Center for Universal Education at BROOKINGS

Tools that fit:

A guide for measuring family, school, and community engagement

A practical, step-by-step tool to guide education leaders in measuring family, school, and community engagement.

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Introduction to the guide

AUDIENCE:	Education leaders in schools, districts, and local and state offices.
PURPOSE:	To help education leaders decide which tools to use for measuring family, school, and community engagement (FSCE) and to identify what they want to measure.
SCOPE:	This guide focuses on quantitative tools—surveys and rubrics—while emphasizing the value of qualitative approaches such as interviews, focus group discussions, and semi-structured observations.
NEED:	In conversations with the Center for Universal Education (CUE), leaders of Statewide Family Engagement Centers described the challenge of having a range of surveys and tools to choose from when measuring FSCE and a lack of tool sharing across institutions.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

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STEP 1

Determine your why

→

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STEP 2

Decide on your approach

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STEP 3

Decide what kind of tool(s) your team needs

STEP 1

Determine your why

There are many reasons we measure family, school, and community engagement (FSCE)—and many ways to use data. The questions below will help your team determine your overarching purposes, the outcomes you seek to measure, and the audiences. Determining your why early ensures the data you collect are meaningful and used effectively.

1a. What are your overarching purposes?

How will you use the data? Check all that apply.

INTERNALLY (WITHIN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT)

- ☐ To improve FSCE practices (e.g., improving parent-teacher conferences)
- ☐ To improve FSCE programming (e.g., parent universities, family events)
- ☐ To inform plans, priorities, and budgets
- ☐ To inform policies
- ☐ To improve two-way communication on student progress (e.g., learning outcomes, attendance)
- ☐ To strengthen relationships with families
- ☐ To promote transparency and communication on school or district decisions, practices, and policies
- ☐ To inform professional development

EXTERNALLY

- ☐ To report to an educational authority
- ☐ To report to external partners (e.g., Title I reports, community partnership meetings)
- ☐ To inform evaluations or research (e.g., the link between FSCE and student outcomes)
- ☐ To make the case for FSCE to funders
- ☐ To make the case for FSCE to decisionmakers
- ☐ To make the case for FSCE to the wider community (e.g., taxpayers)

What guiding questions do you want to answer by using surveys or rubrics?

For example, "What are the schools' current FSCE practices?" or "Which FSCE practices should be prioritized?"

1b. What outcomes do you want to measure?

Surveys and rubrics are often used to measure FSCE in relation to direct and indirect outcomes, with direct outcomes being the most straightforward to measure. Each outcome is distilled into specific measures, known in research as constructs.

Direct and indirect outcomes: FSCE practices can directly impact family collaboration and partnerships. For example, increasing communication and interactions with families can directly lead to strengthening family collaboration and partnerships. FSCE can also indirectly contribute to school or student outcomes, but there are other factors that affect these outcomes that also need to be measured to determine a connection. For example, increasing FSCE alone does not improve student attendance; factors like transportation, stable housing, and a child's health also impact attendance and must be accounted for.

Which outcomes and constructs matter most to your team? Check all that apply, or rank by priority.

DIRECT FSCE OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 1: Strengthen family collaboration and partnerships

- ☐ Types of FSCE
- ☐ Barriers to FSCE
- ☐ Communication and interactions
- ☐ Attitudes on FSCE
- ☐ Collaboration skills
- ☐ Existing policies and systems
- ☐ Relationships and trust
- ☐ Other: _____

INDIRECT FSCE OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 2: Improve school environment and climate

- ☐ School safety
- ☐ Belonging and inclusion
- ☐ Satisfaction with schools
- ☐ Fairness and equity
- ☐ Other: _____

OUTCOME 3: Improve student outcomes

- ☐ Student attendance
- ☐ Student learning outcomes
- ☐ Student durable outcomes (e.g., critical thinking, leadership)
- ☐ Student well-being
- ☐ Other: _____

Note:

- Each of the intended outcomes can be measured in many different ways. For example, you might measure communication and interaction by frequency (daily, weekly), modality (emails, phone calls, in-person conversations), and satisfaction (1–5 scale).
- Determining a link between FSCE practices and indirect outcomes requires substantial data and analysis. For example, if a school wants to show how FSCE practices are improving student attendance, this requires a resource-intensive research design and access to student datasets.

1c. Who are your primary audiences?

Who will use the data to inform decisions or practices? Check all that apply and indicate whether they are your primary or secondary audiences. Primary audiences should be specific groups who will use the data to inform FSCE practices, policies, and programming. For example, the members of your local school advisory group or district councils develop budgets and plans that cover FSCE activities.

