# UNDERSTANDING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Building a Knowledge Base for Culturally Responsive Family Engagement

Becoming partners with families in the education of their children does not always happen automatically for teachers. It will require commitment, specialized knowledge, and skills. Section I of this text is designed to help develop an understanding of families and a positive attitude toward family engagement as well as build on or extend the knowledge base about family engagement practices. Chapter 1 will explore the benefits of and barriers to effective family engagement and the changing demographics of today's families as well as introduce the concept of culturally responsive and ethical family engagement practices. Chapter 2 will explore different theories and models of family engagement, having an emphasis on recognizing cultural context. Chapter 3 continues to build the foundation of your knowledge base by focusing on one of the most important aspects of family engagement: communication. Together, these chapters will help begin a journey in developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for culturally responsive family engagement in the education of students.
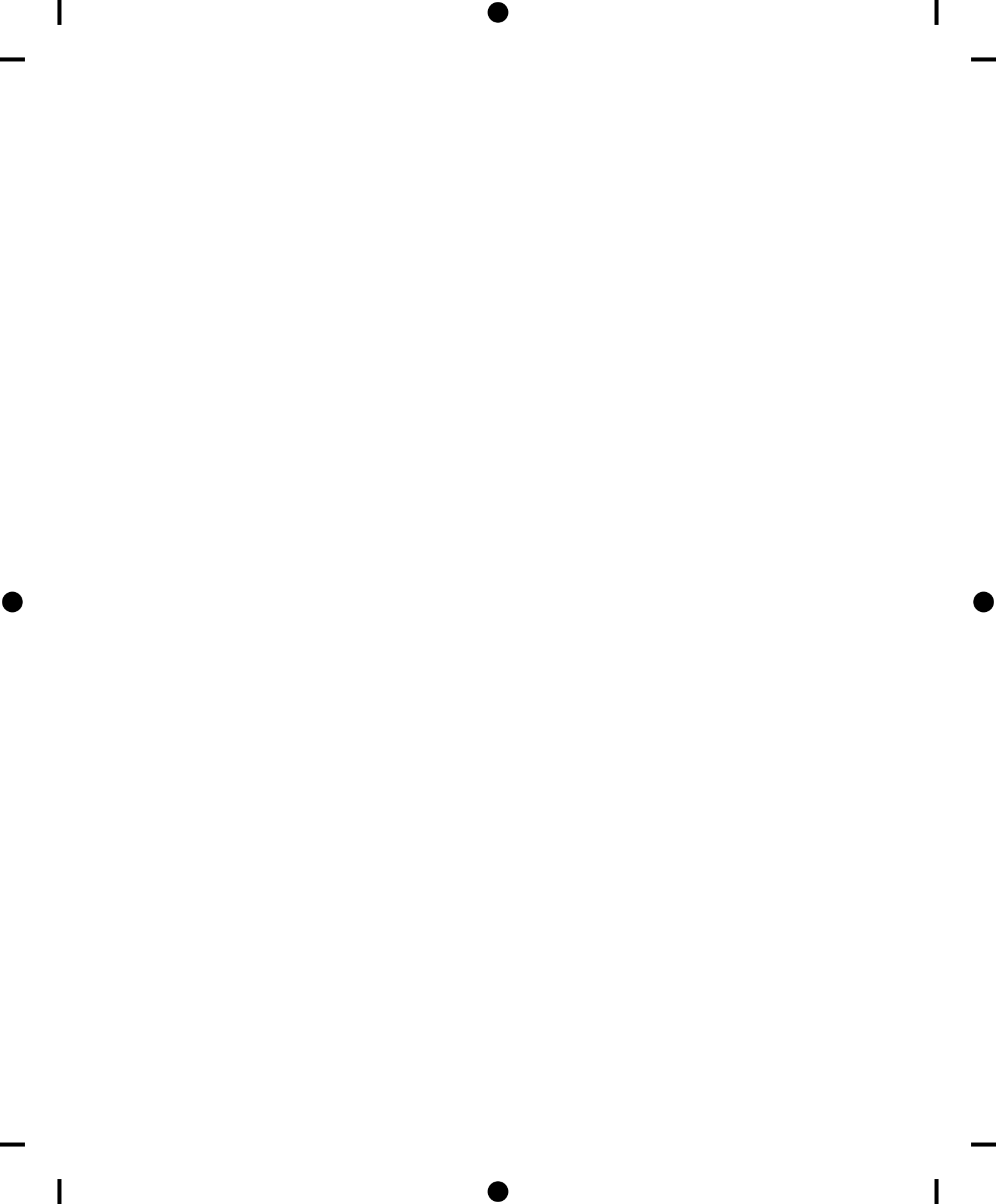
1 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND THE RESPONSIVE EDUCATOR

Family engagement is the process used to build genuine relationships with families. Relationships with families support overall family well-being and children's healthy development. When families are engaged, partnerships are created that have a common focus– helping children grow and thrive.

—*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021)*

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES (CLO 1)

1. Students will describe the characteristics of culturally responsive school and home partnerships.

2. Students will reflect upon their beliefs and attitudes about family engagement.

3. Students will list the benefits of family engagement for students, their families, and schools.

4. Students will list the barriers to successful family engagement in their child's education.

5. Students will describe what families in the United States are like, in terms of structure, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity.

As an educator, your focus is on effective teaching and assessment strategies, classroom management skills, content expertise, and a myriad of other pedagogical skills and knowledge. However, a crucial aspect of development as a responsive educator is knowing how to collaborate authentically and effectively with students' families. Over 50 years of research has shown that the most effective teachers and schools are those with strong family engagement programs. "This research consistently confirms that family engagement is one of the most powerful predictors of children's development, educational attainment, and success in school and life" (Global Family Research Project, 2018, p. 3).

Historically, **family engagement** has been consistently mandated at both the federal and state levels, beginning with **Title I** of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and continuing through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed in December 2015. ESSA mandates that school districts

must have a written family engagement policy to receive Title I funds, and that 1% of these funds be used for family engagement activities (Henderson, 2016).

This text is designed to help teachers become responsive family engagement practitioners. While reading this chapter, consider these questions:

- What does it mean to become a "partner" with families?
- How can I practice culturally responsive family engagement?
- How do I feel about developing home–school partnerships?
- What are the benefits and barriers of family engagement?
- What are today's families like in structure and culture?

PREPARING FOR FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS: ACTUALIZING THE PROCESS

Working toward genuine partnerships with students' families may be one of the most rewarding experiences for a responsive educator. Establishing those partnerships may be elusive, but once established, the family's element of trust in their child's teacher may be secure. Trust is a critical component of collaborative partnerships between families and teachers, and a trusting relationship begins with teachers who are committed to and respectful of all families. This is especially important since researchers have found that parents are more likely to be engaged in their child's education if their relationships include trust, mutual respect, and open communication (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Global Family Research Project, 2018).

Realistically, establishing authentic partnerships with families can be challenging and undoubtedly time intensive. Many times, it depends on creative problem-solving techniques to cement the relationship. As a responsive educator, it may be apparent that some family members may not be engaged in schools in the expected ways, such as volunteering in the classroom or chaperoning a field trip. However, this does not mean that they are not interested in their children's academic and social progress (Compton-Lilly, 2004). It may mean instead that there needs to be "a major shift in mindset" that goes from one of "devaluing and doing to and for families to one of valuing and cocreating with them" (Global Family Research Project, 2018, p. 12). You will need to develop a variety of family engagement strategies that fit today's diverse families' lifestyles, issues, and beliefs about their role in their child's education. This includes asking questions and listening to families, working together to create and implement new approaches, and supporting families as leaders. Researchers have found that when teachers reach out to families, the families are more likely to be engaged in their child's education in some way, resulting in strong, consistent gains in student performance in both reading and math (Global Family Research Project, 2018; Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001).

