, 2,726 educators, and 9,963 students in 235 schools across 16 countries on their beliefs on and experience with school, and the barriers to and opportunities for family, school, and community partnerships. Hundreds of subsequent dialogues on how strategies for strengthening partnerships were then held across these schools. Six critical takeaways were developed from these global data and dialogues, and are detailed in *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

Vozes da Educação surveyed 1,001 government primary school teachers, education leaders, and families (parents/caregivers) in 12 schools in two municipalities (Cruz [Ceará] and Londrina [Paraná]) between September 2022 and February 2023. Prior to administering the surveys, the Vozes da Educação research team extensively field-tested the questions with a group of families and educators from diverse backgrounds. The research team

18   Emily M. Morris, Laura Nóra, and Rebecca Winthrop, *Conversation Starter Tools: A Participatory Research Guide to Building Stronger Family, School, and Community Partnerships* (Brookings Institution, 2024), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/conversation-starter-tools/.

determined what survey language to use in the final Portuguese versions to ensure wording was understandable, relevant, and accurate for families across literacy levels and demographics. The survey was then extended to all families in grades one to five at the 12 sample schools, and all teachers and school staff were invited to participate. In 2024, Avante Educação e Mobilização Social, a civil society organization based in Brazil, extended this research methodology to another four schools in the municipality of Luziânia in the state of Goiás. An additional 368 respondents were also surveyed by Avante, including primary school teachers, education leaders, and families. The participating schools were purposely selected because of their prior collaboration work with each organization, as well as their eagerness to improve family, school, and community engagement in their schools.

Surveys were administered orally by community facilitators and liaisons trusted by the families and school staff, and facilitators were trained by the leading research teams. Oral surveying helped ensure the inclusion of families with low literacy levels and eliminated barriers for families who did not have access to technology. To help families understand the goal of these surveys, the leading research teams shared short videos and audio messages on WhatsApp through existing family groups at the school. On average 60% of families in the targeted grades were reached through the surveys. CUE analyzed and synthesized the data into short summaries geared to low-literacy audiences. Research teams then presented the data to each school and held dialogues with a group of parents/caregivers and educators who participated in the surveys. The dialogues not only helped provide qualitative data on why families and educators responded the way they did on surveys, but also provided an opportunity to build relational trust and identify new directions and strategies that schools could use to build family, school, and community partnerships.

In a small subset of four schools in Cruz, research teams used an additional tool—the Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool ("Global Rubrics Tool")—to assess current practices used by the schools. Small groups of 8-10 teachers, school staff, and family representatives met to assess how schools were building an inclusive culture with families, facilitating relational trust, and other elements of partnerships. Qualitative data that emerged from the exercise and dialogues informed the findings.

As this exploratory research was conducted with a limited number of schools in three municipalities, it is not meant to make generalizations about family, school, and community engagement practices in Brazil. However, the data and findings provide an in-depth look at schools' needs and aspirations for family and school partnerships in different districts and contexts and helps guide schools and communities in naming contextually based strategies to strengthen family, school, and community partnerships.

Analysis and discussion

Demographics of schools, families, and educators

In total, 995 families (parents/caregivers) and 374 school educators (teachers, staff, education leaders) participated in this research in Brazil.

GENDER AND DISABILITY STATUS OF CHILD

In all three municipalities, most family respondents (between 85% and 92%) were female. Of the primary school educators surveyed, 78% to 95% were female; this is consistent with national data that shows that 88% of primary

school teachers in Brazil are female.[19] Overall, only 5% of the 1,001 families reported having a child with a disability (CWD), though the actual number is expected to be much higher; insufficient identification mechanisms and lack of awareness of children's disabilities likely contributed to underreporting.

TABLE 3

Gender of families and educators

Municipality	Families			Educators	
	Number	Percent female	Percent CWD	Number	Percent female
Cruz	220	92.3%	2.7%	109	93.5%
Londrina	514	84.7%	5.5%	158	94.8%
Luziânia	261	88.3%	5.9%	107	78.3%
Total mean	**995**	**87.3**	**5.0%**	**374**	**89.7%**

During dialogues with teachers, education leaders, and families, family engagement was often referred to as 'mothers' engagement or 'grandmothers' engagement. It was assumed that women are the main caregivers, and that family engagement was their responsibility, which is supported by national data that shows that mothers carry a heavier role in caregiving.[20] Also discussed during the dialogues was how single mothers carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving and family, school, and community engagement. In 2022, 14.9% (11.3 million) of the households in Brazil were led by single mothers.[21] While it is true that most family engagement falls onto the shoulders of women, efforts to promote engagement of male caregivers are equally important to children's development and success, as well as helping shift perceptions around gender stereotypes. It is interesting to note of all the sixteen countries in the global study on family engagement featured in Six Global Lessons, Brazil had the highest proportion of parents/caregivers who were female (87%).[22]

EDUCATION LEVEL AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUSES

Levels of education of families and socioeconomic statuses were analyzed together as they are often correlated and impact their families' engagement with schools. Global research shows that parents/caregivers with high socioeconomic statuses are more likely to be involved in their children's schooling.[23] Conversely, families of lower socioeconomic statuses have reported that they are often eager to participate in their children's schools but are unable to do so as they lack the time and financial resources needed to support learning at home.[24]

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19   World Bank, *Primary Education, Teachers – Brazil. World Bank Open Data* (World Bank, 2021), https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TCHR.FE.ZS?locations=BR.

20   Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), *Gender Statistics: Social Indicators of Women in Brazil*, 3rd ed. (Demographic and Socioeconomic Information Studies and Research, 2021), https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv102066_informativo.pdf.

21   Janaína Feijó, "Mães Solo no Mercado de Trabalho," Blog do IBRE (blog), effective May 12, 2023, https://blogdoibre.fgv.br/posts/maes-solo-no-mercado-de-trabalho.

