

M5-S6: Elevating Family Voice Across Learning Environments

GK	<p>Hello, Christina, and hello, listeners! Welcome to Session 6 in Module 5 of your TALE Academy learning experience, Elevating Family Voice Across Learning Environments.</p> <p>Let's start with a message to families on the first day of school from New York City Schools Chancellor David C. Banks, September 8, 2022:</p> <p>"I can't write to families without recognizing you as the lifeblood of our school communities and our true partners in your child's education. Be on the lookout for improved ways to access the information and support you need to help your children succeed. This will include expanded language access supports for families who speak languages other than English and more opportunities for us to work together."</p>
CLH	<p>That's so nice, but it's also not just niceness, right? Chancellor Banks knows that the research shows that students with involved families, no matter their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs. These studies have also shown higher satisfaction for educators and families. Yet in many schools, family engagement remains a challenge.</p> <p>Families have reported that feeling welcome and respected by school staff is the top reason they become connected with a school and stay involved.</p>
GK	<p>So, Christina, you're currently in the classroom. How would families in your school answer these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel welcome at your child's school? • Do you feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher? • Do you feel respected by educators at your child's school?
CLH	<p>I don't think I actually know. Do I want to know?</p>
GK	<p>A "no" response to any of those questions would definitely be difficult for us to hear, but challenges provide us with opportunities to improve and build our capacity.</p>
CLH	<p>That's what I tell my kids, so it should apply to us, as well. You can't fix what you don't know about.</p>
GK	<p>In Module 5, we have explored family engagement in Session 1, identified opportunities for engagement in Session 2, how family engagement is connected to student learning in Session 3, and the strategies that will empower families to participate in goal setting and decision-making in Session 4. This session will explore the equity issues faced by some families and how we, as educators, can develop an</p>

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	understanding of and appreciation for families from diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
CLH	<p>I always like to start with a good book. In Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships, the authors suggest four core beliefs that are important for educators to hold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All families have the capacity to support their children’s learning. ● All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them. ● Families and school staff should be equal partners. ● Responsibility for building and sustaining partnerships between school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.
GK	<p>If I was tracking that correctly, the key concepts to explore in these four statements are “all families” and “partners.” That’s a nice connection. Part of the TALE academy work is to envision school not as a physical place, but as a co-created experience where all families are partners. What would we do, how would we improve our practice to achieve this vision?</p>
CLH	<p>Family voice can be defined as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving students’ academic learning and other school activities. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children’s education at school. Parents are full partners in their children’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in their children’s education.”</p>
GK	<p>I think first we have to acknowledge that some families are less engaged than others, they are the quiet or even the silent voices. What are the root causes for the differences in voice, and what can we do to make meaningful change in family engagement?</p>
CLH	<p>Yes, let’s take a moment to look at those root causes. Based on the research, these are some common barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family members may not be able to attend school meetings or functions due to scheduling conflicts, time constraints (often involving child care, commute time, or multiple jobs), and other challenges. ● Family members (especially recent immigrants) may have had different, few, or no experiences with formal education. ● Educators may hold expectations for family engagement that do not realistically reflect the schedules or cultures of families.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family members may experience language barriers that impact engagement.
GK	Once we acknowledge challenges, we can begin to formulate steps to break down the barriers and build up our connections. Engaging in a reciprocal exchange of information with families will help us to understand any cultural, linguistic, or social contexts or family experiences that impede or enhance engagement.
CLH	There are a lot of terms that start with the word “Cultural”, right? Cultural competence, cultural humility, culturally responsive – what’s this one about?
GK	Cultural reciprocity is just being committed to an exchange of knowledge, values, and perspectives between two or more individuals of different cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or religious backgrounds. We can gather valuable information from families early in the school year that can set us on a path for meaningful and reciprocal communication. Essential questions include learning about the families’ preferred method of communicating with school, such as phone, email, virtual meetings, or in-person meetings.
CLH	When we learn about our families, we can become aware of any cultural or language considerations so that we can offer accommodations that allow every family to access and respond to the information we share. Translation apps and/or interpreters can strengthen the two-way engagement and communication between you and families. Collaborative scheduling considers the best times for meetings to accommodate work and child care considerations. Learning about the family structure ensures that we use inclusive language and terminology and key familial relationships.
GK	Additional strategies to practice cultural reciprocity and enhance our family knowledge include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask families about the best method for communication. Express a commitment to open and frequent <u>two-way</u> communication. ● Inquire about the family’s goals and expectations for their child, you as their child’s teacher, and the school. Discuss the student’s educational growth and the student’s social development.
CLH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide the family with an opportunity to ask questions and invite them to express their expectations. Paraphrase, restate, check for our understanding, and acknowledge the expressed emotions. ● Learn how the family supports the student and discover how the family might contribute to the student’s learning and engagement within the school.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convey gratitude for the teacher-family partnership. Summarize how the conference has helped you better understand the student and how the partnership will help the student achieve success.
GK	<p>Meaningful actions to build our own cultural competence, such as learning how to pronounce names, can add to our families' feelings of connection. We can consider how we greet family members and how and how often we invite them to attend or participate in learning. Scheduling meetings at times that best accommodate their schedules and providing translation services are additional steps we can take to enhance collaboration.</p>
CLH	<p>Families may also benefit from an introduction to basic information about our education system and how they can ask questions, raise concerns, and seek services for their child. An authentic partnership is one where we work together with families to define challenges and develop shared goals. By intentionally developing and practicing culturally responsive family engagement strategies, we can convey to both our students and their families that they are understood and valued.</p>
GK	<p>Part of reimagining education is creating a meaningful role for family voice in the decisions that matter greatly to them. After reaching out as thoroughly as possible, the next step is to add deep listening to important decision-making processes. Families and caregivers have opinions on matters such as school climate and student success measures, and these can be solicited across modalities through digital surveys, live-streamed community forums, or virtual focus groups. Henderson and Mapp found in 2002 that when families advocate for their children, their children are more confident at school, take on more, and achieve more.</p>
CLH	<p>An example of these concepts in practice is A Parent's Bill of Rights developed by The New Teacher Project. Let's take a look at an excerpt from this resource– it's also linked in the transcript.</p>
GK	<p>Oh, I've seen this publication Walking Together about what's possible when schools, families, and communities become true partners. The Parent's Bill of Rights, outlines what parents are entitled to expect from schools and districts. There's also a really great downloadable list of questions to share with parents– things they can be asking you.</p>
CLH	<p>So here's an excerpt from the Parents Bill of Rights:</p> <p>I have the right to be treated as a valued partner in my child's learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel welcome in my child's school and classroom. I have the contact information for my child's teacher, and I know how to connect with my principal.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Before the year begins, my school reaches out through introductory phone calls, welcome back events, or home visits. During the year, my child's teacher gets in touch with me on a monthly basis to share my child's successes, as well as challenges.● I receive information from my school on a monthly basis about academic priorities and programs. If needed, all materials are translated into my native language, and trained interpreters are provided to help me communicate with staff.
GK	<p>I have the right to know how I can support my child in school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● I know exactly what my child needs to master this year to be on track to meet his or her goal of being prepared for college, career, entrepreneurship, and service to the community. I am provided with information about how I can support my child in reaching those goals.● I know how my child is progressing academically compared to his or her peers, and I know how my child's school is performing compared to other schools in the area.● At the first sign that my child is struggling, teachers reach out to me right away to let me know and work with me to create an action plan so that we can intervene before it's too late.