Allocating extra time to nurture relationships with families throughout the school year is essential. A key research finding in effective family engagement practices is that

relationships matter. When school staff view and treat families and community members as assets in the process of educating students as opposed to liabilities, positive relationships can develop (Global Family Research Project, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). This may require several more hours during an already busy day for tasks such as meeting or exchanging texts with a parent or working with a home/school organization to plan a family event night. This may also require a mind shift of seeing families as equal partners in their child's education, as well as experts on their children and community (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). As relationships with families develop and mature, the time spent will pay big dividends with students seeing a connection between home and school and gaining more support in teaching efforts.

How can the educator develop a mutually respectful relationship with families? This textbook is designed to answer that question, focusing on adopting a **culturally responsive family engagement** approach. This approach builds upon the work of Gay (2000) who proposed that culturally responsive teachers use students' "cultural orientations, background experiences, [and] ethnic identities as conduits to facilitate their learning" (Gay, 2002, p. 614). However, in examining the neuroscience behind culturally responsive teaching, Hammond (2014) described it as being more complex than this. She wrote: "It seems simplistic to think that students who feel marginalized, academically abandoned, or invisible in the classroom would reengage simply because we mention tribal kings of Africa or Aztec empires of Mexico in the curriculum or use 'call and response' chants to get students pumped up" (Hammond, 2014, p. 3). She proposed that the first step in culturally responsive teaching is to become aware of your own cultural lens through which you view your students, as well as implicit biases you have. She also stated it is important to have an awareness of the sociopolitical context and structural racialization that impact students' learning and development. Once this foundational awareness is developed, the next step is to establish "learning partnerships," or trusting, caring relationships with students (Hammond, 2014). The same can be said of culturally responsive family engagement. As a teacher, you must understand the influence of families' culture and sociopolitical experiences on learning, including becoming "critically conscious" of your own cultural background and how it affects your attitude about families that are different from yours.

This can be difficult for teachers when working with children and families from cultures different from their own. For example, if an educator has never experienced extreme poverty, how can they relate to a family who is homeless? If a teacher has been raised in a Christian background, how can they be sensitive to the beliefs and values of students' parents or guardians who may come from a Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or no faith background? Because the majority of early childhood and elementary education teachers are females from a white, middle-class, monolingual European American background, they may know little about the beliefs, values, and behaviors of children from cultures that are different from this majority perspective (Gay, 2002; Will, 2020). This textbook will examine all facets of family engagement from a culturally responsive approach.

FORMING FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS: SELF-ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

What are your beliefs about family engagement? Initially, you may experience feelings of ambivalence, fear, or shyness when confronted with the idea of collaborating with families. These feelings are natural for any educator, especially if the educator is not a parent. However, an important part of the job as an educator of children will involve partnering with families in the school community, and it is important to identify any attitudes that will be a barrier to effective family collaboration practices.

You'll note that the term *parent involvement* is not used in this text. Rather, *family engagement* is the terminology chosen to reflect the nature of the homes in which children reside, which may or may not include a parent or parents (Epstein et al., 2002). It also denotes the rich contributions of individuals beyond parents, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings. As this text title, *Home, School, and Community Collaboration*, suggests, a broader perspective than "parental connections" will be presented, demonstrating the "overlapping spheres of influence" that *school, family, and community partnerships*—a multidimensional concept that acknowledges that families, teachers, administrators, and community members jointly share the responsibility for students' academic achievement and development—have on children's education and development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). The term *family engagement* has also replaced the familiar *family involvement* phrase. Ferlazzo (2011) explained it this way:

> We need to understand the differences between family *involvement* and family *engagement.* One of the dictionary definitions of *involve* is "to enfold or envelope," whereas one of the meanings of *engage* is "to come together and interlock." Thus, involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implies doing with. (p. 11)

Making the shift from involvement to engagement requires moving from "doing to and for families" to an attitude of "valuing and cocreating with them." This is only possible if educators are willing to listen to families, seek understanding of their perspectives, and support them to be leaders in their children's learning and development (Global Family Research Project, 2018). Federal legislation supports this model, as ESSA replaced the NCLB language of "parent involvement" with the updated term "parent and family engagement" (Henderson, 2016). A true collaboration between school, home, and community requires active engagement of all those involved.

CONNECTIONS 1.1

Using the survey in Table 1.1, assess your beliefs about some of the basic premises of family engagement. Consider returning to this survey at the end of the course to determine your growth as a responsive family educator.

TABLE 1.1 ■ Family Engagement Attitude Survey

Directions: This survey presents an opportunity for self-reflection about some of the basic premises of family engagement. Read the following statements, and fill in the blank according to your level of acceptance of the statement by selecting option (a) completely, (b) somewhat, or (c) do not. Be honest in your self-assessment, and be prepared to provide your reasoning in completing the statement as you did.

As an educator preparing to work with families, I _____ believe:

1. Families are children's first teacher throughout the school years.

2. Homes can provide a rich learning environment, even those of low socio-economic status.

3. Families have strengths and resilience that can benefit their children's learning and development.

4. Families' backgrounds, degree of education, socioeconomic status (SES), or family structure impact their interests or abilities to be engaged with their children's education.

5. Families' cultural differences and beliefs affect their attitudes about their role in their children's education.

6. Communication with families is key and should be done through a variety of methods, including technology.

7. Poverty presents risk factors for children's education, and as an educator, I will have knowledge of community resources and a willingness to refer families to the appropriate agencies.

8. Educators should respect the decisions made by families concerning the academic future of their children (my students).

9. Educators should welcome all students' family members and respect their differences in race, culture, family structure and other differences.

10. Educators should empathize with the daily economic, personal, and psychological stresses in today's families.

11. Cultural differences matter, and it is my responsibility to be responsive to these differences in my family engagement practices.

Complete this statement: When I think about being a partner with my students' families in their education, I feel

_____ .

BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

As you reflect on your present knowledge and skills relating to working with families, it is important to understand the benefits of a strong family engagement program as well as barriers to its success. Research has confirmed that "educators need to know how to work with families and communities…. These competencies are required *every day of every year of every teacher's professional career* [emphasis added]" (Epstein et al., 1999, p. 29). The reciprocal benefits of family engagement are numerous—all constituents, including children, families, educators, and the school community, reap the positive rewards of increased family engagement.

Family engagement is not an option for educators. As noted previously, ESSA, the legislation guiding school practices, mandates family engagement practices. Schools must fully inform parents about assessment practices and work in partnership to develop effective strategies for school improvement. Essentially, ESSA requires that states and school districts engage parents and families to work together ensuring positive outcomes for all students.

Benefits for Students

Numerous research studies have confirmed the positive impact of family engagement on students from early childhood through high school. *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) reviewed hundreds of studies, which overwhelmingly indicated that high-quality family engagement programs improve and support student achievement. More recent research has continued to provide strong evidence that family engagement is key in school improvement and reform efforts (Global Family Research, 2018). It is especially important in the birth through age five years age range, as research has shown family engagement in the early years plays an important role in children being ready for kindergarten, influencing both their social-emotional and academic readiness (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Specifically, decades of research has shown that students whose families are engaged in their education in some way do the following:

- Earn higher grades and test scores

- Are less likely to be retained in a grade

- Are more apt to have an accurate diagnosis for educational placement in classes

- Attend school regularly

- Like school and adapt well to it

- Have better social skills

- Have fewer negative behavior reports

- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education

A key finding of this research is the importance of encouraging families to support their children's learning at home. Other researchers have found that family engagement may account for 10%–20% of the variance in student achievement levels and that family engagement at the elementary level was a strong predictor of student achievement in urban schools (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007). Family engagement appears to have a long-range effect as children progress through school, and the more families support their children's learning, the better they do in school over time (Arce, 2019; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Family engagement in children's education has many benefits for students, their families, and their teachers.