22   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

23   Laura Cashman, Ricardo Sabates, and Benjamin Alcott, "Parental Involvement in Low-Achieving Children's Learning: The

Role of Household Wealth in Rural India," *International Journal of Educational Research* 105, (2021): 101701, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101701; Cheng Yong Tan, Meiyan Lyu, and Baiwen Peng, "Academic Benefits from Parental Involvement Are Stratified by Parental Socioeconomic Status: A Meta-Analysis," *Parenting* 20, no. 4 (2019): 241–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2019.1694836.

24   Debra Malone, "Socioeconomic Status: A Potential Challenge for Parental Involvement in Schools," *Delta Kappa Gamma* Bulletin 83, no. 3 (2017): 58–62.

TABLE 4

Levels of education and household socioeconomic statuses of families

Municipality	Number	Level of Education		Socioeconomic Status		
		Less than Secondary	Secondary and Above	Never or Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Cruz	220	54.3%	45.7%	15.2%	28.1%	56.7%
Londrina	514	19.6%	80.4%	4.3%	22.2%	73.4%
Luziânia	261	43.0%	57.0%	14.9%	24.1%	61%
Total	**995**	**33.4%**	**66.6%**	**9.4%**	**24%**	**66.6%**

Parents'/caregivers' levels of education and socioeconomic statuses on average were lower in Cruz and Luziânia than in Londrina, which is consistent with data from the National Institute of Geography and Statistics.[25] In Cruz and Luziânia, roughly one in two parents/caregivers had less than a secondary education, which includes no education or some primary or secondary schooling. To the contrary, nearly four out of five parents/caregivers in Londrina had a secondary education (completed high school) or higher degree (e.g. university, technical, and beyond), and nearly three out of four (74%) were "always" able to meet their basic needs, including food and living expenses. Roughly 15% of families in Cruz and Luziânia "never" or "sometimes" were able to meet their basic needs, which is considered poverty or extreme poverty, and roughly a quarter across all three municipalities were "mostly" meeting their basic needs and experiencing relative poverty. The poverty levels were higher in Cruz and Luziânia than in Londrina.

Findings and recommendations

This section presents five key findings and actionable recommendations that emerged from the research, providing valuable insights for education leaders from government, civil society institutions, and community organizations in Brazil. The recommendations offer practical guidance to strengthen inclusive and equity-oriented family, school, and community partnership policies and practices, ensuring that students and schools have the family and community support they need to thrive.

> Finding 1: National, state, and municipal education frameworks often envision the role of families in engaging with schools as contributing to decision making and leadership, particularly through 'democratic management.' Yet, the frameworks lack a clear and detailed description of how families can contribute to decision making and leadership in practice, and how they can contribute to other critical forms of family, school, and community engagement.

All nine education frameworks had extensive mentions of families' participation in decision making and leadership through 'democratic management,' yet there is no clear vision and guidance on how to translate 'democratic management' into practice. According to the education frameworks, schools should include families on school

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25   Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), *IBGE Cities [IBGE Cidades]*, 2022, https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/panorama.

committees, yet there is no official mandate or accountability to ensure actual participation. Schools are responsible for defining their own procedures and regulations, including who has the right to vote on committees.[26]

Although participation in decisionmaking and leadership is an important type of family engagement, it generally involves only a small proportion of families.[27] According to the surveys in three municipalities in Brazil, only one in every ten families is involved in providing feedback on school decisions and even fewer reported they had a leadership role in a parent association. Because there is a lack of clarity, detail, and actionable guidance in education frameworks, few schools in this research could identify strategies to be inclusive of the most marginalized families, including those of children with disabilities and children from low-income families.

> ## Recommendation 1: Ensure national, state, and municipal education frameworks have clear roles and responsibilities for families that are both implementable and inclusive of all families. This includes clear guidance on how to implement 'democratic management' in schools and other forms of decision making and leadership.

Parent/caregiver participation in decision making and leadership is an important mechanism to making families' voices and needs heard. When families participate in school committees or other governance bodies, they build the skills to advocate for the students and communities, often leading to higher parent/caregiver satisfaction and better student performance.[28] In Brazil, 'democratic management' is presented by researchers and educational frameworks as the ideal model for school governance, enabling families and communities to actively participate in the decisionmaking process.[29]

National, state, and municipal education frameworks should include guidance on how schools can implement 'democratic management' in practice. Schools in Amazonas and Porto Alegre provided two promising practices for fostering 'democratic management.' One primary school in Amazonas faced a crisis of high school dropout and pushout rates, compounded by an influx of Haitian and Venezuelan refugee students coming from different education systems and languages of instruction. Students often failed to thrive in an environment that did not accommodate their realities or support their learning needs. In 2010, recognizing the need for a radical shift in how the school engaged families and the community, the school adopted weekly assemblies where students, families, and staff could collaboratively address individual perceptions, reactions, challenges, and ideas surrounding the new curricular practices. These assemblies were an example of 'democratic management,' where the families, communities, and students were empowered to co-create solutions and participate in decision making. Using this process of collective decision making they made changes to communication and how concerns and perspectives were shared and how the schools' PPP was developed and confirmed. Today, the school stands as a dynamic, inclusive space that prioritizes family, school, and community engagement and fosters a culture of shared responsibility and 'democratic management' practices.[30]

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26   Todos Pela Educação, "Perguntas e Respostas: Como Funcionam os Conselhos Escolares?" [Questions and Answers: How Do School Councils Work?], *Todos Pela Educação*, effective January 22, 2018, https://todospelaeducacao.org.br/noticias/perguntas-e-respostas-como-funcionam-os-conselhos-escolares/.

27   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

28   Pedro A. Noguera, "Transforming Urban Schools through Investments in the Social Capital of Parents," in *Social Capital and Poor Communities*, ed. Susan Saegert, J. Phillip Thompson, and Mark R. Warren (Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 189–212.

29   Gilzilene França Almeida, *A Gestão Democrática nos Planos Municipais de Educação: Compromissos e Realizações dos Municípios na Região Norte do Tocantins* [Democratic Management in Municipal Education Plans: Commitments and Achievements of Municipalities in the Northern Region of Tocantins] (Especialização, Universidade Federal do Tocantins, 2020), http://hdl.handle.net/11612/4225.

