

# Promising Practices for Meaningful Family Engagement

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**“We’re all gonna merge in the end and create one great human being.”**

Garnet, parent

# Our Purpose

We sought to uncover promising practices to engage families in our rural context and to understand the critical elements of their success.

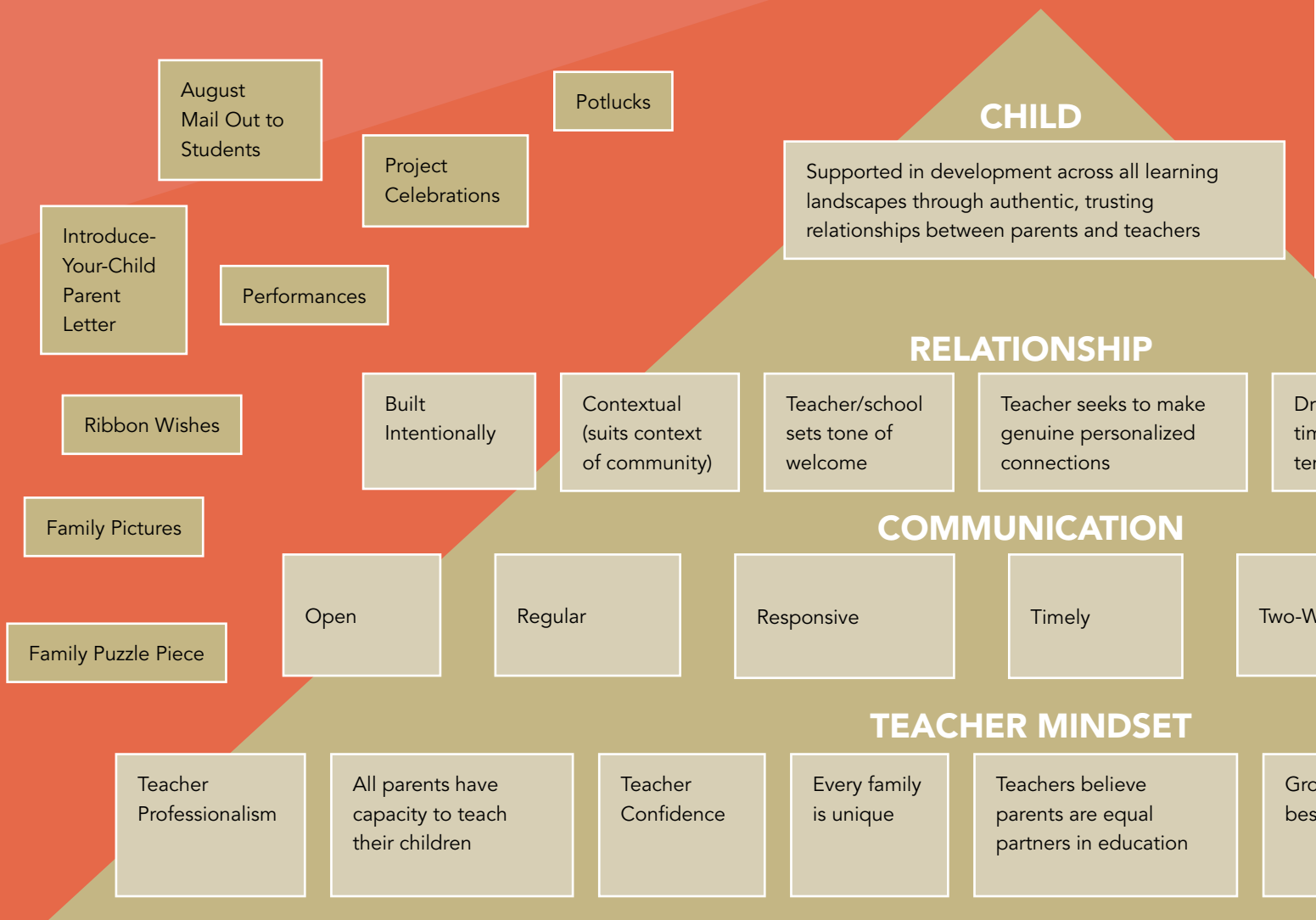
# Our Context

We are three researchers teaching in elementary schools located in mid-sized towns in rural Saskatchewan. The families in each of our classrooms for the 2018-19 school year were invited to participate and engage in our journey.