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Benefits for Families

Family engagement can also have benefits for parents and guardians. Studies have found that families who are engaged in their children's education tend to have more positive attitudes and be more satisfied with their child's school and teachers and have fewer mistaken assumptions between families and teachers about one another's attitudes, abilities, and motives. Family members may also gain a better understanding of their child's skills, abilities, and development as well as learn child rearing skills and how to handle parenting issues such as discipline, nutrition, or how to help with homework. There is also an increase in families' skills and confidence—sometimes even leading to improving their education. As families better understand the school's structure and programs, they may move into more leadership roles in the school setting (Diffily, 2004; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Ample research has shown that families want to know how their children are doing in school and want to have input into their education (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Benefits for Educators and Schools

Family engagement also benefits programs, schools, and school districts. Certainly, teachers benefit from the extra support and individualized attention that families can give their child, whether it is volunteering in the classroom or helping at home. However, the benefits for teachers are more comprehensive. When families are respected by teachers and encouraged to be

active in their child's learning and school setting, they can provide insights to teachers on how to improve their program's learning environment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). They can also help teachers better understand their children's unique character-istics and approach to learning.

School districts can also benefit in a number of ways. For example, researchers have found that schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family engagement can help school districts achieve the standards required under ESSA accountability requirements. School districts may also benefit financially; families who approve of the schools that their children attend are more likely to support the school with votes for passage of school bond issues and edu-cator raises, and they may be involved in grant-writing initiatives. More recently, it was found that schools that had established trusting relationships with families were more effectively able to navigate school closures and remote learning that were required due to COVID-19 (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Here is a note of caution about the benefits of traditional family engagement for educators and schools: It may be a benefit to teachers and schools but have little benefit for families. If the activities do not connect to what children are learning or give families the opportunity to be involved in planning relating to learning goals, there is little benefit for families (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). For example, attending school performances, volunteering clerical assistance, fund-raising, or sending in party treats may be quite helpful to teachers or districts, but they do little to authenticate a true partnership.

Barriers to Authentic Family Engagement

Although there are numerous benefits to family engagement, researchers have also identified barriers to authentic family engagement. The roadblocks may appear formidable, but the first step in overcoming them is to recognize school barriers (teachers and administrators), family barriers (individual or group), community barriers (district or school building), programmatic barriers, and barriers specific to culturally and linguistically diverse families that hinder effec-tive family engagement.

School Barriers: Educators

Despite research to the contrary, unfortunately, some teachers think that families are not valu-able resources in educating students, and hence, they do not value or promote family engage-ment. One of the biggest barriers for authentic family engagement is a "deficit-based view" where teachers and administrators see families through a lens of what they cannot do or do not know or the belief that "they don't care" about their child's education, as opposed to the strengths they possess (Mapp & Bergman, 2021, p. 7, 9). Moreover, the lack of trust for paren-tal motives or actions, or lack of respect for their life choices, can create a negative attitude for teachers toward family engagement (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Middle-class teachers tend, especially, to view low-income families negatively as far as valuing their contributions or child-rearing practices (Arce, 2019; Edwards & Young, 1990). They may also fear that family

members will judge their teaching performance or gossip outside the classroom about the students' abilities or behavior. Finding the time in a busy school day is also a major barrier for teachers (Lawson, 2003). Teachers' preferences for traditional school involvement such as volunteering, chaperoning field trips, or acting as a classroom parent to organize events may limit family engagement. This **school-centric approach**, which refers to traditional family involvement activities that are centered on meeting the teacher or school's needs without regard to a family's perspective, needs, or opinions relating to their child's education, may offer few opportunities for meaningful interactions and relationship building with families. Traditional family engagement activities, like a pizza fundraiser, that don't focus on children's learning and development goals can lack meaning for families (Lawson, 2003; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). This approach may especially prohibit engagement with families who have low education levels, live in poverty, or do not speak English. A national survey of over 17,000 families found that less than half of families without a high school education or who did not speak English attended school events compared to over 85% of educated families. Only 27% of poor families volunteered at school or served on school committees (Noel et al., 2016).

Family Barriers: Individuals or Groups

In addition to educators' and school districts' practices, families may also have barriers that keep them from fully participating in their child's education. As it is for teachers, time is one of the biggest roadblocks to family engagement. Whether it is a work schedule or a busy lifestyle, today's families often do not have discretionary time to devote to their child's education. Teachers may inadvertently make it more difficult for busy working families by offering school engagement opportunities only between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on school days and no flexibility or other options (Rich, 1998). For example, one study found that low-income working mothers or those who were attending school full-time required other means of engagement beyond the school day schedule (Weiss et al., 2005). However, it's important to note that when schools create a welcoming climate, with meaningful activities, where families feel that teachers and administrators are listening to them, they are more likely to make time for family engagement (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Adults who had negative personal school experiences may be anxious about entering a school they perceive as unwelcoming (Arce, 2019; Finders & Lewis, 1994). Direct conflicts with teachers (Lawson, 2003) or unhappiness over remarks made by teachers may cause families to avoid contact with teachers. A lack of **family efficacy**, or confidence in being able to help their child succeed in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and the embarrassment associated with this struggle again may cause avoidance of classrooms. It is important to note in a discussion of family barriers that "there is a mounting body of evidence to suggest that the involvement (or not) of families in schooling is the result of inequitable opportunities and experiences" (Arce, 2019, p. 82). School policies, procedures, and family engagement strategies often reflect the dominant culture's Eurocentric middle-class beliefs and values can cause minority families to feel unseen or unwelcome. Families from socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic groups other than the dominant culture may avoid family engagement due to this discomfort (Arce, 2019).

Another major barrier for families who are new immigrants or English language learners (ELLs) includes the inability to understand the majority language of the school or to be able to communicate fluently with teachers (Antunez, 2000; Arce, 2019; Collier & Auerbach, 2011). Furthermore, some cultural traditions (or simply some parents) believe that the role of the teacher is to educate the child (Kim, 2002) and that the family's role is to rear the child, not to be directly involved in educational practices. Olivos (2009) and Salas (2004) explore potential barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse families who have a special needs child. These include the following:

- The asymmetries of power that can take the form of explicit and implicit discouragement by educators

- Educators fluent in legal discourse of special education laws versus parents lacking that knowledge

- Parental feelings of alienation and disrespect from educators that result in disengagement, avoidance, and anger

- Parental opinions discounted in feeling their "voices were not heard"

All these issues will be addressed throughout this text in more detail. Although the barriers to effective family engagement seem many, creative, caring, and committed educators and families can find ways to surmount these obstacles.