30   Winthrop et al., *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems*, 266-276.

A primary school in Porto Alegre provides another example. This school had a high dropout/pushout rate and was often the target of vandalism. Teachers reported a climate of disrespect by students. In 2012, to address these safety concerns, a school team made up of education leaders and teachers approached families and students to talk about how to improve the school climate and safety as well as students' development and progress. The school began holding monthly assemblies with all educators, students, and families, during which they would collectively make routine decisions about important issues like school safety.[31] In 2022, the school was one of the three finalists for the World's Best School Prizes in the "community collaboration" category for its 'democratic management' model.

These promising practices show how 'democratic management' can be fostered in different contexts. However, to implement decisionmaking and leadership strategies that are consistent and sustainable across the country, national, state, and municipal education frameworks need to include clear roles and responsibilities for families as well as clear guidance for schools. Additionally, to be truly democratic, decision making and leadership in schools should involve diverse families and representatives and education frameworks should provide more guidance on how to do so.

> **Finding 2: There is a disconnect between how educators and families perceive family, school, and community engagement. Educators largely defined engagement as attending school events. In contrast, families saw supporting learning at home as the main form of engagement that involves all families.**

Families and educators were asked to name all the different ways that families were involved in their children's education in the surveys. They were given eight different response options that fell under one of the six types of family involvement and engagement shown in the figure below.[32] Participants also had the option to select "additional" and write in their own response.

Across the three municipalities, families reported that their main type of engagement was supporting learning at home, which included encouraging their children's academic growth by helping with homework; providing children with school materials, uniforms, and other needs; and supporting their children's social and emotional learning and development. As one parent/caregiver noted, family engagement is "an exchange between school and family to help with the child's development."[33] On average, two in three parents/caregivers (67.4%) reported that their main type of family engagement was supporting learning at home. The second most common

Types of family involvement and engagement

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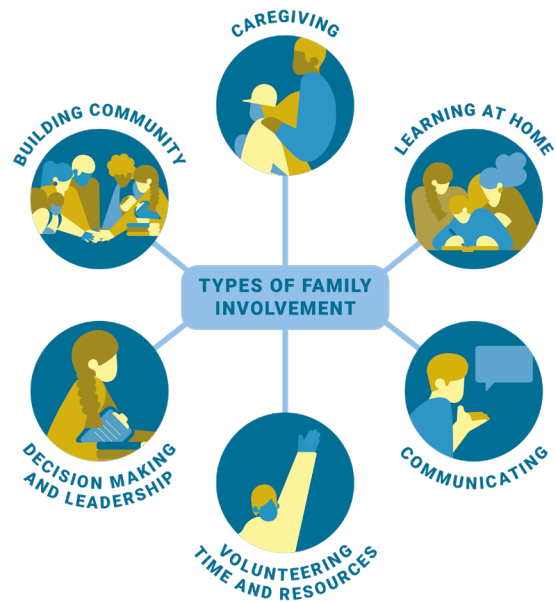
31   Beatriz Vichessi, "Três Escolas Brasileiras São Finalistas De Prêmio Que Vai Escolher as Melhores Do Mundo," Nova Escola, effective June 9, 2022, https://novaescola.org.br/conteudo/21268/tres-escolas-publicas-brasileiras-sao-finalistas-de-premio-que-vai-escolher-as-melhores-do-mundo.

32   From the Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*. Based on Epstein, Joyce L., Mavis G. Sanders, Steven B. Sheldon, Beth S. Simon, Karen Clark Salinas, Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn, et al. School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Corwin, 2008.

33   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, Brazil, September 2024.

type of involvement was communicating with school staff (62.3%). Less than half of families (43.5%) reported that they were attending school events. Across all three municipalities parents/caregivers with higher levels of education (some secondary or above) attended school events at a significantly higher rate[34] than parents/caregivers with primary schooling or less. On average, one in ten family members (11.7%) said they were providing feedback on school decisions, and an even smaller proportion of families (4.8%) reported involvement in a leadership role in a parent association or committee.

TABLE 5

Types of family involvement and engagement according to families and educators

Types of family involvement and engagement	Group	Cruz	Londrina	Luziânia	Total
Supporting learning at home and caregiving					
Supporting or monitoring learning	Families	79.5%	71.4%	49.4%	**67.4%**
	Educators	59.6%	45.6%	28.0%	44.7%
Communicating					
Communicating with school staff and teachers	Families	73.2%	65.6%	46.7%	**62.3%**
	Educators	67.0%	63.9%	30.8%	**55.3%**
Following school news	Families	64.5%	55.3%	37.5%	52.7%
	Educators	50.5%	43.7%	26.2%	40.6%
Building community					
Attending school events	Families	59.1%	44.2%	29.1%	43.5%
	Educators	47.7%	57.6%	29.0%	**46.5%**
Volunteering time and resources					
Donations (financial contributions)	Families	14.1%	24.1%	8.8%	17.9%
	Educators	1.8%	20.9%	3.7%	10.4%
Volunteering in school activities	Families	3.6%	9.3%	4.6%	6.8%
	Educators	3.7%	12.0%	2.8%	7.0%
Decisionmaking and leadership					
Providing feedback on school decisions	Families	14.5%	13.8%	5.0%	11.7%
	Educators	20.2%	17.7%	0.9%	13.6%
Leadership role in a parent association	Families	3.2%	7.8%	0.4%	4.8%
	Educators	12.8%	16.5%	0.9%	11.0%
Not involved	Families	0.0%	2.3%	3.4%	2.1%
	Educators	3.7%	5.7%	14%	7.5%

Note: Responses were "select all" and do not equal 100%. Bolded percentages are top 2 selections for each group.

When asked what family, school, and community engagement meant, one educator highlighted "good coexistence with the school, having parents present at the school, families and schools [working] together."[35] The majority of school educators said communicating with teachers and school staff (55.3%) and attending school events (46.5%) were the main types of family engagement, followed by supporting learning at home (44.7%). During dialogues, educators described how communicating with school staff and teachers entailed in-person meetings with parents/care-

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34   Significance level of .95.