SCHOOLS		
School leadership	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Teachers and staff	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Families	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Students	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary

DISTRICTS		
District leaders	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
District staff	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
School boards	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
District advisory committees	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary

STATES OR BEYOND		
State leaders and state education agencies	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Teachers unions or state staff	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
State school boards	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
State advisory committees	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Organizations supporting schools and/or researchers	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary
Funders or taxpayers	☐ Primary	☐ Secondary

STEP 2

Decide on your approach

Choosing a measurement approach requires balancing your purposes with a school's, district's, or state's time, capacity, and resources. This step helps your team make informed decisions on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods designs and choose which tools to use. Examples of different designs are also included.

2a. Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods?

What approach will lead you to answer your questions and measure your intended outcomes? To capture FSCE outcomes, teams can follow a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods design (known in research as methodology). Although this guide focuses on quantitative surveys and rubrics tools, you may use other tools to capture FSCE.

Note: Quantitative and qualitative designs tell different parts of an FSCE story, and each is a powerful approach in its own right. When combined, mixed methods approaches tell a story with even greater breadth and depth. When used over time in a longitudinal design, data are collected each year or many times a year to measure change from one timepoint to another.

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Purpose	Determines relationships between measures and outcomes; identifies statistical trends.	Captures meaning, experiences, viewpoints, and contexts; identifies themes and patterns.
Metrics	Captures what, how much, and to what extent (typically closed-ended questions, scales, ratings).	Captures how and why behind observable trends (open-ended questions).
Analysis	Enables us to systematically quantify and aggregate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices, identify trends, and draw comparisons (e.g., whether FSCE practices influence student outcomes).	Enables us to dig deeper into knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices to understand the bigger story behind trends or responses (e.g., why and how FSCE practices are working/not working in schools).
Implications	Can be used to determine causality or generalize (if an appropriate sample and a comparison group are part of the design).	Cannot be used to determine causality or generalize; can help identify what is happening and what to do next.

2b. Which tools (methods) will you use?

Many tools can be used to measure FSCE. Below are some of the most common, grouped by design.

QUANTITATIVE

Surveys:
Capture what, and to what extent, FSCE practices are taking place (typically include closed-ended questions, scales, ratings, etc.).

Rubrics:
Guide observations or assessments of practices on a scale or spectrum (typically include a ranked scale of what is happening in a classroom, school, or district).

Tests/assessments:
Evaluate, quantify, or verify knowledge, skills, capabilities, and/or competencies.

Other:
Attendance and student outcomes can be used as indirect measures of FSCE, but require analytical expertise, time, and resources.

QUALITATIVE

Interviews:
Capture the how and why—the deeper story—behind FSCE (typically individuals' experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions on FSCE).

Focus group discussions:
Foster a dialogue on experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions on FSCE (emphasizing meaning-making as a collective group).

Other:
Arts-based methods (photos, journals), family communication, school calendars, and other documents can also be analyzed.

What it takes to show causality

Determining causality—that one variable is statistically related to another—requires quantitative expertise, time, and resources. Causality is often used to show that an FSCE practice (e.g., student-led conferences) results in a measurable change (e.g., greater family engagement at conferences). To inform decisions and practice, schools and districts can often use more implementable designs and approaches without causal designs. For example, causality is not needed to show that greater two-way communication and interactions between families and teachers strengthen collaboration and partnerships.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO SHOW CAUSALITY:

1. A comparison group: people who are not participating in an intervention
2. A sample of individuals that allows for inferential statistical analyses (e.g., enough families and students to determine a link between student-led conferences and greater family attendance at conferences)
3. Clear, specific, and measurable variables

EXAMPLE:

A district is trying a new student-led parent-teacher conference model to see if it increases family conference attendance. To determine causality, a sufficient number of families who are not participating in student-led conferences (comparison group) is needed to compare to those attending conferences (participant group). Families can be randomly or purposively assigned to either group; the first being an experimental design, the second a quasi-experimental design. If they have a comparison group and a large enough sample across the district to show it is not by chance that family attendance in parent-teacher conferences increases when students lead, then they can establish causality.

2c. What should you consider in determining a design?

Many decisions go into determining which designs, tools, and approaches to use for measuring FSCE. Having someone with a research background on your team will ensure you are making informed decisions. Below are three hypothetical scenarios to show what goes into these designs. Each scenario is situated under one of the three direct or indirect outcomes.