School, District, or Community Barriers

In today's era of school security issues and pandemic health concerns, many school campuses have a forbidding and unwelcoming appearance for non–school personnel—locked doors and signs demanding that visitors report to the office, creating an actual physical barrier to families wishing to visit school. Requirements for school visitors to be vaccinated for COVID-19 or fully masked may limit some families' willingness to come into a school building in communities with low vaccination rates or high anti-mask sentiments. School districts may also limit school visitors in an attempt to control the spread of infections in their buildings. In addition, school systems may close doors to parents, especially those who may be critical of teachers or school policies (Saunders, 2001). Policies such as not allowing younger siblings to come to school with a family volunteer or not permitting family members to volunteer in their child's classroom can also be a barrier. Communication strategies used by a school can also be a hindrance to authentic family engagement if materials are not translated for English Language Learner families (Arce, 2019). The size of the school can also be a barrier to family engagement. One study found that the increase in the size of a school led to a decrease in family engagement (Walsh, 2010). A low priority of family engagement funding in high-poverty schools has been noted (Roza, 2005). As noted earlier, schools receiving funding under Title I must allocate 1% of Title I funds to developing family partnerships, but this money can be spent in a variety of ways, such as on investing in teachers' professional development or

collaborating with community-based agencies (Henderson, 2016). Many times, restricted thinking on the part of the district concerning what is viewed as an acceptable contribution to the school effort is constraining for families wishing to be involved in other ways.

Schools may be well intentioned in developing family engagement activities, but they may fail to recognize that not all families may be able to participate in them. For example, many elementary schools host family events, such as a Grandparents Day luncheon, a Mother's Day tea, or a Donuts with Dads breakfast, which by nature will eliminate some children's families from participating if they are not a two-parent family, are a same-sex family, or if they do not have grandparents in the community. A family event that features a meal may eliminate some families whose culture or religion does not allow them to eat certain foods, and school holiday celebrations that honor the majority population holidays, while neglecting other cultural holidays, will exclude some cultural or religious minorities. Teachers may have children create Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts or complete projects, such as a family tree, which may be difficult for children who do not live with both parents or are adopted or foster children, as they may not have photos of themselves as babies or knowledge about their family heritage.

CONNECTIONS 1.2

Table 1.2 has a list of common early childhood or elementary school activities. Which of these activities will exclude some students and their families from participating due to their family diversity, socioeconomic status (SES), or language background? How can these activities be modified to include all families?

CONNECTIONS 1.3

The chart in Table 1.3 offers you the chance to describe both your family or origin and what you perceive to be the "ideal," in family practices, beliefs, and values. Where are they similar? Where are they different? With a partner, discuss your ideas. Do you think that there is more than one way to "do family"? How will your vision of the ideal family influence your interactions with the families of students in your classroom, especially those who are different from either your family experience or your ideal family? Completing this activity may help you better understand not only the influence of your family but also how diverse family backgrounds have a major impact on the students in your classroom.

Current Trends in Family Demographics

Prior to effectively dealing with barriers to a family engagement program, it is important to have a better understanding of the families of the students in today's US classrooms. Families are not easy to define or track because of the changing nature of families and differences in definitions

TABLE 1.2 ■ Inclusive or Exclusive Activities
Rate these school or classroom activities.
1. All children and their families will be able to participate fully.
2. All children and their families will be able to participate, but some may be uncomfortable with the activity.
3. Some children and their families will be excluded in this activity.
___ Having a family picnic on the last day of school
___ Dressing in a Halloween costume for the school costume parade and inviting families to view the parade
___ Requesting that children have their mom or dad sign a paper
___ Creating a family tree with baby pictures as a school project
___ Inviting grandparents to have lunch with their grandchild
___ Doing a classroom cooking activity with family volunteers during a religious observance, such as Ramadan, Yom Kippur, or Lent
___ Having a history day show-and-tell where children and/or their parents bring an item that represents their family's heritage
___ Holding a night time home/school organization meeting where child care is not offered
___ Going on a field trip with parent chaperones that requires an admission and snacks fee
___ Asking a student's family members to come in and read a story to the class
How could each of these be modified so that all children and families can participate?
What are other family engagement activities that you've experienced or observed that were exclusive to some children in the classroom?

of family. Although the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) defines a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family," the reality in today's American families is that there is a wide range of possibilities:

- Children living in two-parent, married families who may be opposite-sex or same-sex parents

- Children living in one (or two) two-parent, blended families where one parent is a stepparent

- Children living with two adults both acting as parents but who are not married (and may be opposite-sex or same-sex partners) and, therefore, defined as a single-parent household

- Children living with one parent full-time or part-time

- Children living in households with grandparents or other relatives

- Children living in foster-care or temporary guardianship situations

TABLE 1.3 ■ The Ideal Family and Your Family: Are They the Same?		
Briefly describe your family of origin in the different categories, and then describe your vision of the "ideal family."		
	My Family	**The Ideal Family**
Family structure		
Typical family activities		
Mealtime		
Childhood chores		
Family celebrations, holidays, and birthdays		
Relationships with extended family members		
Family transitions (i.e., moves, parents changing jobs, deaths, divorce, new babies)		
Types of family engagement in children's education		
Family values and goals		

The proportion of single-parent households continues to increase in today's families.

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Family living arrangements can also change during the school year. Therefore, the labeling of students' family types must be carefully considered.

Configuration of Today's American Families

The US Census Bureau data provides a snapshot of families through data that are collected every 10 years, along with supplemental surveys. Data are gathered on households and families related to number of families, type and size of families, age of children, type of housing, income, and race or ethnicity. The latest census was done in 2020, but given the impact of immigration, racial, and pandemic issues, as well as the fact that family living arrangements are fluid, care should be taken in making conclusions from it. However, Census Bureau data can provide general information about children and families in the United States. Following are graphics summarizing the latest US family demographics:

As seen in Figure 1.1, the majority of children in the United States live in two-parent homes, although one or both parents may not be their biological parents.
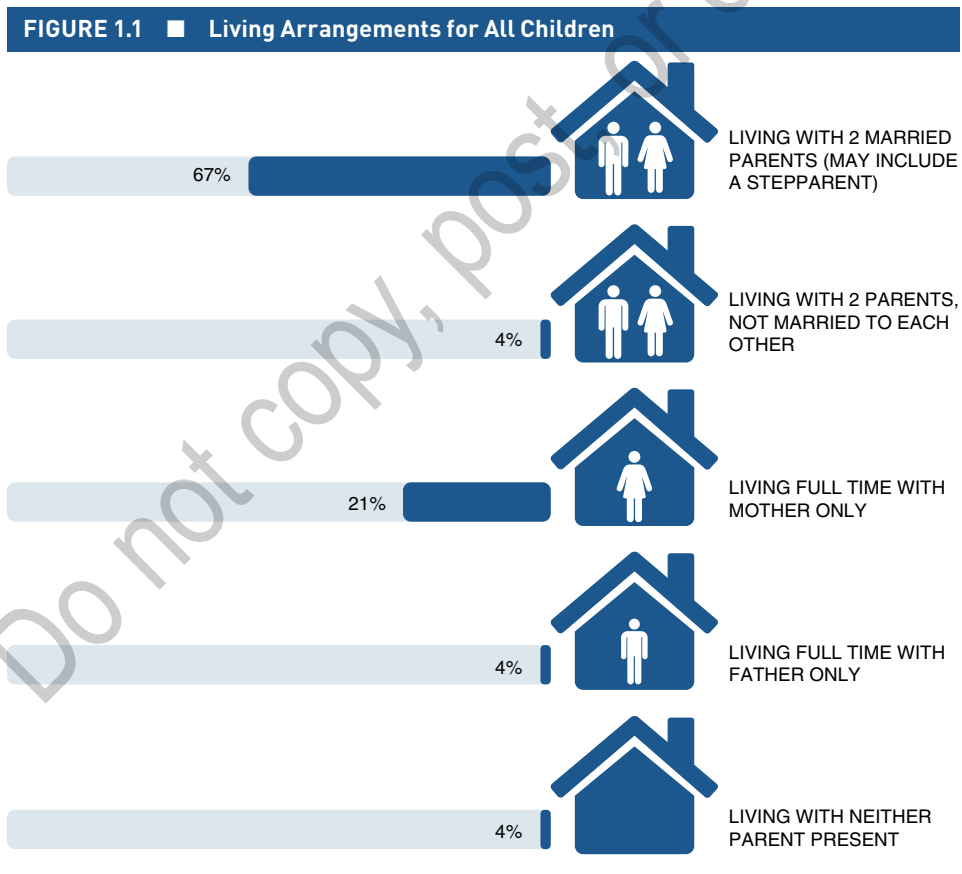
FIGURE 1.1 ■ Living Arrangements for All Children

