Building Trusting Family-Teacher Partnerships

**Always consider families as a resource and help them to recognize themselves as resources. Provide the context for them to feel “empowered.”**

* Help families see that they have power, dignity, and authority in rearing their children.
* “Empowering” families is intentional and ongoing; it involves mutual respect, critical reflection, and caring so that families can gain access to and control over resources.

**Negotiate roles and responsibilities.**

* Include families in decision making for their child.
* Explain to families the importance of families in learning, right away and often.
* Invite and expect families to be partners in classroom management and homework.
* Clarify how they can help provide options.
* Encourage families to be assertive.
* Develop a “family-school agreement.”

**Reduce barriers.**

* Have contact with every family early in the school year.
* Establish ongoing communication systems; include “good news” phone calls.
* Use two communication formats that are both school → home and home → school.
* Bridge the language gap – strive to have the best communication between school and home with every family, including those who speak a language other than English, by accessing school and community resources; always try; ask students to help identify ways to communicate with their families.

**Create a spirit of cooperation and coordination.**

* Explore what they want school to accomplish.
* Devise opportunities for involvement that they see as practical and meaningful – this can be supporting learning at home.
* Work to coordinate learning at home and school.
* Reach out to families with warmth and sensitivity.
* Acknowledge that sharing power with families is not abdicating your role; rather, it provides an opportunity to understand interests and goals of families and learn how to achieve them.

**Engage in perspective taking.**

* Identify why families might not be involved:
	+ Diverse school experiences of families.
	+ Economic and time constraints.
	+ Diverse linguistic and cultural practices.
	+ Different values.
* “Resistance” is always a form of communication. Families may be seen as “resistant,” or they may simply hold different perspectives. Lack of communication about what is important to each party leads to notions of some parents being “resistant” or “hard to reach.” Genuinely attempt to develop a relationship with every family.

**Make your classroom welcoming and family friendly.**

* Consider physical appearance that is inviting, open to all.
* Consider affective climate that fosters warmth, sensitivity, and trust.
* Hold class “open houses” with students and families at variable times so that there can be shared learning experiences.

**Other Strategies**

* Use multiple efforts – no one way will work for all families.
* Make events fun!
* Plan for logistical barriers and build on flexibility.
* Invite families to help determine the best way for them to be involved.
* Meet families on their turf.
* Identify a family who can help spread good messages.
* Make sure roles are meaningful.
* Identify why families might not be involved and try to take their perspective; reach out.

Adapted fromFuture of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships. (2007). *Family-school partnership training modules*. Retrieved from

<http://fsp.unl.edu/future_index.html>