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
	DIRECT OUTCOMES	INDIRECT OUTCOMES	
Intended outcome (Step 1b)	**1. Strengthen family collaboration and partnerships**	**2. Improve school environment and climate**	**3. Improve student outcomes**
Purpose (Step 1a)	• Improve FSCE practices • Improve FSCE programming • Inform school priorities and budgets	• Improve FSCE practices • Improve relationships with families • Promote transparency and visibility of trends and practices • Report to an educational authority	• Report to an educational authority • Inform an evaluation • Make the case for FSCE across schools or districts
Audience (Step 1c)	School, district, and state leaders	School, district, and state leaders	State and national decisionmakers and funders
Tools (methods) or data needed (Step 2b)	**Part A:** surveys and interviews **Part B:** rubrics	**Part A:** surveys **Part B:** focus group discussions	**Part A:** surveys, assessments/tests, or attendance data **Part B:** interviews
Research expertise needed	Basic knowledge of surveying, leading focus group discussions, and analysis	Intermediate knowledge of surveying, analysis, and leading focus group discussions	Advanced research and analysis skills

SCENARIO 1:

Engaging families to strengthen family collaboration and partnerships

PURPOSE:	To understand how families are currently engaged and which strategies schools should prioritize to build stronger partnerships.
AUDIENCE:	School, district, and state leaders
GUIDING QUESTION(S):	**1.1** What are the schools' FSCE practices? **1.2** How are families actually engaged? **1.3** Which practices should be prioritized? **1.4** How can schools, districts, and/or states build stronger FSCE and partnership practices?

Decision points:

OVERARCHING DESIGN

What specific constructs will we measure?

Strengthen family collaboration and partnerships

- [x] Types of FSCE (list)
- [x] Barriers to FSCE (list)
- [x] Communication and interactions (types)
- [x] Attitudes on FSCE (scale)
- [ ] Collaboration skills
- [x] Existing policies and systems (what exists)
- [ ] Relationships and trust
- [ ] Other: _____

Improve school environment and climate

- [ ] School safety
- [ ] Belonging and inclusion
- [ ] Satisfaction with schools
- [ ] Fairness and equity
- [ ] Other: _____

Improve student outcomes

- [ ] Student attendance
- [ ] Student learning outcomes
- [ ] Student durable outcomes (e.g., critical thinking, leadership)
- [ ] Student well-being
- [ ] Other: _____

What design will we use to capture the outcomes?

- [ ] Quantitative
- [ ] Qualitative
- [x] Mixed methods (both)

Part A. What are the schools' FSCE practices? (Question 1.1) How are families actually engaged? (Question 1.2)

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	
Which tools (methods) will we use to measure the outcomes?	☑ Surveys ☐ Rubrics ☐ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	☑ Interviews ☐ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Surveys will be used to capture types of FSCE and barriers, frequency and types of communication, and attitudes. Interviews will be used to understand responses in detail.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families	☑ Students ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Survey responses will be compared by different respondent groups. Students in grade six and above are invited to participate.
How frequent?	☐ One time ☐ Every few years	☑ Annually ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** Frequency depends on financial resources and staff time. Annual surveys allow for comparison and tracking ecosystem factors (e.g., health or environmental crises, absenteeism surge).

Part B. Which practices should be prioritized? (Question 1.3) How can schools, districts, and/or states build stronger FSCE and partnership practices? (Question 1.4)

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	
Which tools (methods) will we use to measure the strength of these FSCE practices?	☐ Surveys ☑ Rubrics ☐ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	☐ Interviews ☐ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** After identifying existing practices through surveys and interviews, a group of teachers and families can sit down together to rate practices on an established rubric, and to determine areas to grow/strengthen practices and how to prioritize them going forward.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families (representatives)	☐ Students ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Groups of 10–12 persons (mixed roles) will be invited to take part in a series of rubric workshops.
How frequent?	☐ One time ☐ Every few years	☑ Annually ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** These rubric workshops will be conducted at the end of each school year to assess what has taken place over the year and to identify strategies for the following school year. Progress will be measured from year to year.

SCENARIO 2:

Engaging families to improve school environment and climate

PURPOSE: To improve school environment and climate, student attendance, engagement, and learning. To report data externally to district offices and use them internally to improve relationships with families, strengthen FSCE practices, and inform policies and decisions.

