



# GRAND PARTNERS IN EDUCATION:

## Grandparents as Catalysts for Family Engagement





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



▶ **GENERATIONS UNITED**

[www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)

Generations United’s mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. For nearly three decades, Generations United has been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together.

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The Center for Law and Education strives to make the right of all students to quality education a reality and to help enable communities to address their own education problems effectively, with an emphasis on assistance to low-income students.

▶ **GRANDFAMILIES MATTERS, LLC**

[www.grandfamiliespts.org](http://www.grandfamiliespts.org)

Grandfamily Matters, LLC provides contractual human services to local governments, nonprofit businesses and community-based organizations, for grandparents and other relatives raising children in Baltimore City. It supported the development of the first Grandfamilies Parent Teacher Student Association (GPTSA), a community-based affiliate of the Maryland PTA and the National PTA. GPTSA serves primarily the needs of a population termed grandfamilies (also kinship care), described as families headed by grandparents and other relatives who share their homes with and are responsible for raising their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or younger siblings.

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▶ **PHOTO CREDITS**

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# INTRODUCTION



“I definitely appreciate having the Family Engagement Plan to show us how to better reach and connect with parents and grandparents. This [project] reminds us always to be inclusive of **the full family** and use language that names and includes grandparents and other caregivers, not just parents.”

- Administrator, Glenmount Elementary/Middle School

## PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is intended to be a resource to Parent-Teacher Associations, organized parent groups, and other parent leaders seeking to tap the time and talents of grandparents, along with parents, to jumpstart or enhance family engagement in schools. The tips provided focus on transformational family engagement where families and school staff work together as full partners to promote students’ academic success. The purpose of this toolkit is to:

- ▶ **Make the case for engaging grandparents and parents as full partners with the school**
- ▶ **Provide tips for increasing grandparent engagement at your school**
- ▶ **Share stories of successful family engagement**
- ▶ **Offer resources to guide the process**

## ABOUT GRAND PARTNERS IN EDUCATION (PIE)

The Grand Partners in Education (PIE) pilot project was a two-year initiative aimed at developing an effective and sustainable method of empowering and engaging grandparents with parents as full partners in schools. The project was based at Glenmount Elementary/Middle School, a public Title I school that serves approximately 550 students from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade in East Baltimore, Maryland. PIE engaged grandparents, parents, teachers, and school administrators in developing and implementing a Family Engagement Plan to improve children’s education. A steering committee of grandparents, parents, school teachers and administrators guided PIE’s efforts, and two Baltimore City School District staff members engaged in PIE’s initial planning.

Project staff recruited three grandparents and a parent to the PIE steering committee through a breakfast meeting for grandparents at the school. A few weeks before school started, steering committee members held a kick off “meet and greet” event with the principal where they recruited additional families to PIE. PIE families worked with the school to plan, guide and facilitate a four month process of discussions and consensus-building exercises around 15 core elements of family engagement specified in federal education law. Discussions were held 1-2 times monthly at the school in the evenings, with dinner and child care provided to incentivize participation and accommodate busy families. Issues where consensus was not reached were elevated for further discussion during monthly school-family council meetings.

PIE grandparents and parents drafted a detailed Family Engagement Plan based on the decisions made by consensus. PIE families distributed the plan to all families for a vote. It passed nearly unanimously. PIE parents and grandparents were instrumental in chartering a new Parent Teacher Association at the school. PTA membership is open to parents, school staff, grandparents and other family and community members. PIE continues to meet monthly in conjunction with PTA meetings to implement the detailed Family Engagement Plan with a special emphasis on how families can impact the academic program plan.

The project recruited and engaged 119 volunteers. Approximately 1/3 of active family volunteers were grandparents. The project was led by Generations United, the Center for Law and Education, and Grandfamily Matters, LLC and was supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

# WORKING TOGETHER MATTERS: WHY ENGAGE FAMILY IN EDUCATION?

Having families engaged as full partners alongside teachers and school administrators to support children’s academic success makes sense. In fact, research has shown time and again that family engagement improves outcomes for children. Furthermore, for Title I schools, parental involvement is a legal mandate, with 15 requirements under the headings of: supporting your own child’s education; working together to improve the

school for all children; and building capacity.<sup>1</sup> Family engagement in education is related to a range of benefits for students, including:

- ▶ **Improved school readiness<sup>2</sup>**
- ▶ **Higher student achievement<sup>3</sup>**
- ▶ **Better social skills and behavior, and<sup>4</sup>**
- ▶ **Increased likelihood of high school graduation<sup>5</sup>**

## DID YOU KNOW?

According to federal law, the term **parent’** includes a legal guardian or other person standing in **loco parentis** (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible or the child’s welfare).

