NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

# Creative Connections: Engaging Families in Different Ways

Non-traditional approaches that center community, context, and family strengths

# Introductions

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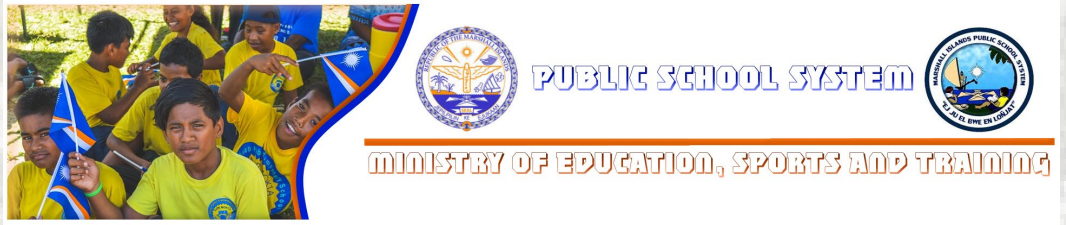


NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

# Session Objectives

Participants will:

- Identify traditional approaches to family engagement in secondary transition
- Explore innovative and community-driven strategies
- Reflect on current practices and share ideas
- Learn methods for evaluating family engagement and its impact

# What Is Traditional Family Engagement?

Common Examples:

- Attending IEP meetings
- Helping with homework
- Signing forms or attending open house events
- Responding to school communication

Often focused on compliance or participation in school-led events

# What's Missing in Traditional Approaches?

Often one-size-fits-all

- → May not align with family work schedules, languages, or values
- → Focuses on deficits rather than strengths
- → Can exclude extended family, community, or informal supports

# A Broader View of Engagement

Engagement = Partnership

- Collaborative
- Ongoing and relational
- Grounded in family and community context
- Values different types of capital:
  - Social,
  - Cultural,
  - Linguistic,
  - Aspirational,
  - Navigational,
  - Familial

# Expanding Non-Traditional Family Engagement: A Person-Centered Approach

Why Person-Centered Approaches Matter

→ Traditional engagement often revolves around compliance and school agendas.

→ A person-centered approach shifts the focus toward relationships, listening, and co-planning.

→ It emphasizes:

- What is important to the student and family
- What is important for the student's safety, health, and well-being
- The family's definition of a meaningful life

→ This approach respects that families are the experts on their child and prioritizes their cultural, social, and lived experiences.

# Ways to Use Person-Centered Practices to Engage Families

- Listen First: Use Structured Conversations
  - Host listening sessions with families (individually or in small groups)
  - Use prompts like:
    - What does a good life look like for your child in the future?
    - What are your hopes and fears as they grow into adulthood?
    - Who are the most important people in your child's life?
    - How do you define independence or success?
  - Tools: PATH and MAPS facilitation, Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC) conversations, Discovery interviews

# Incorporate Visual and Accessible Tools

Some families may feel more comfortable contributing through visual mapping, storytelling, or structured tools rather than formal meetings. Examples:

- “One-Page Profiles”: Snapshot of strengths, needs, preferences
- CtLC Trajectory Tool: Visual representation of life goals and steps
- Photo Voice: Use photos to represent hopes, dreams, or routines
- Life Mapping: Families and students draw or create vision boards for life after high school

# Honor Multiple Forms of Capital

- Recognize that families contribute more than school-based involvement:
  - Social Capital – Networks, community connections, mentors
  - Cultural Capital – Values, identity, traditions that shape priorities
  - Linguistic Capital – Language and communication styles
  - Aspirational Capital – Dreams and goals for the future
- Non-traditional engagement values family stories, not just school data.

# Embed Engagement in Everyday Life

→ Meet families where they are — not just at school.

- Co-host events with churches, barbershops, rec centers, or local businesses
- Create flexible meeting formats: text messaging, WhatsApp groups, video drop-ins
- Partner with community navigators, family liaisons, or peer advocates
- Offer role-specific family nights (e.g., siblings, grandparents, kinship caregivers)

# Capture What's Important To & For the Student

Person-Centered Thinking Tools (PCP) can be used during IEP planning, informal interviews, or transition planning sessions

| Tool | Purpose |
|---|---|
| *Important To / Important For Chart* | Helps teams distinguish between what matters most to the student vs. what supports their health and safety |
| *Relationship Map* | Identifies key people in the student's life and support network |
| *Rituals & Routines Chart* | Documents what a good day looks like, including preferences and sensory/environmental considerations |
| *Learning Logs* | Captures what works/doesn't work after experiences like job shadowing or new routines |



These tools **center the student** but engage families as essential contributors.

# Non-Traditional Approaches

Examples from Practice:

- Conducting home visits or virtual check-ins
- Family storytelling sessions to share student strengths
- Texting or social media for updates and dialogue
- Hosting transition nights in local community centers or churches
- Using parent advisory groups or family liaisons
- Collaborating with local businesses or cultural organizations

# Reflection & Discussion Prompt

Think-Pair-Share or Group Discussion:

- How do you currently engage families in transition planning?
- How might you shift or adapt your approach to be more person-centered?
- What challenges do you face?
- What non-traditional methods have worked in your community?

**Add your ideas to the shared chart**

# Evaluating Engagement Efforts

Ask Yourself:

- Are more families attending, but also contributing to meetings?
- Are families sharing their priorities, goals, and cultural values?
- Do students have stronger self-determination and clearer goals?

# Evaluating Engagement Efforts - Tools

- Family surveys
- Focus groups
- Participation data
- Student transition progress indicators

# Linking Engagement to Outcomes

Improved family engagement can support:

- Increased student involvement in IEPs
- Better alignment of post-school goals with student and family priorities
- Higher rates of employment, education, and independent living
- Stronger community-school partnerships

# Key Takeaways

- Engagement must reflect the community's values and context
- All families have strengths and capital to contribute
- Non-traditional strategies can be more inclusive and effective
- Evaluation helps tell the story of impact

# Your Action Plan

- What's one strategy you'll take back to your team to incorporate in planning?
- Write it down. Share with a partner.

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