AUDIENCE: School, district, and state leaders

GUIDING QUESTION(S):

2.1 What is the current school environment and climate?

2.2 How can schools use FSCE practices to improve school environment and climate?

Decision points:

OVERARCHING DESIGN

What specific constructs will we measure?

Strengthen family collaboration and partnerships

- ☐ Types of FSCE
- ☐ Barriers to FSCE
- ☐ Communication and interactions
- ☐ Attitudes on FSCE
- ☐ Collaboration skills
- ☐ Existing policies and systems
- ☑ Relationships and trust
- ☐ Other: _____

Improve school environment and climate

- ☑ School safety
- ☑ Belonging and inclusion
- ☑ Satisfaction with schools
- ☑ Fairness and equity
- ☐ Other: _____

Improve student outcomes

- ☐ Student attendance
- ☐ Student learning outcomes
- ☐ Student durable outcomes (e.g., critical thinking, leadership)
- ☐ Student well-being
- ☐ Other: _____

What design will we use to capture the outcomes?

- ☐ Quantitative
- ☐ Qualitative
- ☑ Mixed methods (both)

Part A. What is the current school environment and climate? (Question 2.1)

Which tools (methods) will we use to measure school environment and climate?	**QUANTITATIVE** ☑ Surveys ☐ Rubrics ☐ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	**QUALITATIVE** ☐ Interviews ☐ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Surveys will be used to capture different elements of school environment and climate on a scale.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families	☑ Students ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Survey responses will be compared by the different respondent groups. Students in grade six and above are invited to participate.
How frequent?	☐ One time ☐ Every few years	☑ Annually ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** Validated surveys used by other districts/states will be considered, as will frequency.

Part B. How can schools use FSCE practices to improve school environment and climate? (Question 2.2)

Which tools (methods) will we use to measure the different ways families can be leveraged (FSCE practices) to improve school environment and climate?	**QUANTITATIVE** ☐ Surveys ☐ Rubrics ☐ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	**QUALITATIVE** ☐ Interviews ☑ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** In a focus group discussion, teachers and families will look at the survey data from Question 2.1 and outline the practices to engage families on school environment and climate.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families (representatives)	☐ Students ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Groups of 10–12 persons (mixed roles) will be invited to take part in a series of focus group discussions.
How frequent?	☐ One time ☐ Every few years	☑ Annually ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** These focus group discussions will be conducted at the end of each school year to assess what has taken place over the year and to identify strategies for the following school year. Progress will be measured from year to year.

SCENARIO 3:

Engaging families to improve student learning outcomes

PURPOSE:	To show a causal link between FSCE practices and student learning outcomes and identify strategies in order to make the case for funding to large donors.
AUDIENCE:	State and national decisionmakers and funders
GUIDING QUESTION(S):	**3.1** To what extent do FSCE practices influence student learning outcomes? **3.2** How do these FSCE practices influence student learning outcomes?

Decision points:

OVERARCHING DESIGN

What specific constructs will we measure?

Strengthen family collaboration and partnerships

- [x] Types of FSCE
- [ ] Barriers to FSCE
- [ ] Communication and interactions
- [ ] Attitudes on FSCE
- [ ] Collaboration skills
- [ ] Existing policies and systems
- [x] Relationships and trust
- [ ] Other: _____

Improve school environment and climate

- [ ] School safety
- [ ] Belonging and inclusion
- [ ] Satisfaction with schools
- [ ] Fairness and equity
- [ ] Other: _____

Improve student outcomes

- [ ] Student attendance
- [x] Student learning outcomes
- [ ] Student durable outcomes (e.g., critical thinking, leadership)
- [ ] Student well-being
- [ ] Other: _____

What design will we use to capture the outcomes?

- [ ] Quantitative
- [ ] Qualitative
- [x] Mixed methods (both)

Notes: Surveys will be administered annually, but analyses of student outcomes will only be assessed at one timepoint given the amount of resources demanded for this kind of analysis. A comparison group and sizable sample (across many districts) will be established.

Part A. To what extent do FSCE practices influence student learning outcomes? (Question 3.1)

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	
Which tools (methods) will we use to measure FSCE practices and student outcomes?	☑ Surveys ☐ Rubrics ☑ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	☐ Interviews ☐ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Validated surveys will be used to capture FSCE practices and partnerships. Scores on student tests/assessments, or grades, will be used to measure student learning outcomes.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families	☑ Students (grade six and above) ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Survey responses will be compared by the different respondent groups. For example, how FSCE practices impact literacy scores for grade six students across race, gender, disability status, and socioeconomic status.
How frequent?	☑ One time (assessments) ☐ Every few years	☑ Annually (surveys) ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** Frequency depends on financial resources and staff time. Annual surveys allow for comparison and tracking ecosystem factors (e.g., health or environmental crises, absenteeism surge).