## INVOLVEMENT VS. ENGAGEMENT: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

For schools to begin engaging grandparents and parents to their fullest potential, they must start by understanding the difference between simply involving families and truly engaging families. When compared to traditional models for family involvement, full family engagement is transformational.

Consider a few ways that tapping the time and talent of grandparents can help schools move from family involvement to transformational engagement:

INVOLVEMENT		→	ENGAGEMENT <sup>6</sup>	
APPROACH	EXAMPLE		APPROACH	EXAMPLE
<b>Individual Responsibility</b>	Parent volunteers and school staff work individually to address school needs	→	<b>Shared Responsibility</b>	Grandparents lead effort to bring families and school staff together to identify shared goals and jointly develop a family engagement plan
<b>Random Acts of Involvement</b>	Parents attend an annual school event and complete a school performance survey	→	<b>Systematic and Integrated</b>	Grandparent and parent leaders serve on key councils or committees and are consulted routinely in school planning, decision-making and evaluation
<b>“Check the Box” Compliance</b>	School holds meeting to secure federally required parent approval of budget decisions	→	<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	Rather than focusing solely on checking off requirements for compliance, the school engages grandparents and parents in sharing ideas, and drafting and sharing budget proposals for discussion with the school-wide community



# THE GRANDPARENT EFFECT: WHY ENGAGE GRANDPARENTS?



Traditionally, when schools think of family engagement, they think of parents. However, grandparents can also be a tremendous asset to schools, often having time, a broad range of skills, and a unique perspective to contribute. The numbers of grandparents are at an all-time high, and they are continuing to grow at more than twice the overall population growth rate.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the sheer quantity of grandparents that are available as a resource to schools, there are many reasons grandparents may be uniquely suited to help transform family engagement, including:

- ▶ **Impact on Children** - Research shows that grandparents and other older adults can improve children's academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes, such as:
  - ▶ Improved academic performance,<sup>8</sup>
  - ▶ Increased school attendance and decreased school suspensions,<sup>9</sup>
  - ▶ Enhanced social skills,<sup>10</sup> cooperation, communication, tolerance and respect<sup>11</sup>
  - ▶ Improved self-esteem<sup>12</sup> and increased quality of relationships with family members<sup>13</sup>

- ▶ **Time** - Older adults volunteer more time than any other age group. In 2015, individuals ages 55 and older contributed more than 3.3 billion hours of service in their communities.<sup>14</sup>
- ▶ **Influence** - While schools may struggle to engage parents who are juggling work responsibilities and raising multiple children, grandparents often have the relationships, access, and communication skills needed to motivate and encourage parents to be engaged.
- ▶ **Leadership Capacity** - Key qualities of successful leaders and mentors align well with those of people with years of experience such as: active and patient listening, being relationship-oriented, and experience enduring strained relationships and overcoming major challenges.<sup>15</sup>
- ▶ **Family Roles** - Grandparents often play significant roles in caring for children during out of school time, for example by providing afterschool care, or even raising the children full time.<sup>16</sup> The role of extended family in caregiving may be especially prominent in certain cultures.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**One in 10** grandparents live with their grandchildren, and more than **2.5 million** grandparents report they are responsible for grandchildren.<sup>17</sup>



## Grandparents Engaged at School: A Two-Way Street of Benefits

**Carrie Russworm** thought she was simply attending a Grandparent's Day event at her grandson's school. But, after hearing a presentation recruiting family members to become equal partners with the school in the children's education, she signed up for a whole lot more.

She joined what would become Glenmount Elementary and Middle School's Partners in Education (PIE) initiative. "A few of us hung in there to establish the steering committee," she said. "I was at the right place at the right time."

Russworm's daughter and son-in-law work during the school day, so at the time, she got involved so her grandson would be represented at his school. "I am a firm believer that your child does better in school when they know they have somebody who cares, somebody who shows up," she said. "What's happening today is that, a lot of times, both parents have to work, so they don't have the time to invest like the grandparents do."

During PIE's two years, a lot has been accomplished and relationships built to the point that families and school staff have jointly drafted a Family Involvement Plan, based on federal Title I requirements, and have chartered a Parent-Teacher Association.

Having grandparent engagement is important, Russworm noted. "First and foremost, grandparents bring the wisdom and the knowledge from already going through it with their own children. We also bring the tolerance and the patience."

"Plus, we can make as much, if not more, of a commitment. Even though people say we have to do things different today, and I'm on board with that, I believe that when a person is there for their child, it goes a lot farther than just giving children stuff," she said.

One interesting result of grandparent involvement was drawing parents into the program. Russworm said, "When I began with PIE, I immediately knew that my daughter was going to be a part of it because I know her. (Her husband) wanted to do it, too, and that has been a blessing." The same thing has happened in other Glenmount families, she said, when the parents have been available.

"As a grandparent, it has meant so much for me (to be involved)," Russworm said. "I wasn't familiar with the Title I program, and I didn't know you could form a group such as Partners in Education. You think that you take your child to school, the system has been set up and it's a done deal. But, that doesn't have to be the case. I've learned a lot and socialized at the same time."

"For my grandson and the other kids, it's going to help them," she said. "Plus when he sees me in the school hallway, he'll shout out the biggest, 'Nana!' And that just warms my heart, when he's excited to see me."



"I am a firm believer that your child does better in school when they know they have somebody who cares, somebody who shows up,"

- Carrie, Grandparent



# TIPS FOR GRANDPARENTS AS CATALYSTS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

## TIP #1. BE PREPARED



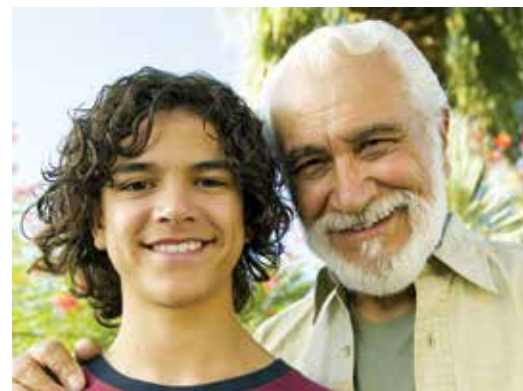
**Good preparation is critical to getting your family engagement initiative off on the right foot. Keys to preparation include establishing a strong steering committee; assessing the school's current strengths and opportunities for family engagement; and providing quality information to school staff and families.**

Recruiting a small and strategically-selected steering committee is an important first step for preparing your school. A variety of perspectives—including grandparents, parents, teachers, staff, and students—should be included on the committee from the very beginning to guide the initiative. Work with the school to equip the steering committee with valuable information that may inform the schoolwide assessment of family engagement, such as:

- ▶ **School Data** (ex. School demographics and budget)
- ▶ **Family Engagement Data** (ex. Results of past surveys, focus groups and interviews; lessons learned from previous or existing family engagement efforts)
- ▶ **Research** (ex. Nationally-endorsed standards for family engagement, such as those set forth through Common Core)
- ▶ **Policies** (ex. Rights and obligations for family engagement)
- ▶ **Useful Tools & Models** (ex. Family Engagement Resources from National PTA and other sources)

To effectively tap into the school's existing strengths and address barriers for family engagement, you must understand the capacity of all key players, including grandparents, to work together in a collaborative way. This requires an objective assessment of the school's culture, policies and attitudes toward full family engagement. The steering committee can help to develop the assessment (ex. Focus group questions or survey content), guide the process, and ensure ample feedback is gathered from all stakeholders. Grandparents may provide especially valuable feedback during the assessment process, as they often bring broader insight into the children and families while remaining less singularly focused on the day-to-day experience of their own grandchild.

Once the assessment is complete, the steering committee should have a plan to thoughtfully share with families and school staff. Grandparents can be effective conveyors of this type of information, as they may be viewed as a more neutral or objective party than parents or school staff. Information shared will promote buy-in from leadership, staff and families, inspire them to action, and empower them to lead. The information will be essential to inform your action plan for strengthening family engagement.



Available at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)  
(See page 18 for more details)

- ▶ Steering Committee Position Description
- ▶ Collaboration Readiness Check-List
- ▶ Sample Family Engagement Survey



### Are You Ready for Grandparent Collaboration?

Factors to consider when assessing capacity to full partnership:

- ▶ **Motivation**  
*Ex. Is there recognition of the value of and need for grandparent engagement?*
- ▶ **Time Commitment**  
*Ex. Is there a regular time to work with one another (both during and outside of the regular school day)?*
- ▶ **Structure for Inclusion**  
*Ex. Is it clear what role and authority grandparents have in various opportunities for engagement?*
- ▶ **Access to Information**  
*Ex. Do grandparents know about opportunities for engagement? Do they have the information they need to understand and meaningfully contribute?*
- ▶ **Capacity to Communicate**  
*Ex. Is there a system and/or process for collecting contact information for grandparents?*

**TIP #2. BE INTENTIONAL**



**A work plan is essential for setting and achieving goals for full family engagement. Working together to create a comprehensive Family Engagement Plan includes a shared vision for your children and your school; clear action steps, responsibilities, and measures of success; and a process for continuous improvement.**

Just as essential as the finished product, however, is a thoughtful process for jointly developing the Family Engagement Plan. In traditional models of family involvement, staff and parents often work in silos to address issues that affect the school. Furthermore, grandparents are often left out altogether. More often than not, these silos result in duplicated efforts, a lack of clarity about the roles including those of grandparents — and a disjointed plan for moving forward.

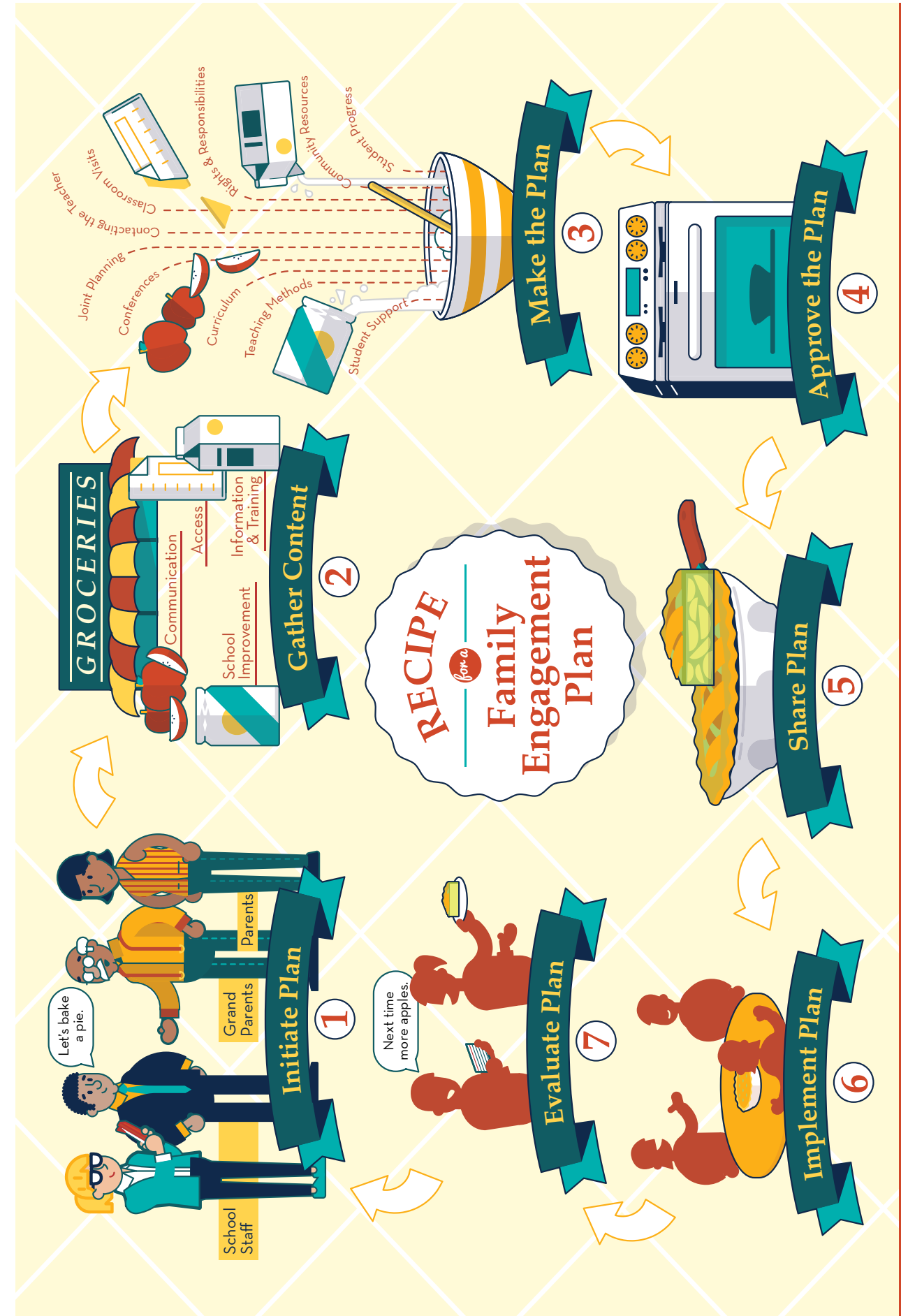
For schools and families to achieve full partnership in the process, your steering committee should start working together from the very beginning to coordinate meetings, assemble key players, and communicate progress. Consider hosting a kick-off visioning session, where families, staff, and students create a shared vision for your children and your school. If possible, hold your kick-off event or visioning session at an off-site meeting space, such as a library or local business. A neutral location can foster creativity, minimize distractions, and provide a space where power and perspectives are shared. Be sure to consider the valuable roles that grandparents can play in this experience, from recruitment of participants to facilitation of meaningful dialogue.

The Family Engagement Plan should go beyond field trips to provide opportunities for deeper engagement. Families and schools should identify ways in which they will work together on programs and policies that affect all children. At Title I schools, for example, this may include working together to develop the annual schoolwide program plan – a comprehensive strategy to ensure that all students, particularly those who are low-achieving, meet or exceed academic achievement standards. The impact of a collaborative approach is extraordinary, as grandparents, parents, teachers, and staff will have equal ownership of the Family Engagement Plan and are committed to next steps and their roles in achieving them. Including grandparents in the process ensures that the school fully leverages the broad range of skills, experience, and interests that they bring to the table.

**What is “Joint Development”?**

**A group effort between the school and families, including grandparents, in which all the participants:**

- ▶ Have a voice and develop the plan from the beginning
- ▶ Are engaged before a decision is made
- ▶ Are not simply being heard – but are developing it together, throughout the process, as equal partners
- ▶ Come to the table with much of the same basic background information needed to inform the decision



TIP 2

TIP 2





### Establish Working Agreements

Establishing working agreements is a great way to ensure that members of your Steering Committee have shared expectations and a commitment to full partnership:

- ▶ Agree upon a meeting structure that will accommodate varying schedules. Consider a mixture of in-person meetings after school and evening conference calls.
- ▶ Be aware of varied learning and communication styles. Balance written information with visuals and ample time for discussion.
- ▶ Make sure there is clarity about goals and purpose for each element of the plan.
- ▶ Review elements of the plan as you go to make sure that they are: clear enough, specific enough, and good enough to effectively carry out the requirement and fulfill their purpose.
- ▶ Strive to make decisions by consensus. If not achieved, a vote showing basic widespread agreement both among the families and among the staff can allow the group to go forward until the next discussion.
- ▶ Create a safe space to share input, emphasizing respect and listening to everyone.
- ▶ Determine a clear feedback loop, and provide an adequate time frame for input, before finalizing decisions.
- ▶ Capture the working agreements in writing, and ask all participants to sign that they understand and are committed.