# Our Process

## Representation of parent voice through narrative inquiry:

- Teacher-created intentional activities based on research throughout the 2018-19 school year.
- Three teacher reflective journals.
- One teacher focus group.
- Eight parent focus groups.
- Twelve individual parent conversations.
- Eleven parent questionnaires.
- Total of 42 parent voices heard.



## WHAT OUR PARENTS ARE SAYING

### Erin on Welcoming Through a Host of Practices:

"I think that doing all of those: parent orientation, letter in the mail before the year started, sneak peak, sharing assignments, Seesaw, face-to-face ... interacting with us parents has made it welcoming and for us to be more involved with you and our children."

### Kassandra on Differentiated Engagement:

"Be open-minded; no families are the same. Their dynamics are all different. Work different times, one parent may be home, one at work. Everybody is different and each kid is different too."

### Deb on Teacher Believing in Parent Voice:

"(Parents) don't always reach out and have those one-on-one conversations with teachers, but when you are invited to, it's a lot easier to then do it."

### Syhra on Communication and Making Learning Visible as a Means to Engage:

"Communicate. Positive, negative, just random happenings in the classroom. So whether it is learning projects, special events ... share that with families, because definitely it is worth so much more to the parent when that happens. Then it feels like you are more engaged and aware of what they learn at school."

### Sheri on Relationship:

"He sees that his teacher and I are collaborating and trying to get to a place where we're helping him. We have the same goal to help him."

### Deb on Home Learning:

"We've had some kind of cool conversations and breakthroughs that we wouldn't have had [without the Home Learning Project]. There's been a few moments where it made us more involved with [our] children, and they love that because some of the activities we wouldn't have done."

### Joylene on Face-to-Face Engagement in In-Between Times:

"Face-to-face [communication is] one thing that really sticks out for me ... Today you said he did amazing on his multiplication. So tomorrow morning, he can talk to me about that ... it opens up more communication with him ... and it makes me feel like my kid is important to you [which] makes me feel more comfortable. [I] get the feeling that he matters."

### Carla on Seesaw as a Window into Child's School Experience:

"I really like [Seesaw] because it's kind of like an opportunity to be a fly on the wall in your child's classroom, and [to] see how they're learning and how they're interacting."

Seesaw

Math Game  
Fridays

Home Reading  
Programs

Welcome  
Post Cards

awn upon in  
nes of stress,  
nsion

Reciprocal

Home Learning  
Projects

ay

Informal  
and Formal

Rock Wishes

Home Visits

ounded in  
t practice

Engagement  
has to start  
with the school

All parents want  
what is best for  
their children

Sneak Peek:  
Unpack the  
Backpack Nights

## BEFORE YOU MOVE ON . . . A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

- What do I believe is important when partnering with families?
- What am I already doing to build positive relationships with my families?
- What is holding me back from engaging with families?
- What past experiences are forming my current practices when partnering with families?

Count connections, not number of people at an event.

Be intentional in your engagement strategies- what is your purpose?

## Top Five Recommendations

- Communicate – the more the better – **early, often,** and **timely.**
- Build an open and welcoming environment that fosters relationships with families.
- Use an online learning platform that makes learning visible and allows two-way communication such as Seesaw or Class Dojo.
- Select building blocks that honour family knowledge such as home learning projects.
- Personalize engagement opportunities to meet the needs of the families in your care. Consider access to technology and work schedules.

“The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

Henderson, Anne T. & Mapp, K. (2002). A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement