

# STRENGTHENING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT in VIRGINIA TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

This Fact Sheet is designed to complement three Family Engagement in VTSS videos, produced by Formed Families Forward, family partner to the VTSS project. The videos feature educator and family voice to offer practical tips to build stronger relationships between families and schools.

Family engagement is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and activities of families to support their children's learning.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of family engagement in schools are well documented through research and include: higher levels of academic achievement (across SES levels, race/ethnicity, or parental education), improved attendance, improved self-esteem, and fewer disciplinary problems.<sup>2</sup> Meaningful family-school partnerships are key to school efforts to improve outcomes for all students.<sup>3</sup>



## VIDEO 1: BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS and EMPOWERING FAMILIES

### Positive relationships allow schools and families to work well together:

- Build relationships to gain trust and insights.
- Support students' social-emotional growth at school.
- Trust that families want their children to do well.
- Meet students' basic needs to encourage attendance.
- Directly ask families what help they need.
- Be honest and kind with families.
- Build relationships so hard talks are productive.
- Be open to difficult tasks that may enable progress.
- Have options in mind before sharing a problem.

### Empowering families so they can be and be seen as experts regarding their children:

- Tell families they are experts on their children.
- Help families see their impact on student success.
- Ask families for help to build a sense of shared responsibility.
- Meet with families to learn about student home life.
- Invite families to reveal other sides of students.
- Encourage families to support initiatives at home.
- Empower families to easily find school information.



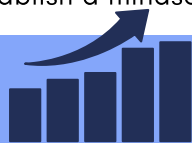
## VIDEO 2: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP and a MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH

### Strong leadership makes family engagement a priority:

- Drive change in school practices through leadership.
- Set tone and culture to encourage family engagement.
- "Walk the talk" by modeling inclusive practices.
- Expect changes to grow more effective over time.
- Welcome family input to encourage engagement.
- After inviting family input, commit to incorporating it.
- Coach and train staff to improve family relationships.
- Use data to set goals and measure progress.
- Establish a mindset that values collaboration.

### Multi-Dimensional, multi-tiered approaches meet the needs of individual students and families:

- Use paper, phone, email and social media to send information.
- Be persistent in efforts to reach families.
- Enlist students to help encourage family engagement.
- Use a variety of approaches to connect with families.
- Focus on ensuring families understand messages home.
- Ensure the intent of messages to families is clear.
- Be flexible about location and timing of events.
- Be mindful of varied family approaches to education.



## VIDEO 3: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT in ACTION: USING DATA and SOLVING PROBLEMS

### Collaborative problem-solving by families and schools working as a team supports learning for each student:

- Be mindful of jargon family members may not know.
- Watch for signs of misunderstanding at meetings.
- In meetings, explain terms so everyone can follow along.
- Directly tell families you need their help with decisions.
- Invite family insights to better understand students.
- Be open-minded to family input on goals and strategies.
- Take the time to work with, inform and empower families.
- Engage with families to develop more effective strategies.

### Data-based goals and outcomes guide schools and families as they collaborate:

- Use data to assess needs and develop response goals.
- Base goals on student outcomes and team input.
- Identify family engagement success with data.
- Focus on engaging in partnership to support learning.

1 Cite: Weiss, Lopez, Kreider & Chatman-Nelson (2014)  
2 Cite: Weiss, Lopez, Kreider & Chatman-Nelson (2014)  
3 Cite: Mapp & Kuttner (2013)