Available at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)

- ▶ Visioning Guide
- ▶ Family Engagement Plan Discussion Guide
- ▶ Sample Family Engagement Plan
- ▶ Sample Working Agreements

## The Effect One Family’s Engagement Had in Their Child’s Academic Life

Monte Smith’s son was well-prepared to start school. After all, he had already learned in pre-K to read at a first grade level.

But in kindergarten, his parents realized he was bored, often completing his work early and then, for example, getting into trouble for talking. They investigated and, at a teacher’s suggestion, got involved in what would become the Glenmount Elementary/Middle School’s Partners in Education (PIE) initiative.

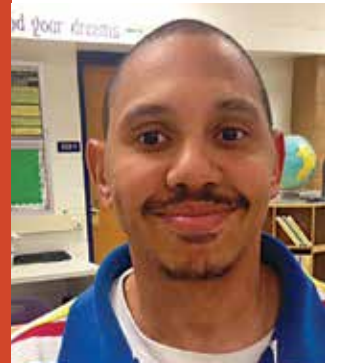
“As members of PIE, we discussed the criteria of the school,” Smith said. “I’m constantly telling parents to come up here and get involved so you can understand why things are the way they are – and what we can do to change what needs to be changed and make it better.”

For his son, now 7 and in first grade, the academic payoff began quickly. “Before, we were not informed of a lot of things that our son could be offered. But, working through PIE, we were able to get him to a place where things are going well. Teachers talked with us about what to try, and we learned how to address that. It was like a chain reaction,” Smith said.

“(Our son) is more focused. Instead of getting bored, he knows how to constructively find things to do. He’ll ask his teacher for a book to read or for more work. His teachers all understand him now,” Smith continued.

“From a parent’s perspective, if you care anything about your child, get involved,” Smith said. “If you don’t know all the aspects about how the school is being operated and how the system works, like where the money is going, find out. Find out what your child has and what they need. Stop complaining, and make time for that person who looks up to you. That can’t start when they’re 10 or going into college. The foundation has to start early.”

“If you’re not a part of the solution, you’re a part of the problem. So take a piece of the PIE – it’s very fulfilling!”



“If you don’t know all the aspects about how the school is being operated and how the system works, like where the money is going, find out. Find out what your child has and what they need.”

- Monte, Parent

### TIP #3. BE INCLUSIVE



Whether you're developing or implementing your Family Engagement Plan, grandparents are an incredible asset for growing your capacity for enhancing family engagement. At each stage of your family engagement initiative, ask these basic questions to make sure there is intentional inclusion of grandparents:

- ▶ **Who** is receiving information about opportunities for family engagement? Are grandparents and all parents included? What are the barriers to their inclusion?
- ▶ **How** is information communicated? Is the language sensitive to caregivers who are not parents? Is it welcoming of input and participation from grandparents or other family members?
- ▶ **What** information is communicated? Is the information inclusive of ways grandparents or other family members can support the child's education?

Not surprisingly, building relationships is critical to recruiting and sustaining family engagement.

Grandparents can be particularly effective relationship-builders, gently but firmly inviting participation from their peers and their adult children, their grandchildren's parents. They often bring years of experience and skills for addressing relationship challenges and may be particularly effective at building bridges between people. Consider ways to identify grandparents and other family leaders who are particularly skilled at strengthening relationships, and engage them in outreach and planning activities that build connections between family members and the school.

Available at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)

- ▶ Sample Flyer for Grandparent Inclusion
- ▶ Relationship-Building Ice Breakers
- ▶ Family Café Information

### Tips for Creating a Grandparent-Friendly School

- ▶ **Know Who They Are**  
*Work with the school to develop a way to collect contact information for grandparents who are not primary caregivers of students, such as a Grandparent Information Form in school registration materials.*
- ▶ **Know How to Reach Them**  
*Be aware of individual communication preferences. In particular, be sensitive to varying levels of comfort with technology, such as email, texting, and social media.*
- ▶ **Use Inclusive Language**  
*Specifically name grandparents and other family members when getting the word out about family engagement opportunities. This is especially helpful for activities that are not obviously inclusive of grandparents, such as Parent-Teacher Association meetings.*
- ▶ **Take Time**  
*Show your commitment to building relationships by building time for "get to know" activities at meetings and events. Invite grandparents to lead ice-breakers or highlight an active grandparent in your school's monthly newsletter.*
- ▶ **Say Thanks**  
*Host special events in honor of grandparents, such as "Bring a Grandparent to School Day," to acknowledge their commitment to their grandchildren and the school. Use it as an opportunity to recruit new grandparents and share information about other ways to be engaged throughout the year. Make a point to follow-up with individuals who express interest.*