67% — LIVING WITH 2 MARRIED PARENTS (MAY INCLUDE A STEPPARENT)

4% — LIVING WITH 2 PARENTS, NOT MARRIED TO EACH OTHER

21% — LIVING FULL TIME WITH MOTHER ONLY

4% — LIVING FULL TIME WITH FATHER ONLY

4% — LIVING WITH NEITHER PARENT PRESENT

Source: U.S. Census Bureau C3. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years and Marital Status of Parents, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin and Selected Characteristics of the Child for All Children (2020).

When the data is disaggregated by race and ethnicities, differences emerge among family types. In particular, as Figure 1.2 shows, black children are more likely to live in a single parent household, headed by a mother, while a very small minority of Asian American children live in a single parent household.

Due to the change in state laws concerning same-sex marriage, the US Census Bureau began collecting data on same-sex married couples in 2010. The Census Bureau (2021) reported that similar to opposite-sex couples, married same-sex couples were more likely to have children in the home than unmarried couples. Figure 1.3 shows a comparison of opposite-sex and same-sex households in 2019.

As noted, family types are complex and varied. Figure 1.4 illustrates the many different types of families in the United States:

As seen in Figure 1.5, a historical review of family size for the last 60 years shows the increase of smaller families and a decrease in the number of children that families have.

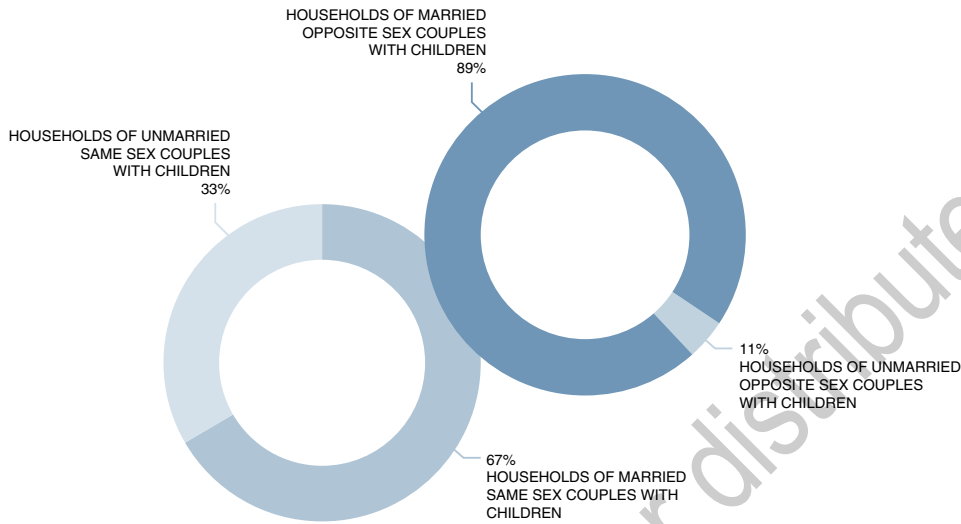### Marriage, Divorce, and Birth Rates

American adults are marrying later, with both marriage rates and divorce rates declining (Anderson & Scherer, 2020). Additionally, remarriage rates have also declined (Payne, 2018). Figure 1.6 shows the comparison of age for men and women in the United States to marry, and the marriage, divorce, and remarriage rates.

Birth rates for unmarried women have increased in the last 30 years. Figure 1.7 depicts this increase, including the variation seen according to race/ethnicity.
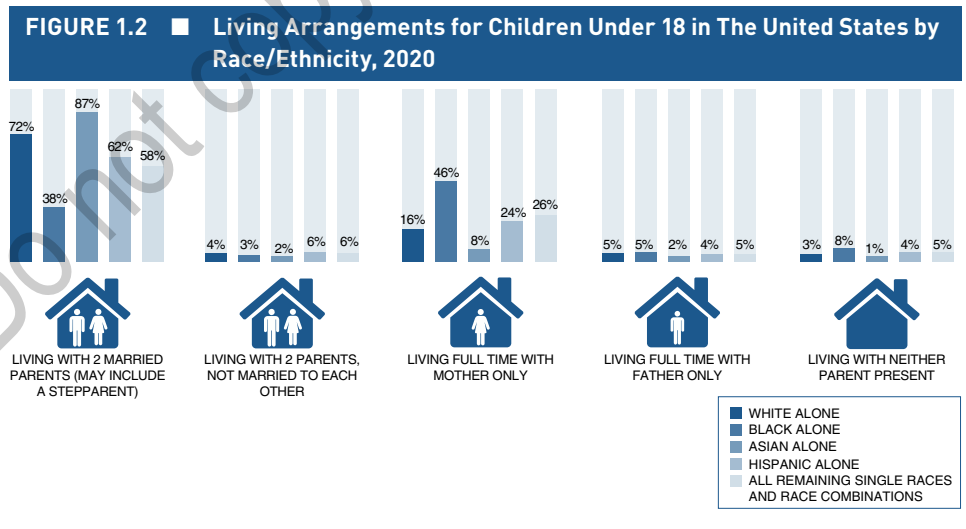
FIGURE 1.2 ■ Living Arrangements for Children Under 18 in The United States by Race/Ethnicity, 2020
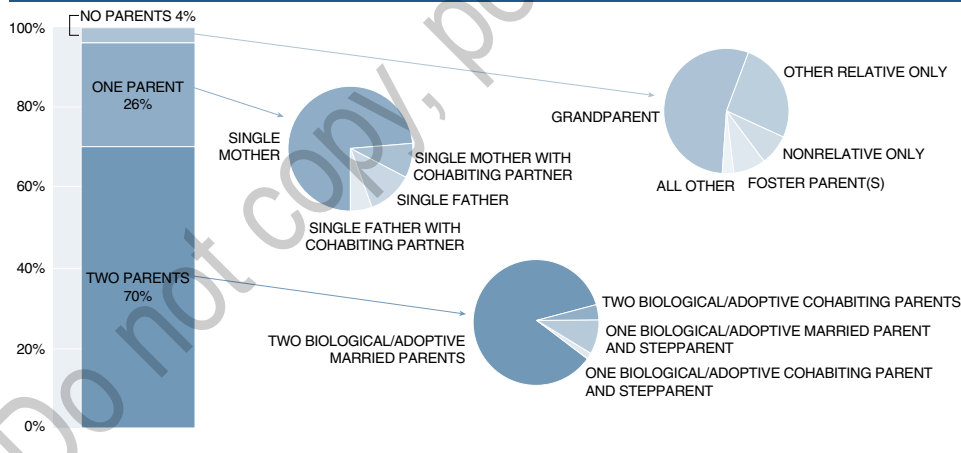
Source: U.S. Census Bureau C3. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years and Marital Status of Parents, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin and Selected Characteristics of the Child for All Children (2020).