35   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, Brazil, September 2024.

givers, communicating through SMS or social media groups (e.g., WhatsApp), or speaking on the phone. On average, educators reported attending school events, providing feedback on school decisions, and serving leadership roles in a parent association at higher rates than families. School events included celebrations, parent-teacher conferences, and all school meetings and assemblies.

Overall, school educators tended to define family involvement and engagement as direct communication and interactions with teachers and staff whereas families identified involvement as what happens in the home, including caregiving and supporting learning. In education frameworks, family involvement was often defined as participation in decision making and leadership. All these types of involvement and engagement are important and should be taken into consideration in policy planning and development.

> **Recommendation 2: Support schools to create shared visions and plans for family, school, and community engagement that encompass all the ways that families support their children's learning, including in the home. Schools need to go beyond solely hosting family-facing events and ensure that forms of engagement are inclusive of all families, including the most marginalized.**

Schools must ensure that educators and families can work together to support well-being at home and in school. Findings revealed that the main way that families are actively involved in their children's education is through supporting learning at home, but more could be done to enhance these practices. For example, school teams can help families support learning at home by providing clear educational activities and guidance appropriate for families with different education levels and equipping families with developmentally appropriate tips, encouragement, and resources.[36] State and municipal departments of education could also provide clear guidance to educators on how they can work with families to support children's learning and development at home. For example, in Sierra Leone a civil society organization worked in close collaboration with the district government to co-design a parent/caregiver engagement toolkit that helps families feel more confident in supporting their children's learning at home. A pictorial tool was created to give mothers with low levels of education concrete questions to ask their children's teachers about their learning and development, and to ensure mothers know what to do to ensure their children are meeting grade-level expectations.[37]

During the research process in Brazil, educators and families alike emphasized how communication with schools was an important type of family engagement. Yet, during dialogues the communicated they described often fell under one-way communication, telling families what they think they needed to hear, as opposed to two-way communication and creating opportunities to listen to families. Greater two-way communication and opportunities to listen and hear from families is critical. As one parent/caregiver noted, "The school could listen more to families. Engagement is also about helping and guiding families."[38] The assemblies in Amazonas and Porto Alegre described under the first recommendation are examples of fostering two-way communication that could be studied and replicated in other states.

When asked about effective strategies to improve family, school, and community engagement, school teams often thought about the creation of more school events to increase interactions with families. While events help build interactions, according to the research, adding more events to the school calendar and expecting all families to attend

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36   ParentPowered, *2022-23 End of School Year Impact Report for Springfield School District* (ParentPowered, 2023), https://parentpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SAMPLE-District_End-of-Year-Report.pdf.

37   Emily Markovich Morris, Max Lieblich, and Laura Nóra, *Building Partnerships Where Families, Schools, and Communities Stand Together in Sierra Leone* (Brookings Institution, 2024), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Sierra-Leone-Policy-Brief.pdf.

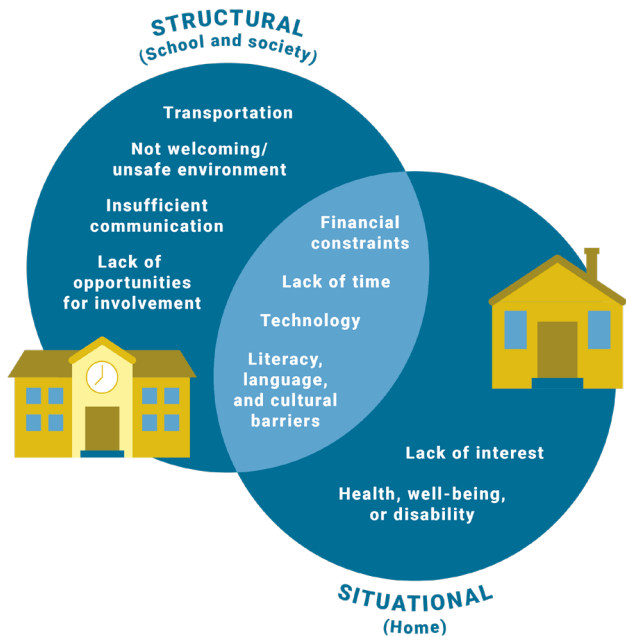38   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, Brazil, September 2024

puts a burden on families who already lack time and flexible work arrangements.[39] In order to make family, school, and community engagement part of schools' practices, education frameworks need to be inclusive of diverse families and provide schools with clear and concise strategies on how to strengthen family-school partnerships through a variety of forms of engagement, and not just events.

> **Finding 3: There are different kinds of barriers preventing families from being more engaged with schools. Barriers can be structural (school-facing), situational, (family-facing), and a combination of the two. According to families, the main barriers they faced in engaging with schools are lack of time and financial constraints. Educators perceived that families also lacked interest in engaging with schools. Differences in perspectives on barriers to family engagement have led to a blame game between educators and families that inhibit strong partnerships.**

Families and educators were also asked in the survey to identify the main barriers that families faced in engaging with schools. They were given ten possible barriers and the opportunity to name an additional barrier(s) or name "no barriers." Barriers fell under structural, situational, and a combination of structural and situational barriers, as shown in figure 4.[40] Structural barriers are perpetuated by schools and education systems and include lack of transportation as well as unwelcoming or unsafe environments. Barriers that vary depending on the familial circumstances and situations are called situational barriers and include health challenges or disabilities of a parent/caregiver that hinders their ability to connect with teachers and staff or attend school events. Many barriers, including lack of time and financial resources to engage with schools and educators, were overlapping structural and situational barriers.