### Full Partnerships Make All the Difference

**Danielle Myles** – parent to a third grader and a founding member of Glenmount Elementary and Middle School's Partners in Education (PIE) initiative – has experienced the ups and downs of building a real working relationship among families and school staff so all students can achieve academically.

"It's important because I think your child can only be successful in their education if the parents – and even extended family – are involved," Myles began. "By my being involved, my daughter has been on the principal's honor roll every quarter since pre-K. If I was just sitting back, if I wasn't helping her and encouraging her, she wouldn't be there. And, I really think that's because she knows mommy's involved."

"[With family engagement], children have more confidence in school; they participate in class because they want to tell mommy about it. They know you're talking with the teachers. It's a whole dialogue."

Dialogue, as Myles said, is one of the major factors in establishing the family/school working relationship that PIE has cultivated over two years.

"You've got to put it out there that this is going to be a partnership where parents are heard," she said. "Their opinions matter, and their opinions will be moved on. You want to hear what the parents and grandparents think. That was a big draw for us."

It took time, though, for the message to sink in. "Getting people out to the meetings – outside of the steering committee – we always used incentives, like a gift card or a raffle drawing or a dinner, and we offered childcare for the length of the meeting, just so people would come out and get their feet wet. It started building from there because you create a comfortable environment: 'We're all here (parents, teachers, administrators), we're relaxed and let me hear what you think about this.' People felt like everyone was really listening."

Myles said everyone knew that the family/school relationship was real when PIE started drafting their school's Family Involvement Plan, which addresses all 15 of the federal Title I requirements for parent involvement. Breakout groups of family and school staff worked through specific areas, then came together to share recommendations as a whole.

Since PIE began, Glenmount's school staff also asked about re-forming their Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). "They had been so many years without one," Myles said. "One of their goals is to be partners with parents, so we discussed that a lot in PIE – how we need a working PTA of people who are engaged in their children's education and want to volunteer."

Today, Glenmount has a PTA, with Myles as president. "PIE was instrumental to that; it helped pave the way," she said.



"[The Partners In Education project] is important because I think your child can only be successful in their education if the parents – and even extended family – are involved"

– Danielle, Parent

TIP 3



**TIP #4. BE RESOURCEFUL**



Remember that while all family engagement is super, grandparents can be superheroes. Often, they have the extra time to engage that parents and others may not. Always, they have experience that can be valuable to school staff, their peers, and the children. Consider the hidden time, talents, and passions — or “grandparent power” — that may be hidden at your school. Imagine the possibilities for maximizing family engagement!

**Tips for Making the Most of Your Grandparent Power**

- ▶ **Ask the right questions.**
  - ▶ Review your volunteer information form. Does it capture more than contact information? Use it as a tool for collecting information about the skills and interests that individuals are willing to share.
- ▶ **Get organized.**
  - ▶ Create a database or other system to organize individual information, which will help to easily tap into individual skillsets or identify those that are still needed. Perhaps you already have a grandparent on hand who has a knack for spreadsheets or technology.
- ▶ **Use what you have.**
  - ▶ There’s hardly any value in asking for volunteers if you don’t take the time to use them! Make sure that there is a clear person or team responsible for volunteer management.
- ▶ **Embrace differences.**
  - ▶ Understanding individual differences in volunteer motivations, commitment levels, and interests is a critical element for effectively engaging grandparent volunteers. Understanding whether people are looking for power and influence, a feeling of achievement, affiliation, and/or friendship and relationships will help in creating meaningful opportunities with reciprocal benefits.

- ▶ **Invest in all-stars.**
  - ▶ Keep an eye out for individuals who demonstrate promising leadership potential and interest in deepening family engagement. Provide training opportunities to expand the skills they can share with the school.
- ▶ **Build the capacity of all partners.**
  - ▶ Remember the importance of building the capacity of all partners when making the most of grandparent power. Offer professional development opportunities for teachers and staff to better understand generational differences and to build their capacity to effectively partner with older adults.



