

When You Say... They Think...



When you say...

Strong family engagement depends on strong relationships—when teachers and parents engage, they show students how much they both care about their education and success.

They think...

That's true—teachers have to really care about their students to be good teachers, and if parents don't care enough about their kids' education, they just aren't going to make the effort.

What's triggered in their minds?

The belief that caring enough is all it takes to teach or parent well, so only teachers and parents who really care about students' success will engage with each other; some adults just don't care enough to engage.

What helps?

Use the ***Space Launch*** metaphor to demonstrate that family engagement is about much more than caring, but instead brings together the expertise of both educators and families in a deliberate, intentional way to plan for student success. Provide examples of how family and school collaboration can be built into the education system, just as close collaboration and coordination between engineers, physicists, mathematicians, etc., is built into the way mission control centers work.



When you say...

We need to make sure that all families are engaged in their students' education, regardless of their circumstances.

That's why we need to take an equitable approach to engagement.

They think...

That's great, but certain families just won't engage. Not every parent values education the same way, and some families just don't prioritize education at all. And what is equity, anyway?

What's triggered in their minds?

Biased perceptions that families living in low-income communities—and particularly Black families and other families of color living in these communities—don't "value" education and aren't interested in encouraging their children to succeed in school or meet with teachers.

What helps?

Frame your message using the ***Opportunity for All*** value to orient public thinking towards the importance of including all families in engagement in order to ensure student success. Interrupt biased thinking by offering clear explanations about what barriers families face (language, work schedules, two-parent working households) and what equitable practices look like (holding events at times that work best for parents, hosting events at locations in the community, offering events in alternative languages).



When you say...

Families and schools should engage early on in the school year and make sure they develop clear strategies for how they will work together throughout the year.

They think...

Absolutely, parents need to make sure to attend parent-teacher conferences and look at their children's homework every night to make sure they are doing well. And if kids are misbehaving, teachers should call parents in right away.

What's triggered in their minds?

The assumption that family and school engagement only occurs once or twice a year and is limited to parents, teachers, and kids.

What helps?

Use the ***Space Launch*** metaphor to talk about the importance of ongoing communication and regular, close collaboration between the various experts in children's lives, e.g., their families, teachers, community, and other school staff to change the perception that "engagement" means only a handful of discrete interactions during certain times of the year or at points of crisis.



When you say...

When families and schools engage, students benefit, and so do teachers and parents.

They think...

That sounds nice, but engaging families is just one more thing that I don't have time for.

What's triggered in their minds?

For practitioners, the belief that engagement is just one more thing to add to their already overloaded plates and that they alone are responsible for successful family engagement.

What helps?

Frame your message using the **Interdependence** value to highlight the importance of families, schools, and communities working together and move thinking towards successful collaboration between all these stakeholders. This allows teachers to understand and appreciate that they are not solely responsible for family engagement. In addition, name **Teacher Benefits of engagement** to bring its transformational aspects for teachers to the fore.

When you say...

When families and schools engage, students benefit, and so do teachers and parents.

They think...

How do parents benefit? This is about kids doing well, not their parents.

What's triggered in their minds?

The belief that family engagement is about helping students to learn well and teachers to teach effectively, so therefore, parents are only supporters, not beneficiaries, of quality engagement.

What helps?

Turn **Parents** into messengers for talking about how engagement benefits parents and explaining how it can be a game-changing experience for everyone involved. Call attention to the bigger picture to reinforce the collective (and not just individual) benefits of engagement.