The main barrier named across municipalities, and families and educators alike, was lack of time. Over a third of families (41.0%) and more than half of school educators (59.6%) said lack of time was the main barrier families faced in being engaged in their child's education. Lack of time meant families did not have flexible work situations or had challenging circumstances, like a single parent/caregiver having children at multiple schools, inhibiting their participation in events and ability to communicate with educators. Dialogues with families and educators revealed that working families, single mothers with more than one child, and parents/caregivers dealing with a health or disability in the family often struggled to take time away from their work to meet expectations for family, school, and community engagement set by schools, like attending parent-teacher meetings during working hours. Many families felt judged and that their struggles with poverty were often overlooked. As one parent/caregiver said, "I believe our society

Barriers to family involvement and engagement

STRUCTURAL
(School and society)

Transportation

Not welcoming/unsafe environment

Insufficient communication

Lack of opportunities for involvement

Financial constraints

Lack of time

Technology

Literacy, language, and cultural barriers

Lack of interest

Health, well-being, or disability

SITUATIONAL
(Home)

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39   Karen L. Mapp et al., *Everyone Wins!: The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships and Implications for Practice* (Scholastic, 2022).

40   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

is structured in a way that prevents families from participating in school. If a worker asks for time off to visit their child's school, their pay is deducted."[41]

The schools' and education systems' expectation that parents/caregivers participate in activities during the school day and take time away from work and income generating activities to come to school, creates a predicament for parents/caregivers working in multiple jobs and in positions where they do not have flexible work hours and conditions. According to the conversations across the three municipalities, mandating family attendance at school meetings and events can often penalize the most marginalized families, a finding noted in other countries in the global study.[42]

Compared to lack of time, families choose other barriers at considerably lower rates, For example, less than ten percent of families selected financial constraints (8.9%), and less than six percent selected literacy, language, or cultural barriers (5.9%). In Luziânia, roughly half of families (46.7%) from higher socioeconomic statuses, who always were able to meet their basic needs, reported no barriers to getting engaged in their children's education, in contrast to families from lower socioeconomic statuses (21.6%). This difference was statistically significant, and it indicates that marginalized families face more barriers in getting involved in their children's education. The data also showed that nearly half of educators (42.2%) in Cruz, the municipality with the highest percentage of families from lower levels of education and socioeconomic statuses, identified literacy, language, or culture as one of the main barriers to family engagement. One educator in Luziânia said that parents'/caregivers' "lack of interest and their low education levels, many are not used to paying attention to school activities, going to school, and do not set aside time with the child."[43]

Educators reported that a main barrier to family engagement was lack of interest among parents/caregivers; nearly a third (34.8%) across municipalities named this as the second major barrier. According to the conversations, lack of interest included parents/caregivers not showing interest or motivation in engaging with school staff, activities, or student learning. One educator said, "The school has done so much, but there's a lack of interest from the parents. We call, reach out, but we don't get a response from them. There's a lack of willingness on their part."[44] Educators often felt overwhelmed and frustrated. Families did not report lack of interest as one of the main reasons they are not involved in the survey or in the conversations. On average, only 0.5% of families reported that lack of interest was a barrier to their engagement with schools. Instead, 94% of families who were not already highly involved in their children's education said they wanted to be more involved. During conversations, families discussed that they often did not know how to get involved beyond organized school events, and/or they did not feel that their children's schools welcomed their participation. Instead, these public-school families reported feeling stigmatized, especially those with lower education levels, for not being able to participate more in school events and felt blamed when their children were having challenges with learning or in the school. This blame game prevented schools from building strong family, school, and community partnerships.

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41   Focus group discussion, Londrina, Brazil, May 2023.

42   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

43   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, September 2024.

44   Focus group discussion, Cruz, Brazil, May 2023.

TABLE 6

Barriers to involvement according to families and educators

Barriers to involvement	Group	Cruz	Londrina	Luziânia	Total
Structural Barriers					
Lack of transportation	Families	6.4%	2.7%	6.9%	4.6%
	Educators	11.0%	6.3%	7.5%	8.0%
Not welcoming environment (not comfortable with school staff)	Families	0.5%	0.8%	2.3%	1.1%
	Educators	0.0%	0.6%	1.9%	0.8%
Insufficient communication between family and school	Families	1.4%	2.5%	3.4%	2.5%
	Educators	5.5%	5.7%	10.3%	7.0%
Situational Barriers					
Lack of interest (not interested)	Families	0.9%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%
	Educators	25.7%	46.8%	26.2%	**34.8%**
Health issues or disability of family members	Families	2.3%	5.6%	2.3%	4.0%
	Educators	11.9%	10.1%	5.6%	9.4%
Structural and Situational Barriers					
Lack of time	Families	39.1%	44.6%	35.6%	**41.0%**
	Educators	57.8%	66.5%	51.4%	**59.6%**
Financial constraints	Families	5.0%	10.9%	8.4%	8.9%
	Educators	9.2%	25.9%	15.9%	**18.2%**
Literacy, language, or cultural barriers	Families	11.8%	3.7%	5.4%	5.9%
	Educators	42.2%	16.5%	12.1%	22.7%
Lack of technology	Families	3.6%	3.1%	2.7%	3.1%
	Educators	12.8%	13.3%	7.5%	11.5%
No barriers	Families	43.6%	36.0%	36.8%	**37.9%**
	Educators	6.4%	2.5%	5.6%	4.5%

Note: Responses do not equal 100%. Families and educators were asked to "select all" options that applied except for educators in Luziânia who were "select top 3" options. Bolded percentages are top 2 selections for each group of participants.

Recommendation 3: Identify and design inclusive and evidence-based family, school, and community engagement strategies that are intentionally tailored to the needs and aspirations of diverse families, educators, and students and that intentionally break barriers to engagement.

Research findings and global studies indicate that families struggling to meet their basic daily needs face greater challenges in engaging with schools, particularly when schools design family, school, and community engagement without taking into consideration the needs and aspirations of diverse families, educators, and students.[45] To ensure that families across socioeconomic and demographic groups have equal opportunities to participate in schools, education leaders must prioritize flexibility For example, holding events, assemblies, and meetings at times when most working families can attend—e.g. after typical work hours in evenings or on weekends. Working families and communities also suggested that schools design meetings with a more inclusive tone—focused on collaboration versus punitive issues—and opportunities for dialogue.