**DID YOU KNOW?** Older adults volunteer more hours in their communities than any other age group? In fact, in 2015, **people over the age of 55 contributed 3.3 billion volunteer hours** to their community.

- Available at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
- ▶ Volunteer Interest Form
  - ▶ Sample Meeting Evaluation
  - ▶ Learning Goals Assessment Tool

**School and Families Navigating New Ways to Work Together for Student Achievement**

A visitor to Baltimore’s Glenmount Elementary/Middle School might be surprised to see a group of adults in a classroom, learning math – until they hear about the school’s Partners in Education (PIE) initiative.

“We are ‘old school,’ but this new math is nothing like that,” explained Wanda Williams, an original PIE member and grandmother to a second grader there. “When the kids come home with the homework, and we’re teaching them the way we know, they get frustrated. We made a suggestion to have seminars, and that was one of the things (the math teachers) started doing once or twice a month – having seminars to teach us how to teach the kids.”

Since PIE began roughly two years ago, Glenmount families and school teachers and administrators have navigated ways, such as the math seminars, to become equal partners in their children’s education. Together, they have even drafted a Family Engagement Plan, based on federal Title I requirements.

“When the PIE project comes in, the teachers get involved, which is a good thing,” Williams said. “They enjoy being in the meetings because they bring to the table things we don’t see and can say, ‘Let’s try this,’ and implement what they want to do into what we want to see done. The principal or vice principal is always at the meetings, too. It all works together.”

As a grandparent, Williams knows the importance of family involvement in schools. “My daughter works, so she can’t be there like I can because I have retired. With lots of parents working, you’re seeing the grandparents more than you’re seeing the parents – dropping off, picking up, volunteering. And we’re interested in how to help the children in school. With PIE and Title I, grandparents have a voice now. We’re putting things in place that can help all of us.”

“We have a PTA in the school now, and we’re trying to set aside a room where you can come to be taught different things, like how to keep track of your child’s progress online,” Williams said. “We’re now able to go into the classroom for about 20 minutes at a time to see how the teacher and children are interacting. Plus, we have a newsletter available in the main office so the parents can keep abreast of what’s going on.”

In addition, Glenmount offers fun to engage families, including Grandparent’s Day, a mother/son dance, a father/daughter dance and the tried-and-true field trip chaperoning.

“The grandparents go on all the field trips,” Williams said, noting the fun students have picking vegetables at a Maryland pumpkin farm and a visit to Washington, D.C.

What advice would Williams give to other schools starting a program like Partners in Education? “Let the grandparents get involved. It makes me feel good that I can step in for my daughter, my voice is heard and my grandson doesn’t miss out on anything.”

“And, it makes the children feel good. They know mommy and daddy would like to be there, but (because of work) sometimes they can’t. It gives them pride to know there is someone there for them.”



“With lots of parents working, you’re seeing the grandparents more than you’re seeing the parents – dropping off, picking up, volunteering. And we’re interested in how to help the children in school.”

- Wanda, Grandparent

TIP 4

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



The information, tips, and stories provided in this toolkit are intended to elevate the powerful role of grandparents as catalysts for family engagement in schools.

The following materials are available to support your family engagement initiative. While all materials may not explicitly relate to grandparents, we encourage you to utilize all family engagement resources with intention and emphasis on the valuable role of grandparents.

Access these, along with additional resources, online at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org).

- ▶ **Steering Committee Position Description**
- ▶ **Collaboration Readiness Check-List**
- ▶ **Sample Family Engagement Survey**
- ▶ **Visioning Guide**
- ▶ **Family Engagement Plan Discussion Guide**
- ▶ **Sample Family Engagement Plan**
- ▶ **Sample Working Agreements**
- ▶ **Sample Flyer for Grandparent Inclusion**
- ▶ **Relationship-Building Ice Breakers**
- ▶ **Family Café Information**
- ▶ **Volunteer Interest Form**
- ▶ **Sample Meeting Evaluation**
- ▶ **Learning Goals Assessment Tool**

### COLOPHON

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