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Households With Children Under 18, 2019

HOUSEHOLDS OF MARRIED
OPPOSITE SEX COUPLES
WITH CHILDREN
89%

HOUSEHOLDS OF UNMARRIED
SAME SEX COUPLES
WITH CHILDREN
33%

11%
HOUSEHOLDS OF UNMARRIED
OPPOSITE SEX COUPLES
WITH CHILDREN

67%
HOUSEHOLDS OF MARRIED
SAME SEX COUPLES WITH
CHILDREN

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Same-Sex Couple Households (2019).

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Complexity of US Families in 2019

NO PARENTS 4%

ONE PARENT
26%

SINGLE
MOTHER

SINGLE MOTHER WITH
COHABITING PARTNER

SINGLE FATHER

SINGLE FATHER WITH
COHABITING PARTNER

GRANDPARENT

OTHER RELATIVE ONLY

NONRELATIVE ONLY

ALL OTHER   FOSTER PARENT(S)

TWO PARENTS
70%

TWO BIOLOGICAL/ADOPTIVE
MARRIED PARENTS

TWO BIOLOGICAL/ADOPTIVE COHABITING PARENTS

ONE BIOLOGICAL/ADOPTIVE MARRIED PARENT
AND STEPPARENT

ONE BIOLOGICAL/ADOPTIVE COHABITING PARENT
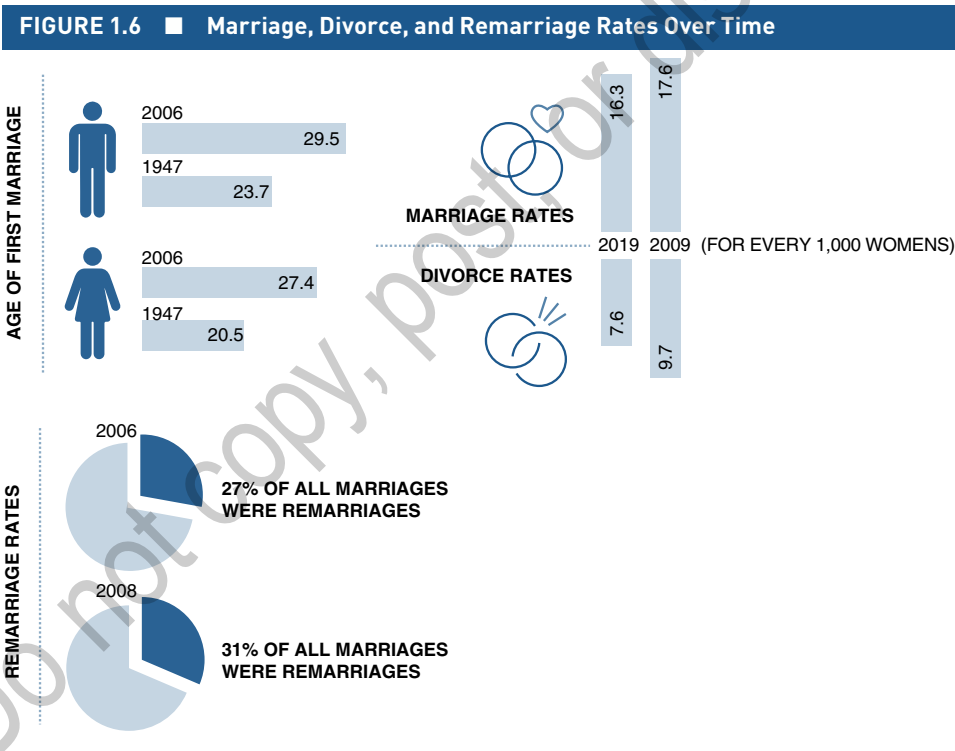AND STEPPARENT

Source: Childstats.gov: America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being (2020).

Grandparent Caregivers

Another significant trend in today's families is the increase of grandparents raising their grand-children, known as **grandfamilies** (Goyer, 2011; Wiltz, 2016). As Figure 1.8 illustrates, these families are more likely seen in southern states.
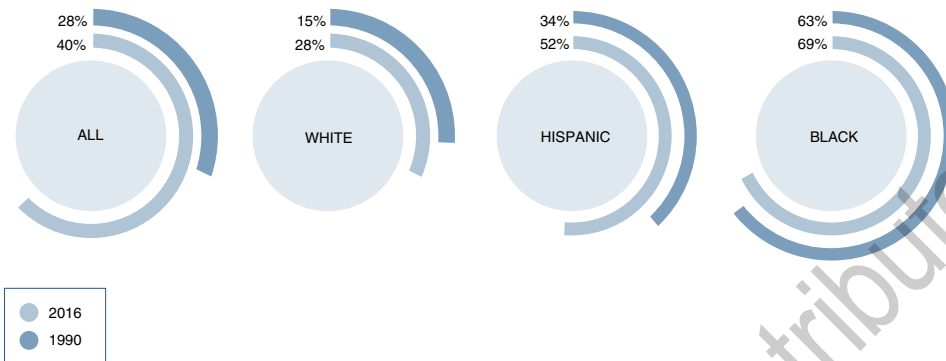
FIGURE 1.5 ■ Family Size 1960–2020

👤 1 CHILD	👥 2	👥👥 3	👥👥 4	👥👥👥 5	👥👥👥 6	👥👥👥👥 7+

1960: 13% → 2020: 28%
1960: 28% → 2020: 35%
1960: 19% → 2020: 15%
1960: 17% → 2020: 13%
1960: 12% → 2020: 6%
1960: 6% → 2020: 2%
1960: 5% → 2020: 1%

Source: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/households.html – Table HH4.

FIGURE 1.6 ■ Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Rates Over Time

AGE OF FIRST MARRIAGE

2006: 29.5
1947: 23.7

2006: 27.4
1947: 20.5

MARRIAGE RATES
16.3   17.6

DIVORCE RATES
2019 2009 (FOR EVERY 1,000 WOMENS)
7.6
9.7

REMARRIAGE RATES

2006
27% OF ALL MARRIAGES WERE REMARRIAGES

2008
31% OF ALL MARRIAGES WERE REMARRIAGES

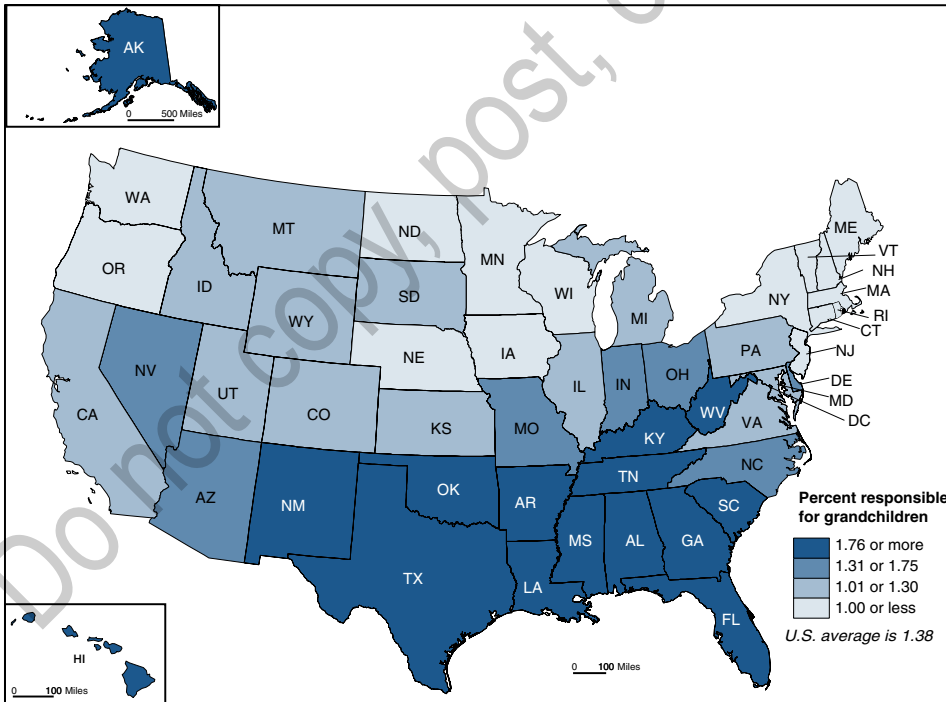*Source:* Anderson and Scherer (2020) and Payne (2018).

2.7 million children in the United States are being raised by relatives or close family friends without a parent in the household in what is labeled **kinship care** (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015; Grandfamilies.org, 2021). Clearly, there is not one typical type of family in today's American society.

FIGURE 1.7 ■ Percentage of Births Occurring to Unmarried Women Age 18+, 1990–2016 (2018)

ALL	WHITE	HISPANIC	BLACK
28% / 40%	15% / 28%	34% / 52%	63% / 69%

Legend:
- 2016
- 1990

Source: Wildsmith et al. (2018).

FIGURE 1.8 ■ Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Percent responsible for grandchildren
- 1.76 or more
- 1.31 or 1.75
- 1.01 or 1.30
- 1.00 or less

U.S. average is 1.38

Source: Anderson (2019).

Economic Status of Today's American Families

Responsive educators recognize that child poverty in America affects educational opportunities, child health, and social growth and development for children whose families experience poverty. Hardships suffered by children include food insecurity, lack of affordable housing and health insurance, and difficult daily economic struggles.
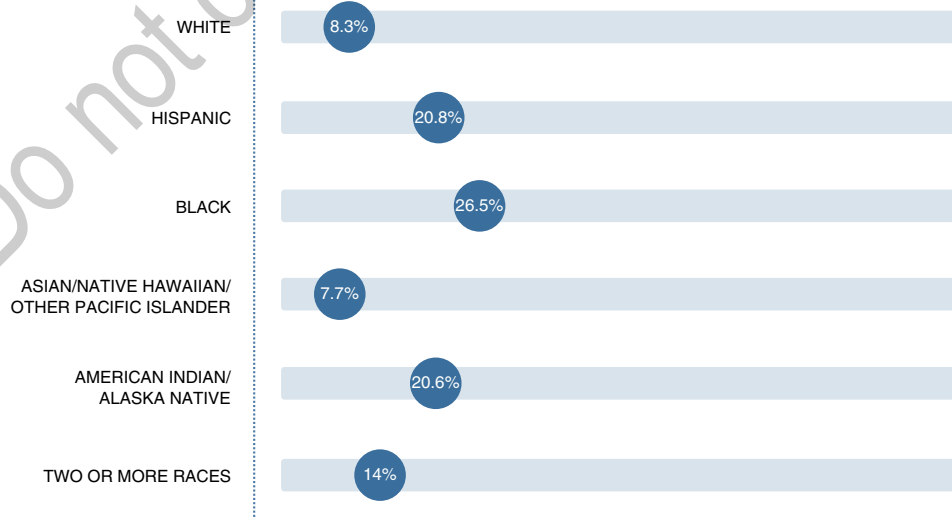
Family poverty appears to impact the following:

- Children of color: 71% of children in poverty in 2019 were African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or Native American. Children of color were 2.5 times more likely to be living in poverty than white, non-Hispanic or Asian American children.

- Young children: one in six children younger than 6 lived in poverty in 2019, with almost half of them being in extreme poverty.

- Children in single-parent families: 68% of children who are poor lived in a single-parent household in 2019.

- Southern states, as they exhibit the highest levels of child poverty, 44%, and extreme child poverty in 2019.

Source: (Children's Defense Fund, 2021)

Child poverty in the United States is defined as children who live in families below the federal poverty level (FPL), which in 2021 was $26,500 for a family of four ($30,480 in Hawaii and $33,130 in Alaska) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Being employed does not protect families from poverty, as 70% of children living in poverty in 2019 had at least one adult who worked (Children's Defense Fund, 2021). Figure 1.9 depicts the status of children living in poverty by race/ethnicity in the United States.

FIGURE 1.9 ■ Child Poverty by Race/Ethnicity 2019

WHITE — 8.3%

HISPANIC — 20.8%

BLACK — 26.5%

ASIAN/NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER — 7.7%

AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE — 20.6%

TWO OR MORE RACES — 14%

Race and Ethnicity of Today's American Families

As the society of the United States becomes more diverse, American families are also increasingly diverse in race and ethnicity. The 2020 Census survey improved its question design for how individuals self-identify race and ethnicity, which likely led to a more accurate picture of the diversity in the United State. The largest population growth since 2010 has been in children who are multiracial (two or more races), and approximately half of the population growth from 2010 to 2020 came from those with Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity (Jones et al., 2021). This continues a trend toward a more diverse population in the youngest population that was noted in 2015 when the number of minority births exceeded the white, non-Hispanic majority population births (Cohn, 2016). Figure 1.10 illustrates this demographic.

Summary of Demographic Information

An examination of current demographic data indicates the following trends:

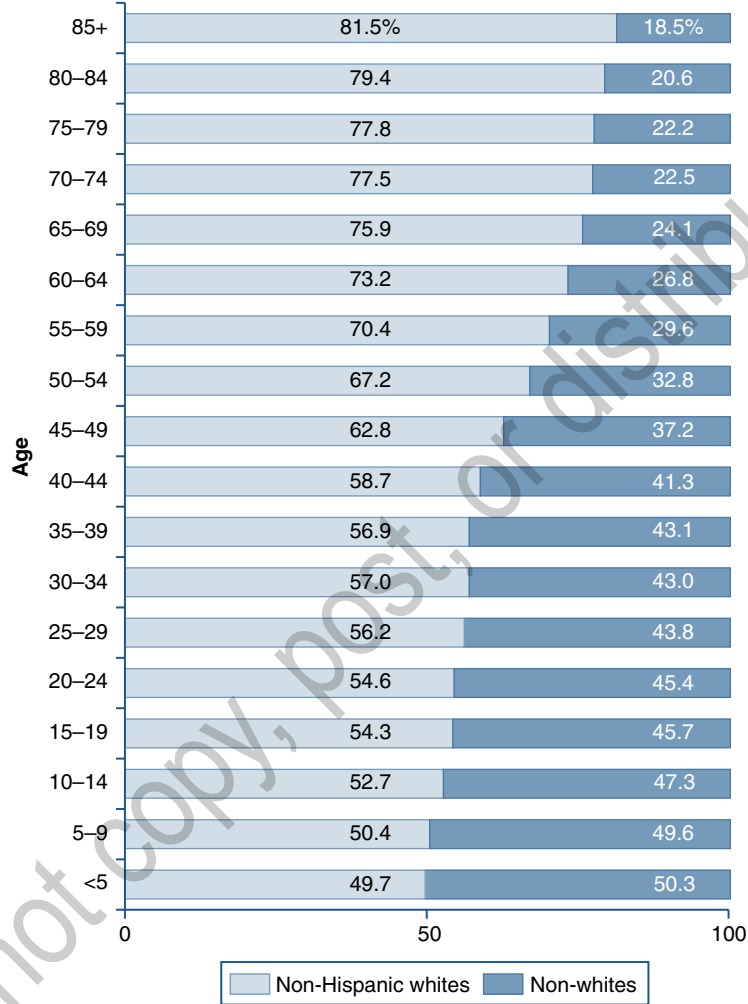- Two-parent households continue to be the majority family type, although these families may include stepparents, cohabiting parents, grandparents, or same-sex parents. This may vary, depending upon race/ethnicity.