Part B. How do these FSCE practices influence student learning outcomes? (Question 3.2)

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	
Which tools (methods) will we use to measure how FSCE impacts student outcomes?	☐ Surveys ☐ Rubrics ☐ Tests or assessments ☐ Other _____	☑ Interviews ☐ Focus group discussions ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** After identifying which of the strategies are positively linked to student learning outcomes, qualitative research will be conducted to try to discern what it is about these practices that influences learning outcomes.
Who should participate?	☑ Teachers ☑ School staff (including leaders) ☑ Families	☑ Students (grade six and above) ☐ Other _____	**Notes:** Interviews will be conducted with teachers, school staff, and families to understand more about how/why these practices link to outcomes. Students in grade six and above are invited to participate in group interviews led by student leaders.
How frequent?	☑ One time ☐ Every few years	☐ Annually ☐ More than one time a year	**Notes:** Interviews will be conducted with those with in-depth knowledge of the different FSCE practices and contexts.

2d. What are some tips to keep in mind for maximizing participation?

- **Timing.** At what point in the school year you administer a survey can influence whether people respond, as well as their mood. Find a time in the school year when families, students, and teachers are more likely to respond, and avoid high-pressure moments.

- **Start small and build over time.** Measure what really matters. It is tempting to ask about everything at once, but long surveys often lead to lower participation. Begin with a few priority questions tied to a real decision so you can act on the data. Add new methods or questions over time.

- **Use more than one method.** Surveys are useful, but rarely enough to draw in-depth conclusions. Pair surveys with interviews, focus group discussions (listening sessions), empathy conversations, and/or feedback from events and conferences. Surveys can help identify patterns; qualitative methods can help explain what those patterns mean.

- **Reduce barriers to participation.** Surveys are often biased toward certain groups: those who have high literacy levels, speak the language fluently, and are accustomed to taking surveys. To promote inclusion, send the link in multiple ways (text, email, newsletter, social media), offer other ways to answer (phone call, in person), use personal outreach from trusted staff, make the survey available in languages spoken at home, and offer incentives for completion (if possible).

- **Honor different positionalities.** Having diverse perspectives helps enrich your findings. It is important to intentionally consider power dynamics when planning interactive activities like interviews, focus group discussions, and rubrics activities; you want all respondents to feel their perspectives are valued and honored. Using different participant groups to answer the research questions is called triangulation, and it enriches data and findings.

- **Consider representativeness and response rates.** Response rates and representativeness matter. Teams should be cautious about using data with too few respondents or from respondents who do not represent the whole community. Many surveys require at least a 20% response rate from target populations, which can suffice in a large community if responses reflect key demographics. The Brookings Institution's Conversation Starter Tools surveys intentionally reach as many families as possible in targeted classrooms instead of an all-school survey blast. The focus is on getting all families in a few classrooms to respond versus a few families in the whole school.

- **Capture demographics carefully.** Follow best practices in your context. You don't need every demographic, just the ones that are critical to telling your story.

- **Look for differences across groups.** Aggregated responses rarely tell the full story. Where possible, examine whether families' experiences and perspectives differ by key demographics, such as grade level, language spoken at home, race, gender, socioeconomic grouping, disability status, and family circumstances. Analyzing across and within groups reveals demographic differences and who is being left out, and helps teams design inclusive strategies.

- **Make participation feel worthwhile.** One of the best ways to increase participation is to share back what you are learning. Families are more likely to respond to surveys if data are shared back with them. If they hear nothing after completing the survey, they may not respond the next time. Tell families what you learned. See the following table for examples of how to share findings with families.

Ways to share findings with families

PATHWAY TO FAMILIES	MESSENGER OR PARTNER	EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION
Through schools	**Teachers**	Parent-teacher conferences, take-home or digital resources
	School administration	Newsletters, take-home or digital resources and links, informational meetings with families, school communication apps (e.g., ClassDojo, Remind, ParentSquare)
	School leadership	Newsletters, take-home or digital resources and links, informational meetings with families, school communication apps
	Tech/IT teams	
	School advisories/committees	
	Professional development events	Workshops, take-home or digital resources and links
Through parents	**PTAs/PTOs/parent councils**	Meetings, newsletters, emails, group chats
	Informal and formal parent groups (e.g., classroom parents)	Group chats (e.g., SMS, WhatsApp, school apps), social media, school websites
	Parent affinity groups	Meetings, newsletters, emails, group chats
Through students	**Student groups and peer-to-peer**	Activities, newsletters, emails, group chats
Through community partners	**Community programs (e.g., after-school programs, tutoring), health providers**	Newsletters, take-home or digital resources and links, informational meetings