To tailor family, school, and community engagement practices to families' needs, schools in the municipality of Cruz replaced traditional parent-teacher meetings, where educators presented general classroom performance to groups of parents, with personalized one-on-one meetings. The previous model, characterized by long and often unclear presentations led by school teams, left little room for meaningful dialogue and personal interactions. In contrast, the new approach, known as "personalized feedback day," provided a dedicated opportunity for parents/caregivers to meet individually with their child's teacher either remotely or in-person. To accommodate families' schedules, educators made themselves available throughout the day rather than within a fixed time window. Schools also strived to create a welcoming atmosphere by setting up comfortable seating areas for families and educators near the school entrance or walkways, offering families coffee, and making the experience less formal and more inviting. These sessions allowed tailored discussions about students' specific needs and created space for educators to listen to families' questions and perspectives. This practice helped families overcome structural and situational barriers and created opportunities for two-way communication and the building of relational trust as well.

Welcoming and inclusive schools have stronger partnerships with families, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration that benefits both students and the broader school community. Therefore, it is essential for school teams to frequently assess family, school, and community engagement efforts in their schools and communities. One strategy that schools can use is the *Global Rubrics Tool*,[46] which guides educators and family leaders in assessing and reflecting on their current family, school, and community practices and policies and plan more inclusive strategies.

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45   Ann M. Ishimaru, "From Family Engagement to Equitable Collaboration." Educational Policy 33, no. 2 (2017): 350–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691841.

46   Global Family Engagement in Education Network, *Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool* (Brookings Institution, 2024), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Global-Rubrics-Web.pdf.

Finding 4: Educators and families have different levels of trust in one another. Educators reported low to moderate trust with families, whereas families cited higher levels of trust with educators. Educators and families wanted more opportunities for meaningful interactions and to build trust.

Research teams asked families and educators[47] to gauge their relational trust with each other. Participants gave their level of agreement to seven statements on a relational trust scale developed by CUE. The scale consists of seven elements as outlined in Figure 5.[48]

In Luziânia, families and educators responded to the full seven-point relational trust statements while participants in Cruz and Londrina responded to a smaller subset of 5-6 statements of the scale.[49] In all three municipalities, families on average reported higher trust with educators than educators reported with families. Families reported that they fell somewhere between feeling "moderate" and "high trust" with educators, while educators' trust was slightly lower and fell between "low" and "moderate trust" with families.

Elements of relational trust
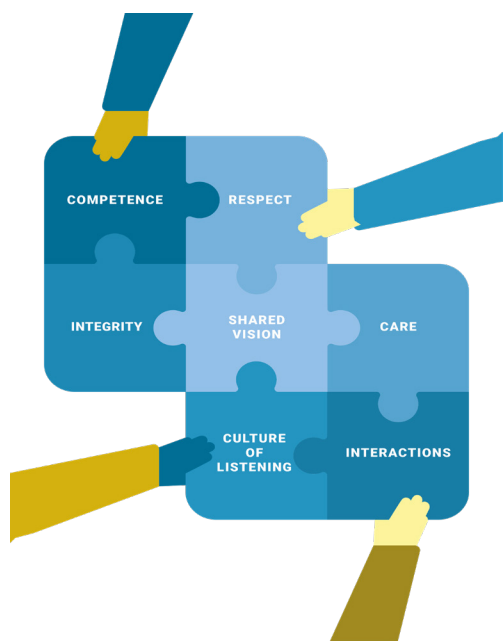
How families and educators rated each of the components of the scale varied by municipality. In Luziânia, families reported higher levels of relational trust (3.18 out of 4) with educators than educators with families (2.70 out of 4). Respect was the component that families and educators rated the highest (3.29 and 3.20 out of 4 respectively). Families rated interactions and culture of listening the lowest (3.02 and 3.05 out of 4 respectively), while educators rated interactions and competence the lowest (2.39 and 2.48 out of 4 respectively). Interactions refer to the extent to which families and educators are in contact and communication with each other; the more contact they have, the more opportunities to develop trust.[50] During dialogues in Luziânia, one parent/caregiver explained that they rated interactions lower because their children often had multiple teachers, which changed throughout the year, making it hard for families to bond with educators. Culture of listening includes valuing students, educators, and families' inputs, and creating opportunities to share and listen. Families did not feel like they had enough opportunities to share their inputs with the school and when they did, their suggestions were not always valued by educators.

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47   In other countries in the global research that looked at family, school, and community engagement in middle and high school, students were also surveyed.

48   The scale was developed over the course of two years and went through many iterations (See Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*).

49   In Cruz and Londrina, two elements (respect and culture of listening) were combined during data collection and two other elements were added later (integrity and care). Educators were not asked about their perceived competence of their students' families.

50   Anthony S. Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

TABLE 7

Relational trust scale ratings by element and municipality across families and educators

Element	Municipality	Rating	
		Families	**Educators**
Shared Vision	Cruz	3.29	2.99
	Londrina	3.19	2.86
	Luziânia	3.07	2.66
Respect	Cruz	3.25	3.25
	Londrina	3.17	3.01
	Luziânia	3.29	3.10
Culture of Listening	Cruz	3.25	3.25
	Londrina	3.17	3.01
	Luziânia	3.05	2.90
Care	Cruz	N/A	N/A
	Londrina	N/A	N/A
	Luziânia	3.11	2.59
Competence	Cruz	3.49	N/A
	Londrina	3.20	N/A
	Luziânia	3.19	2.48
Integrity	Cruz	N/A	N/A
	Londrina	N/A	N/A
	Luziânia	3.17	2.67
Interactions	Cruz	3.26	2.85
	Londrina	3.22	2.68
	Luziânia	3.02	2.39
Total Mean Across the Scale	**Cruz**	**3.32 (N=209)**	**3.03 (N=97)**
	Londrina	**3.22 (N=431)**	**2.87 (N=131)**
	Luziânia	**3.02 (N=184)**	**2.70 (N=54)**

Note: In Cruz and Londrina, respect and culture of listening were combined in the same question. Therefore, the ratings of these elements are the same.

