



## CALIFORNIA FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK

### Story Submission Guide

*Prompts and reflection probes for educators, administrators, and community practitioners*

#### About this Guide

CA-FEN is collecting stories from educators, school and district administrators, and nonprofit and community practitioners across the network. **We want to learn from you and key moments, practices, or strategies that reflect real family engagement work and lead to successful family-school partnerships.**

#### Why It Matters

We want every child to belong, learn, and thrive, and that happens when teachers and families work closely together. These stories are our way of honoring what educators, administrators, and community practitioners across our network are already doing — and making sure these hard-won lessons reach the teacher preparation programs and professional development spaces where they can take root. Together, they will become a curated collection that belongs to all of us and a living resource that reflects the wisdom, creativity, and commitment of the practitioners who are doing this work every day. These will be shared with Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Development providers. Authors from selected submissions will be credited in the publications.

#### Topic Areas

We know from our own network's educator survey that partnering with families is one of the hardest — and most important — parts of teaching. To better support teachers in overcoming challenges, we are soliciting stories in topics based on [NAFSCE's Core Competencies](#) and the [2024 California Standards for the Teaching Profession](#):

1. REFLECT (CSTP 6): Reflection is embedded as a prompt in each of the 16 story topics
2. CONNECT (CSTP 1): Building trusting relationships with families
3. COLLABORATE (CSTP 5): Co-developing learning plans and linking family engagement to learning
4. LEAD: Getting buy-in and support for family engagement from administrators and colleagues

We are looking for stories and a specific practice, activity, routine, or tool you use to successfully connect and collaborate with families. Each story includes reflection prompts to move beyond simply collecting inputs and outputs — making explicit the preparation, intentionality, and reflection that happen before, during, and after family engagement so that practitioners can continuously improve their practice.

#### Stories May Be Submitted in 3 Ways:

- In writing (using the prompts below as your guide)
- By video (record yourself responding to the prompts, 3–10 minutes)
- Through an interview with Araceli Simeón at [asimeon@ca-fen.org](mailto:asimeon@ca-fen.org) (30 minutes, scheduled in advance)

Choose the theme that best fits your story. Pick the story prompts that feel most relevant **and** a reflection probe and go deep. We are looking for honest, specific stories — not polished programs or perfect outcomes.

## What makes a strong story?

The best submissions will:

- Be grounded in a specific situation, person, or moment — not a general description of what you do
- Show your thinking and your reflection, not just what happened
- Share a practice, activity, routine, or tool you use to successfully connect and collaborate with families.
- Name the challenge honestly — including what was hard, uncertain, or imperfect
- Include the voices of families where possible — what they said, what they felt, what changed for them

**Submission deadline: September 30, 2026.** Scan the QR code to submit your stories:

For interviews schedule an interview here: <https://calendly.com/asimeon-ca-fen/30min>



## Story Themes & Prompts

THEME **CONNECT — Building Trusting Relationships with Families**

### Welcoming & inviting all OR new families

*"How do teachers welcome or invite all families and new families in your classroom?"*

#### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us how you welcome all families in your class at the beginning? OR Tell us the story of a time you welcomed a new family or a group of families in a way that felt genuinely different. What did you do, and what made it meaningful?
- Describe a specific practice, activity, routine, or tool you use to help new families feel they belong. How did it develop, and how have families responded?
- Share a moment when a family who initially felt like an outsider became an active, trusting partner. What shifted, and what role did you play in that shift?

#### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What assumptions did you have to challenge in yourself before this became possible?*
- *What would you tell a first-year teacher about welcoming families that you wish someone had told you?*

THEME **CONNECT — Building Trusting Relationships with Families**

### Reaching families your school struggles to connect with

*"How do you reach families you struggle to connect with?"*

#### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a family or community that you struggle to connect with. What did you try differently, and what happened?
- How do you make parents feel that they matter in their children's education?
- What strategies have you used to get families to attend meetings or events?
- Share a story about rethinking what 'engagement' looks like for families whose circumstances, culture, or schedules don't fit the traditional model.

#### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What did you have to let go of — a program, a format, an assumption — to make this work?*
- *How did this experience change how you define family engagement?*

**THEME CONNECT — Building Trusting Relationships with Families**

## **Communicating across language differences**

*"How do you communicate with families whose language is different from yours?"*

### **STORY PROMPTS**

- Tell the story of how you built an authentic relationship with a family who spoke a different language from yours. What tools, people, or approaches made it possible?
- How do you ensure your communication with families is asset-based, culturally responsive, and respectful?
- Describe a communication practice — a translated note, a bilingual family night, a community interpreter — that worked when engaging with multicultural, multilingual families. What made it effective, not just available?
- Share a moment when a language became a bridge instead. How did working through it deepen trust with a family or community?

### **TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES**

- *What questions come to mind about the families language to help you prepare for the meeting?*
- *What did you learn about the family's culture, not just their language, through this process?*
- *Did your institution provide support to make this easier for you or other educators?*

**THEME CONNECT — Building Trusting Relationships with Families**

## **Addressing cultural differences among students and families**

*"How do you address cultural differences among students and families?"*

### **STORY PROMPTS**

- Tell us about a time you learned something about a student's or family's cultural background that changed how you taught, communicated, or built relationships with them.
- Describe a practice you use to bring family and community cultural knowledge into your classroom or program. How did it start, and what did it mean for students and families?
- Share a story about navigating a cultural difference that felt uncomfortable at first — and how you worked through it in a way that deepened trust.

### **TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES**

- *What does it look like, concretely, to honor a family's culture without reducing them to a stereotype?*
- *How has learning about families' cultures shifted your own assumptions or blind spots?*

**THEME CONNECT — Building Trusting Relationships with Families**

## **Designing purposeful communication**

*"How do you design communication with purpose for families?"*

### **STORY PROMPTS**

- Share an example, practice or tool, you use to ensure communication between you and families is ongoing, two-way, and directly connected to learning.
- Describe or share how you help families understand the flow of instruction across the year. Do you share what students are learning, why it matters, and/or build skills or share actionable ways to support learning at home over time?
- Share a story about how parents react or behave towards you and their child's learning when they feel more connected and better understand the learning process.

#### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *How do you know parents' preferred communication methods?*
- *How do you know most parents are receiving and understanding the information?*
- *Does your communication process or practice create space for family voice and feedback, communication becomes a bridge into the classroom experience, strengthening alignment, engagement, and shared ownership of student success?*

#### THEME **CONNECT** — Building Trusting Relationships with Families

### Addressing miscommunication and misperceptions

*"How do you address miscommunication or misperceptions between schools and families?"*

#### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time a family had a misperception about you, your classroom, or your school — and how you worked to understand where it came from and address it.
- Describe a moment when something you communicated landed differently than you intended with a family. What did you learn, and what did you change?
- Share a story about rebuilding trust after a miscommunication. What steps did you take, and what made the difference?

#### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What systems or habits in schools make miscommunication more likely? What have you done to work around them?*
- *How do you create space for families to tell you when something isn't working?*

#### THEME **COLLABORATE** — Co-Constructing Learning

### Building academic partnerships with families

*"How do you build academic partnerships with families?"*

#### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time when parents or caregivers became true collaborators to support their child's learning in reading or math or understanding homework assignments. What did that look like?
- How do you partner with all families to support children's learning?
- Describe a specific moment when a family's knowledge, experience, or perspective made you rethink how you were teaching their child.
- Share a story about earning the trust of a family that had reason to be skeptical of schools — particularly families of color. What did you do, and what did you learn?

#### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What did you have to understand about the family's history with schools before this partnership became real?*
- *How did this relationship change what happened in your classroom?*

#### THEME **COLLABORATE** — Co-Constructing Learning

### Sharing data with families

*"How do you share student data with families in a way that builds understanding, trust, and partnership — rather than anxiety, guilt, or confusion?"*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time you shared student data with a family — a progress report, assessment results, or learning data — in a way that felt like a real conversation rather than a one-way delivery. What did you do differently, and how did the family respond?
- Describe a moment when a family helped you see student data in a new light. What did they notice or know that you hadn't considered, and how did it change your understanding of the child?
- Share a story about a family who came in feeling defensive or overwhelmed by data — and left feeling informed and ready to act. What shifted, and what role did you play in that shift?

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What gets in the way of families truly understanding student data — and what have you done to bridge that gap?*
- *How do you make sure a data conversation feels like the beginning of a partnership, not a verdict?*

### THEME **COLLABORATE — Co-Constructing Learning**

#### Co-creating plans and activities with families

*"How do you co-create learning plans and activities with families so their voice genuinely shapes the outcome?"*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time you built a plan together — an IEP goal, a home learning routine, a behavior support plan — where the family's knowledge and priorities genuinely shaped the outcome.
- Describe a family engagement activity that families helped design, not just attend. How did you involve them in identifying strengths and areas of need, in setting goals and planning, and how did it turn out differently than if you had done it alone?
- Share a story about a moment when a family pushed back on a plan and you listened — and the outcome was better for it.

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What structures or habits had to change in your practice to make genuine co-creation possible?*
- *What does 'family voice' really mean in your experience, beyond checking a box?*

### THEME **COLLABORATE — & Co-Constructing Learning**

#### Navigating difficult conversations with families

*"How do you engage in difficult conversations with families?"*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a hard conversation you had with a family about a child's behavior, development, absences, academic struggle, or conflict. What did you do to prepare, and how did you hold space for the family's feelings?
- Describe a moment when you had to deliver information a family didn't want to hear. How did you approach it, and what happened?
- Share a story about a time your mindset or assumptions almost derailed a conversation with a family — and how you caught yourself and shifted.

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What structures or habits had to change in your practice to make genuine co-creation possible?*
- *What does 'family voice' really mean in your experience, beyond checking a box?*

THEME **COLLABORATE** — Linking Learning at Home & School

## Expand on family learning in the home

*“How do you expand on what is already happening at home to support student learning?”*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a practice or tool you use to help families understand what their child is learning in class, why it matters, and what to do to support the learning at home — in a way that fits their real lives.
- Describe a time when you shifted from telling families what to do at home to genuinely listening to what was already happening — and building on it.
- Share a story about a family that became more confident supporting their child’s learning. What changed, and what role did you play?

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *How do you communicate expectations and demonstrate activities to families without making them feel judged or inadequate?*
- *What did you learn about a family’s home environment that changed how you thought about homework, reading, or practice?*

THEME **COLLABORATE** — Linking Learning at Home & School

## Linking student learning to family engagement events at school

*“How does your school link student learning to family engagement events or activities?”*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a family event or activity at your school where student learning was genuinely at the center (i.e. data chats, classroom observations or walks, sharing reading or math strategies) — not just celebrated. What did it look like?
- Describe how you connected a classroom unit or standard to a family engagement experience that families could participate in and extend at home.
- Share a story about a family who came to a school event and left with something concrete — a strategy, a resource, a conversation — that changed how they supported their child.

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What made this event feel different from a typical back-to-school night or open house?*
- *How did you know it made a difference for families and students?*

THEME **COLLABORATE** — Linking Learning at Home & School

## Weaving family knowledge into lesson planning

*“How do you weave what you learn from families and students into your lesson plans?”*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a lesson, unit, or activity that was genuinely shaped by something you learned from a family or student. What was the source of that knowledge, and how did it make it into your teaching?
- Describe a practice you have for gathering family and community knowledge — a home visit, a survey, an informal conversation, asset mapping — and how it feeds into your planning.
- Share a story about a student whose learning changed when you brought their family’s experiences, language, or expertise into the classroom.

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What gets in the way of doing this consistently, and how have you worked around it?*
- *How do families respond when they see their knowledge show up in what their child is learning?*

THEME **LEAD – Take Part in Lifelong Learning**

## Getting administrator or union buy-in for family engagement

*“How do you get buy-in from administrators to prioritize family engagement in teacher practice?”*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time you made the case to a principal, director, superintendent, or union leader for prioritizing family engagement — and it worked. What was your argument, and what made it land?
- Describe a strategy you used to connect family engagement to something administrators and union leaders already cared about — test scores, attendance, staff retention — to get support for it.
- Share a story about an administrator or union leader who became a champion for family engagement. What changed their mind, and what did your role look like?

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What data, stories, or evidence did you use to make the case?*
- *What would it take for family engagement to be treated as a core instructional practice, not an add-on, at your school or organization?*

THEME **LEAD – Take Part in Lifelong Learning**

## Getting colleagues on board for family engagement

*“How do you get colleagues on board to redesign family engagement in teacher practice?”*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a time you helped redesign a family engagement event — a conference, open house, curriculum night, or math night — and colleagues were skeptical at first. How did you bring them along, and what made the difference?
- Describe a strategy you used to connect a reimagined event format to something your colleagues already cared about — student outcomes, family satisfaction, teacher workload — to build buy-in.
- Share a story about a family event that shifted from a one-way presentation to a genuine two-way exchange. What did you change, who did you have to convince, and what happened as a result?

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What is the hardest part of getting colleagues to let go of the way events have always been done?*
- *How did families respond differently when the event was redesigned? What did that feedback do for your colleagues' willingness to keep going?*
- *What would it look like for every family event at your school or organization to be intentionally designed to build relationships and connect families to what their child is learning?*

THEME **LEAD— Take Part in Lifelong Learning**

## Supporting educator reflection on family engagement

*"How do you get teachers to reflect on family engagement to improve their practice?"*

### STORY PROMPTS

- Tell us about a structured or informal practice — a protocol, a coaching conversation, a journal prompt — that helped you or your colleagues reflect on family engagement in a way that actually changed practice.
- Describe a moment of honest self-reflection about your own family engagement. What did you see that surprised or challenged you, and what did you do with it?
- Share a story about supporting a colleague to grow in family engagement — a resistant teacher, a new hire, or someone going through a hard situation with a family.

### TELL US MORE — REFLECTION PROBES

- *What makes reflection on family engagement different from reflection on instruction? What gets in the way?*
- *What would it look like for your school or organization to build reflective practice around family engagement into the regular rhythm of the work?*

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Questions? Contact [Araceli Simeón](mailto:araceli.simeon@ca-fen.org) at [araceli.simeon@ca-fen.org](mailto:araceli.simeon@ca-fen.org)