STEP 3

Decide what kind of tool(s) your team needs

Given your responses to the questions in Steps 1 and 2, there will be many tools that your team may use in your design to capture your FSCE story. This section helps teams decide what kind of survey or rubric tools are needed, and to determine if there are existing tool(s) or question(s) that teams can use. This step is geared more toward research leads on school teams.

3a. Can you use an existing survey or do you need to create a new survey?

A case for an existing survey:

Existing surveys are often the best option, especially for complex constructs such as trust, belonging, attitudes, beliefs, or relationship quality. These measures have to be carefully designed; capturing a full construct usually takes several questions, each measuring a different variable. For example, communication and interactions is measured by three questions: types, frequency, and satisfaction with communication.

When adapting a survey, try to use full constructs.

Rather than picking individual questions from different surveys, select fewer full constructs with all the intended questions from a given survey. Surveys and rubrics are designed to be valid (measure what is intended) and reliable (measure consistently across schools, districts, and time). Changing individual questions within a construct can weaken your ability to make inferences and give only part of the story.

A case for a new survey:

Creating a new survey can make sense when you need simple, school-specific information for immediate decisions—preferred times for events, communication preferences, or the supports families want most. To understand relationships in depth, qualitative methods can help illuminate why families feel disconnected, what builds trust, and what barriers are impeding partnerships.

3b. What factors do you need to consider in choosing your tool?

In addition to purposes, outcomes (constructs), and audiences, teams should choose their survey or rubric method based on a number of factors outlined below.

Accessibility	
Cost and access	• Is this tool open access? What is the cost per unit? • Does this cost include analysis and visualization?
Literacy level and languages	• What reading levels does the tool require? • What languages is the tool in? (Can I easily get the tool in the major languages at my school?) • Do literacy levels and languages match my school population?
Disability access	• Is the tool designed to accommodate users with different disabilities (including visual, hard of hearing/deaf, dyslexia or dyscalculia, neurodivergence, intellectual disabilities)?
Format	• What format is the tool available in (paper, electronic, other)?
Usability	
Time	• How long does it take to administer the tool?
Ease of use	• Is the tool intuitive and easy for a respondent to follow independently?
Modality	• Do respondents need to have internet connectivity to complete? • Can all respondents complete on their own, or do they need someone to orally administer (in person or on the phone)?
Cultural and equity responsiveness	
Diversity of respondents	• To what extent is the tool intended for and developed with a diverse population in mind (e.g., socioeconomic status, cultures, genders, ethnicity)?
Adaptation	• To what extent does the tool provide room and guidance for adapting to different communities?
Quality (technical merit)	
Valid measure	• To what extent does the tool measure what it is intended to measure? To what extent has the tool been validated?
Reliable measure	• Can I use this tool over time to measure change, or is it a one-off tool? To what extent is the tool shown to be reliable?

Source: Based on the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments School Climate Survey Compendium.

3c. What are some existing surveys and rubrics?

Center for Universal Education at BROOKINGS

An open call for survey and rubric tools was conducted, and the results are presented below. This is not an exhaustive list, but it includes district, state, and national tools being used to measure FSCE toward different purposes and outcomes.

Inventory of existing survey and rubric tools (2026)

Name Authors	PARTICIPANTS							MEASURES										
	Families	Educators	Students	District leaders	Languages	Access	Validated	Types of FSCE	Barriers to FSCE	Communication and interactions	Attitudes on FSCE	Collaboration skills	Existing policies and systems	Relationships and trust	School safety	Belonging and inclusion	Satisfaction with schools	Fairness and equity
RUBRICS																		
Family and Community Partnerships Reflection Tool for Family-Facing Professionals National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement and Ohio State University		✓			1	Open	Yes						✓	✓		✓		✓
Family, School, and Community Partnerships P-12 Framework Rubrics Colorado Department of Education	✓	✓		✓	2	Open	Yes	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓
Flamboyan School-Wide Family Engagement Rubric Flamboyan Foundation	✓	✓	✓		1	Open	Yes			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool Brookings Institution	✓	✓	✓		5	Open	Yes	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓
Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Johns Hopkins University	✓	✓			1	Open	Yes	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓		✓
Minnesota Family and Community Engagement School Capacity-Building Stages of Development Tool Minnesota Department of Education		✓			1	Open				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit Center for the Study of Social Policy	✓				1	Open	Yes		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓

Name Authors	PARTICIPANTS							MEASURES										
	Families	Educators	Students	District leaders	Languages	Access	Validated	Types of FSCE	Barriers to FSCE	Communication and interactions	Attitudes on FSCE	Collaboration skills	Existing policies and systems	Relationships and trust	School safety	Belonging and inclusion	Satisfaction with schools	Fairness and equity
SURVEYS																		
5Essentials Surveys University of Chicago	✓	✓	✓		2	Partial	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys California Department of Education	✓	✓	✓		2	Partial	Yes	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Conversation Starter Tools Surveys Brookings Institution	✓	✓	✓		19	Open	Yes	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	
Delaware School Climate Surveys Delaware Department of Education	✓	✓	✓		3	Open	Yes							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District Family Engagement Survey Ohio State University				✓	1	Open							✓					
Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Educators (FEEB-E) Survey Ohio State University		✓			1	Open	Yes	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Family Feedback Forms Federation for Children with Special Needs, Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center	✓	✓			7	Open				✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Panorama Surveys Panorama Education	✓	✓	✓		11	Paid	Yes		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
School Experience Surveys Los Angeles Unified School District	✓	✓	✓		3	Open	Yes			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School-Family-Community Partnership Surveys Colorado Department of Education	✓	✓			2	Open	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓

Appendix A: Description of measures

Types of FSCE:	How often and in what forms families are involved in their children's education, at home and at school. It also covers how satisfied participants are with those forms of involvement.
Barriers to FSCE:	The challenges that limit family, school, and community engagement, such as time, language, or transportation.
Communication and interactions:	How often and through what channels families and schools communicate, such as in person, phone, SMS, or online. It also covers how satisfied participants are with the quality and clarity of that communication.
Attitudes on FSCE:	Beliefs about why FSCE matters and what role families, educators, and communities should play. It also covers the value people place on partnership.
Collaboration skills:	The capacity of educators, families, and communities to work together toward shared goals. This includes joint decisionmaking, drawing on families' ideas, and advocating together for change.
Existing policies and systems:	Whether schools have policies, resources, and structures that support FSCE, such as trainings, data systems, or family liaisons. It also covers how effective these are seen to be and what additional support stakeholders would like.
Relationships and trust:	The quality of relationships among families, educators, and communities. For example, the Conversation Starter Tools surveys measure relational trust across seven elements: shared vision, care, culture of listening, respect, integrity, competence, and interactions.

School safety:	How physically and emotionally safe students, families, and staff feel at school. This includes perceptions of bullying, discipline, and security.
Belonging and inclusion:	Whether participants feel welcomed, valued, and part of the school community; also covers whether all families have meaningful ways to participate.
Satisfaction with schools:	How satisfied participants are with the overall quality of education and the school's performance in meeting students' needs.
Fairness and equity:	Whether all families and students are treated fairly and with respect. It also covers whether schools recognize and address bias and differences in context, history, and access.
Student outcomes:	Students' academic learning, social-emotional well-being, and attendance as affected by or linked to FSCE.

Appendix B: Description of tools

RUBRICS

Family and Community Partnerships Reflection Tool for Family-Facing Professionals

(National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement—NAFSCE—and Ohio State University):

Aims to promote self-reflection, dialogue, professional learning and growth, and to improve family engagement efforts. Aligned with NAFSCE's Family Engagement Core Competencies. Measures family-facing professionals' capacity to reflect, connect, collaborate for learning, and lead alongside families.

Languages (1): English.

Family, School, and Community Partnerships P-12 Framework Rubrics

(Colorado Department of Education):

Guides school teams in assessing their partnership efforts across four elements: creating an inclusive culture, building trusting relationships, designing capacity-building opportunities, and dedicating necessary resources to implement and scale up partnership efforts. The process includes identifying strategies to improve these elements.

Languages (2): English and Spanish.

Flamboyan School-Wide Family Engagement Rubric

(Flamboyan Foundation):

Guides school teams in assessing their partnership efforts across three elements: creating a welcoming and engaging climate with strong relationships and communications, partnering with families to support student achievement, and investing families and communities in school success.

Languages (1): English.