Educators in Luziânia rated the competence of families lower than other elements, meaning they did not think that families were always doing their part in supporting their child's learning and development. Educators said that many families relied too much on schools, expecting teachers to take full responsibility for their children's education and were not dedicating enough time to their children's learning at home. One educator stated that, "Families think that

only teachers have the job to educate children [...] they attribute the educational role solely to the school."[51] In Luziânia educators rated competence of families lower than other elements. In Cruz and Londrina, educators rated interactions with families the lowest (2.85 and 2.68 respectively out of 4). While families and educators in Luziânia respected each other, significant gaps in relational trust stemmed from sporadic interactions and a poor culture of listening.

Families and educators in Cruz varied in their highest rating. Families rated competence of teachers highest (3.49 out of 4), while families in Londrina scored interactions the highest (3.22 out of 4). Families in Cruz and Londrina alike scored the combined element of respect and culture of listening the lowest (3.25 and 3.17 out of 4). It is unclear why in Luziânia families felt more respected by school educators than in Cruz and Londrina, but some of the dialogues suggested that levels of communication may have played into families' perspectives and ratings. Families and educators emphasized the importance of interactions and two-way communication in building strong partnerships and a culture of listening. One educator said "This partnership between school and family is achieved through active and effective communication. I speak and I allow myself to listen to what they [parents/caregivers] have to say [...] Often, we [teachers] don't listen enough, we want to speak and we don't want to hear what the parent/caregiver says."[52] Opportunities for active listening and intentional connections between families and educators are critical to building greater relational trust.[53]

RECOMMENDATION 4: PRIORITIZE EFFORTS TO BUILD RELATIONAL TRUST BETWEEN FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, AND STUDENTS. RELATIONAL TRUST IS CRITICAL TO ENSURING THAT EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORKS, PRACTICES, AND PARTNERSHIPS ARE SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE.

Strong partnerships between families, schools, and communities ensure schools have the conditions and support necessary for students to thrive and require relational trust and for families and educators to feel valued, connected, and genuinely heard.[54] One important strategy for building trust through meaningful interactions is the national Programa Criança Feliz (Happy Child Program), an intersectoral early childhood development program that aims to promote the holistic development of children in early childhood. Through this program, families and children "in a situation of vulnerability and social risk"[55] receive home visits from community agents that are trained in areas such as health, education, and social services.[56] The home visits aim to provide comprehensive support to pregnant women and children in early childhood (up to six years old) by:

1. Offering guidance and care during pregnancy and early childcare.

2. Strengthening parenting skills and family roles in caregiving and education.

3. Ensuring access to essential public policies and services.

Supportive home visits also help schools bridge gaps between school teams and families by improving the culture of listening, creating opportunities for meaningful interactions, and fostering educators' understanding of families' backgrounds. For example, a nation-wide Parent Teacher Home Visits program in the United States was launched in

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51   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, September, 2024.

52   Focus group discussion, Luziânia, September, 2024.

53   Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement*.

54   Bryk et al., *Organizing Schools for Improvement*.

55   This includes: 1) pregnant women who are beneficiaries of the national income cash transfer program; 2) children up to 72 months and their families who are beneficiaries of the national income cash transfer program; and 3) children up to 72 months old removed from family adverse experiences.

56   O que é o Programa Criança Feliz" [What Is the Happy Child Program], Ministério do Desenvolvimento e Assistência Social, Família e Combate à Fome, last modified June 28, 2022, https://www.gov.br/mds/pt-br/acoes-e-programas/crianca-feliz/o-que-e-pcf-2.

1998 as a way of building deeper relationships between schools and families and to "counter deeply held mistrust and disrupt the cycle of blame between home and school."[57] These voluntary home visits target families at different education levels—from preschool to secondary school—and focus on listening to families' aspirations and expectations for their children and collaborating on strategies to support student success. Home visits have been shown to enhance relationships and trust between families and schools, break the blame game, improve teaching practices, and positively impact student outcomes.[58] Home visits also humanize teachers in the eyes of parents/caregivers and make them more approachable.[59]

The importance of building relational trust between families and educators during early years has received considerable attention in research and practice as exemplified with the example of Programa Criança Feliz. Relational trust is also critical during later years, including when students are transitioning through school in late primary, middle, and secondary.[60] Yet, there is often less research and fewer documented strategies for these levels, and research indicates that trust between families, schools, and students often decreases among families and educators as children move through school. Intentional efforts to document and employ strategies for these middle and secondary school years is a critical area of need. For example, since 2003 the State Department of Education of São Paulo has operated the "Escola da Família,"[61] an initiative that supports secondary schools to stay open during the weekend and promotes cultural activities for the community as a way of strengthening partnerships and creating a more welcoming environment.

Finding 5: Schools often lack the human and financial resources and tools to implement inclusive and sustainable family, school, and community partnerships.

According to the dialogues held in schools across the three municipalities, school teams rarely have the human and financial resources to realize family, school, and community engagement goals and to monitor or assess family, school, and community engagement practices. Pedagogical coordinators and education leaders are often the people responsible for family engagement in practice, although there is rarely official time allocated in their job descriptions for interacting with diverse families. Pedagogical coordinators play a multifaceted role in their schools, overseeing student progress and coordinating educational projects as well as training and professional development of teachers. They serve as key intermediaries between the PPP and the teaching staff. Additionally, pedagogical coordinators foster positive relationships within the entire school community, focusing on resolving both collective and individual issues involving students, families, and educators. As pedagogical coordinators are not a mandated and consistent role across all public schools, many schools do not have designated personnel serving in this role and in these schools family engagement falls completely on an education leader or other teacher.

Education leaders, pedagogical coordinators, teachers, and other school staff have little to no training and professional development on how to build intentional and sustainable partnerships with different kinds of families, especially those who are most marginalized. According to one of the largest teacher training institutions in Brazil, some pedagogical coordinators receive pre-service training on family engagement either through a single course or as a theme woven into another course. Without sufficient training, education leaders and pedagogical coordinators are often left to intuitively develop strategies for reaching with families. For example, educators reported that interactions with fam-

57   "Parent Teacher Home Visits | A Home Visit for Every Learner," Parent Teacher Home Visits, last modified April 12, 2024, https://pthvp.org/.