- Families and households are getting smaller, with adults marrying at an older age.

- Marriage, divorce, and remarriage rates have declined.

- Births to unmarried women have continued to increase, with variation seen according to race/ethnicity.

- More grandparents are raising their grandchildren, especially in southern states.

- Children of color, living in single-parent households, living in the south, or younger than six are more likely to be living in poverty.

- The population of the United States is becoming more biracial or multiracial, with a slight majority of the population growth in Hispanic/Latinx families.

- The number of combined minority births now exceeds the number of babies born to the majority population.

CONNECTIONS 1.4

With a partner or group, choose one of the data charts in Figures 1.1–1.10. Discuss how these demographic data about today's children and families could impact your teaching or your school's family engagement practices. What is one action you might take based upon these data? What is one recommendation you would make for your school's family engagement practices based upon these data?

FIGURE 1.10 ■ Demographic Trends by Age

U.S. demographic change begins with the youngest age groups
% of population, 2015

Age	Non-Hispanic whites	Non-whites
85+	81.5%	18.5%
80–84	79.4	20.6
75–79	77.8	22.2
70–74	77.5	22.5
65–69	75.9	24.1
60–64	73.2	26.8
55–59	70.4	29.6
50–54	67.2	32.8
45–49	62.8	37.2
40–44	58.7	41.3
35–39	56.9	43.1
30–34	57.0	43.0
25–29	56.2	43.8
20–24	54.6	45.4
15–19	54.3	45.7
10–14	52.7	47.3
5–9	50.4	49.6
<5	49.7	50.3

0   50   100

☐ Non-Hispanic whites ☐ Non-whites

Source: Cohn (2016).

SUMMARY

Becoming an exemplary teacher with effective home and school collaboration practices is a life-long task that requires myriad skills and dispositions, such as commitment, creativity, under-standing, respect, and communication. Recognizing the benefits of strong family engagement can help you become committed to the work involved in achieving this. Being creative in removing the barriers that present roadblocks to your efforts will help you be more successful.

Understanding the demographics of the families of your students, having respect for their differences, and using culturally responsive family engagement strategies will make the task easier.

IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC: LESSON LEARNED

The pandemic created a huge disruption in children's education and forever changed families' engagement in their child's education. This textbook will address those changes, such as parents' increased leadership in making decisions about their child's education, virtual communication strategies, and the inequities in home learning created by remote instruction. One of the most important lessons learned, however, is that successful teachers and administrators see families as an asset and partner in their children's education. One teacher described that experience:

> Parents in our community are very busy, and many work several jobs. Our school worked hard to flexibly respond to parents' schedules, meeting with parents before school, during lunch and after school, for example. But we struggled to foster a stronger bond between school and home.

> The pandemic changed everything. When the lockdown started, parents of children in early grades were right next to their children as they participated in lessons. As I taught, parents were there to fix technology issues, clarify assignments, and answer questions.

> This experience has been a lesson for educators like me. We talk about meeting our students where they are, academically and emotionally, by building on their strengths and assets. But we don't talk enough about families, one of students' biggest assets. When parents go back to work and students go back to school, I hope this partnership carries on.

> Christina Armas, teacher, P.S. 307, Queens, New York (Mapp & Bergman, 2021, p. 13)

IN THE CLASSROOM: A NEW SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS

Kate Harrison listened intently as her principal, Brenda Frasier, addressed the group of teachers at their first faculty meeting of the year. As a first-year teacher, Kate was excited to have a job teaching second grade at Kennedy Elementary School which primarily served low-income families in the suburban Poplar Grove School District. Kate was nervous about the start of the school year, as Mrs. Frasier described some of the new district initiatives and challenges.

> We have a lot of continuing challenges that the pandemic and racial unrest have created. Even though we've all done the training to be a trauma informed school and have established a crisis care team, we know the rise in student mental health and behavior issues are going to test our efforts and resources. We've had limited family engagement since our schools opened back up, and we're missing out on the benefits of family and community volunteers. Central office has designated our school

to be a "community school" with the goal of having authentic partnerships with our families and the community. We'll begin the work in implementing that model this year. The biggest difference will be recognizing the strengths our students' families have, encouraging their leadership, sharing the power to make decisions about their children's education, and better utilizing our community's resources. We asked families to help educate their children when our school building was closed, and we can't go back to telling them that we are the only experts in helping their children learn now that we are open again. Our "new normal" will include doing a book study on anti-racism strategies, establishing a new volunteer program, working to eliminate any negative attitudes we have about families, and engaging all families in the day-to-day work and decisions we make in teaching their children. We're also going to re-activate our home/school organization, establish a family advisory council, and engage our community in this work in ways we've never done in the past. I know these ideas may make some of your nervous, but it's time. We'll be talking more about these ideas at our next faculty meeting, but in the meantime, I want you to complete this assessment of your beliefs about family engagement.

Kate looked at the survey with trepidation. She had little experience with family engagement in her clinical experience courses. While she wanted to have good relationships with the families of her students, she was also a little afraid of what they might think of her as an inexperienced teacher. She also couldn't imagine how she was going to find time to do anything more than write a monthly parent newsletter along with getting lessons planned and papers graded. She sighed as she laid the survey to the side with the stack of other back-to-school tasks that the principal had given out.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What benefits do you think Kennedy Elementary School might see by improving their family engagement practices? What barriers are likely to exist that would keep them from being successful?

2. What do you think it means to use the strengths of families to help educate their children? What kind of decisions do you think families should be included in making about their child's education?

3. If you were Kate, which of planned activities the principal described would you be excited about? Which would you be hesitant about? Are there any planned activities in her list that you would be resistant to implementing? Why?

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENTS

CLO 1. Write a reflection paper describing the key characteristics of family engagement that demonstrate an understanding and respect for diverse families' cultural beliefs and practices. Give an example of what this might look like at a school in which you teach in the future. How does your example demonstrate that family engagement is a partnership between home and school and not a one-directional model with decisions made by school personnel?

CLO 2. After completing the Family Engagement Survey in Table 1.1, write a reflection about what you've learned about your current beliefs and attitudes about family engagement. Where do you feel the most comfortable in family engagement and what makes you uncomfortable about your role, as a teacher, in working with your students' families? What are some actions you can take to be well prepared for successful family engagement?

CLO 3. With a partner or group, create a video public service announcement or commercial that could be shared with families about the benefits of family engagement for their children, their family, and the child's school.

CLO 4. With a partner or group, choose one of the barriers to successful family engagement described in this chapter. Create a class presentation that has a comprehensive description of the barrier, with a variety of solutions for how to overcome this barrier.

CLO 5. Choose one of the demographics presented in this chapter about families in the United States, in terms of structure, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity. Do additional research about this demographic, such as historic trends and more in-depth explanation of the data. Create a presentation slide(s) about it that can then be compiled with your classmates' slides for a presentation titled "Today's U.S. Families."