Global Family, School, and Community Engagement Rubrics Tool

(Brookings Institution):

Based on the Colorado Department of Education rubrics, but adapted and simplified for global audiences. Guides school teams in assessing their partnership efforts across four elements: creating an inclusive culture, building trusting relationships, leveraging families as assets, and sustaining meaningful family, school, and community engagement practices. The process includes identifying strategies to improve these elements.

Languages (5): Arabic, English, French, Portuguese (Brazil), and Spanish.

RUBRICS

Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships (Johns Hopkins University):

Guides schools in assessing the six types of parental involvement to support school planning. Provides activities and illustrative examples of six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decisionmaking, and collaborating with the community.

Languages (1): English.

Minnesota Family and Community Engagement School Capacity-Building Stages of Development Tool (Minnesota Department of Education):

Guides school teams in assessing current efforts and commitment to building stronger family-school partnerships. The seven elements are: building high trust and reciprocal relationships, amplifying family voice, linking families to learning, expecting all departments and staff to partner with families and communities, committing to continuous improvement, using inclusive and transparent communication, and seeing schools as community spaces.

Languages (1): English.

Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit (Center for the Study of Social Policy):

Guides institutions in assessing four pillars of parental engagement and leadership: family-centered, equity-driven, collaborative, and transparent. Helps education institutions and organizations working with young children (early childhood and development) and their families develop an equitable and responsive approach to family engagement.

Languages (1): English.

SURVEYS

5Essentials Surveys (University of Chicago):

Helps schools assess their organizational strengths and areas of opportunity across the five essential factors for school improvement toward improved student and school outcomes. The five essential factors are: effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction.

Languages (2): English and Spanish.

SURVEYS

California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys (California Department of Education):

Helps schools and districts improve students' academic learning, social and emotional development, and health of all students, and meet state reporting requirements. Measures school climate and learning, including student, teacher, and family engagement, academic rigor and support, interpersonal relationships, and school safety.

Languages (2): English and Spanish.

Conversation Starter Tools Surveys (Brookings Institution):

Captures data and perspectives to inform school and district practices on family, school, and community engagement. Measures beliefs on education, relational trust, and types of and barriers to family involvement. Includes qualitative tools and participatory practices.

Languages (19): Arabic, Bangla, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, Hindi, Hungarian, isiXhosa, Kazakh, Marathi, Mandarin (simplified Chinese), Portuguese (Brazil), Punjabi, Russian, Spanish (Latin America), Swahili, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

Delaware School Climate Surveys (Delaware Department of Education):

Provides schools with data on perceptions of school climate to support school planning. Measures various aspects of school climate, including student engagement, student well-being, student-teacher relationships, teacher-family relationships, and school safety.

Languages (3): English, Haitian Creole, and Spanish.

District Family Engagement Survey (Ohio State University):

Captures districtwide family engagement efforts to inform professional development. Measures human resources and capacities available to plan, implement, and evaluate family engagement in schools.

Languages (1): English.

SURVEYS

Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Educators (FEEB-E) Survey (Ohio State University):

Assesses educators' confidence in partnering with families. Aligned with NAFSCE's Family Engagement Core Competencies, the survey measures educators' beliefs in their ability to plan and carry out family engagement practices that improve instruction and student learning.

Languages (1): English.

Family Feedback Forms (Federation for Children with Special Needs, Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center):

Captures experiences and feedback on family engagement practices in schools and districts to inform efforts to strengthen school and family collaboration. Measures perceptions of communication, satisfaction with schools, professional development, and other opportunities for engagement. The survey is aligned with the Massachusetts Family Engagement Framework.

Languages (7): Arabic, English, Haitian Creole, Mandarin (simplified Chinese), Portuguese, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Panorama Surveys (Panorama Education):

A suite of surveys that helps schools and districts gather data, feedback, and insights to improve student achievement. Helps measure a wide range of topics such as quality of teaching, school climate and safety, family engagement, and AI perception and usage.

Languages for parent surveys (11): Arabic, Cantonese (traditional Chinese), English, Haitian Creole, Korean, Mandarin (simplified Chinese), Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, and Vietnamese.

School Experience Surveys (Los Angeles Unified School District):

Gathers feedback, perceptions, and experiences in schools. Measures a wide range of topics including school climate and safety.

Languages (3): English, Korean, and Spanish.

School-Family-Community Partnership Surveys (Colorado Department of Education):

Helps schools and districts evaluate and improve family, school, and community partnerships. Measures types of parental involvement, communication, and other family, school, and community engagement practices.

Languages (2): English and Spanish.

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