58   Mapp et al., *Everyone Wins!*

59   Winthrop et al., *Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems*.

60   Morris and Nóra, *Six Global Lessons on How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Transform Education*.

61   Government of São Paulo, "Programa Escola da Família" [School of the Family Program], n.d., https://escoladafamilia.fde.sp.gov.br/.

ilies were often focused on reacting to punitive problems and challenges versus proactively building collaborations and partnerships with families using proven strategies and promising practices.[62] Like in other parts of the world,[63] this lack of intentional training and professional development for educators on how to work inclusively and equitably with all families inhibits efforts to build strong family, school, and community partnerships and practice.

In addition to lacking human resources and personnel for meaningful family, school, and community engagement, schools and municipalities often lacked the financial resources to implement strategies and to integrate and elevate family, school, and community engagement practices and partnerships in their schools. During discussions on financial and human resources using the Global Rubrics Tool, educators and families in a school in Cruz revealed that lack of resources was one of the greatest barriers to implementing meaningful engagement. This research found that funding for family, school, and community engagement is often inconsistent, and rolled into other activities, making it challenging to analyze and monitor effectively. An executive officer from one of the municipalities said, "we don't have any budget for family, school, and community engagement strategies. We need resources, especially if we want to create opportunities for educators' training on how to engage families." Further analysis of financial resource flows for family, school, and community engagement in national, state, municipal, and school budgets through an education sector analysis would help further this recommendation.

Finally, the research revealed that none of the participating schools had previously used tools for assessing family, school, and community engagement. One of the valuable outcomes of this research was the creation of contextually based tools tested in Portuguese to both assess family, school, and community engagement practices (Global Rubrics Tool) and to gather perspectives of families, educators, and students (Conversation Starter Tools).

Recommendation 5: Support educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to develop partnerships with families, including ensuring that a designated individual at the school is trained to engage families effectively.

Schools need human and financial resources for building sustainable, equitable, and inclusive partnerships with families, as well as tools for gauging practices and progress. This starts with designating where family, school, and community engagement falls under state and municipal education systems, and who at these levels can be champions for ensuring schools have the capacity and resources to implement family, school, and community engagement. An education sector analysis on where family, school, and community engagement falls under national, state, municipal, and school systems and frameworks would help towards this goal.

Secondly, it is critical that schools have a point person for engaging with families using best practices and strategies. A designated person would ensure that family, school, and community engagement is integrated into schools' PPPs. An education sector analysis could determine whether this would be a responsibility of pedagogical coordinators, or an additional family school liaison, as is the case in many United States education districts. Thirdly, it is critical that designated personnel at all levels in states, municipalities, and schools have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices on how to work in collaboration with families. Practicing pedagogical coordinators, education leaders, and principals are often dealing with multiple administrative and financial tasks, meaning that designating them with the role of supporting a welcoming school culture to families and communities can be overwhelming. In-service training for school as well as state and municipal leaders would help ensure that family, school, and community engagement is a systemic approach. Another important strategy is developing evidence-based pre-service training for education

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62   Focus group discussion with teachers and pedagogical coordinators, São Paulo, June 2024.

63   See NAFSCE, 2023 for efforts in the United States.

leaders, teachers, and staff on family, school, and community engagement that can be integrated into teacher training institution curricula. This could be done, for example, by helping school personnel understand why family, school, and community engagement is critical to student and school success and how to implement strategies that address barriers to engagement.

States and municipal departments of education also need to provide schools with funds for family, school, and community engagement. Research shows that consistent funding to engagement activities and programs can result in increased student success, better-supported families, and more effective teachers.[64] Allocating consistent school funding for family, school, and community partnerships is a key strategy to ensuring schools with fewer resources and in more economically disadvantaged communities have the resources they need to engage families, as they often do not have the same ability to ask families to make up school funding shortfalls that more economically advantaged communities do.[65]

Finally, schools also need easy and practical tools to help them assess and improve their practices collectively with families. The Global Rubrics Tool is one such tool that brings the school community together to help them assess and plan family, school, and community partnerships. For example, this tool can be used by schools to annually assess their PPPs, making sure that the families, educators, and students are equal contributors to its development per the protocols set forth by the existing education system frameworks.

Conclusion

To build sustainable, equitable, and inclusive partnerships that support students and schools to thrive, a systemic approach to family, school, and community engagement is essential. Expanding the definition of family, school, and community engagement to include and document the myriad ways families support their children's education—both at school and at home—is a critical first step. Education leaders at the national, state, and municipal levels must provide schools with practical guidance on implementing 'democratic management' if they want families to play the integral role in decision making and leadership that they were intended to play.

Addressing barriers to family engagement is as important as identifying existing strategies in order to promote equitable and inclusive partnerships and practices between schools and families. State and municipal education departments must work with schools to identify and understand the specific challenges faced by diverse families, especially those from marginalized communities, in order to design strategies that meet their unique needs and aspirations. These strategies should prioritize building relational trust and two-way communication.

Putting these five recommendations into practice requires that state and municipal education departments and schools are equipped with adequate human resources, trained personnel, financial resources, and practical tools for monitoring family, school and community engagement. Developing human and financial resources must go hand in hand. For schools to designate clear champions for family, school, and community engagement, they need adequate funding to support these roles. For example, if pedagogical coordinators are best positioned to be family liaisons, all schools need a pedagogical coordinator, with a portion of their time allocated for building relationships and partnerships with families. If Brazil wants to improve quality and equity of learning and strengthen education systems to see greater student and school success and well-being, families need a clear and intentional role where they can serve as partners to educators. When families feel valued and empowered as critical partners in their children's education, they are powerful allies to educators and schools and help ensure all children receive a quality, inclusive, and relevant education.

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64   Joyce L. Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships* (Corwin, 2008)

65   Anne T. Henderson et al., *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (New Press, 2007).

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