

Standards in Action: Amplifying Family Voice



Introduction

Families are our students' first teachers and lifelong advocates. When schools invite families to share their experiences, ideas, and hopes, we build stronger, more inclusive, and student-centered learning communities. There are many ways to intentionally create a collaborative environment that welcomes student and family voice.

Here are some ways you can amplify family voice:

- Collect your community
- Build an inviting environment
- Organize purpose-driven meetings
- Share and celebrate family voice

Amplifying Family Voice in Action



Teacher: Pushpanjali Sengupta

Context: K–5th Grade Multilingual Learner Facilitator

Pushpanjali's Amplifying Family Voice Practice

Each month, Pushpanjali hosts meetings for families, students, and school staff to discuss various topics. These meetings are focused not only on what is being taught in her class and how families can best support their students but also on seeking feedback on school initiatives and building community through shared experiences. Continue reading to learn about Pushpanjali's practices and recommendations for connecting with families and caregivers.

Collect Your Community

Find educators in the building who have existing relationships with families.

To build trust with families, partner with staff who have strong community ties. Pushpanjali noticed a colleague often speaking with Spanish-speaking parents. By teaming up, they tapped into colleagues' relationships and local knowledge to better connect with families.

"There was a staff member from the city, and I would see a lot of Spanish-speaking parents come to her. So, I started talking to her and understanding what she was doing and what resources are available from the city to the families."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Start small and stay consistent.

Every connection counts. Whether one family or 40, each interaction is a meaningful step toward building a welcoming school community. Begin with who is present and nurture those relationships consistently. As families share their experiences, your community will grow.

"Start with wherever you can start, even if it is one person or one family. When they go back and share it with another family, maybe that family will come."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Build an Inviting Environment

Build trust before diving deep.

Partnerships grow from consistent, respectful interactions. Start by focusing on what families bring, including the knowledge of their children, their hopes, and their languages. These early conversations help build trust and set the stage for deeper collaboration.

"You have a lot of knowledge. Your children have a lot of knowledge. Let's do something where you are able to share what knowledge you have, so we went a little deeper."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Use language access tools to include everyone.

To ensure families are able to participate fully, use tools that facilitate learning in multiple languages. There are programs that offer live interpretation and allow families to select their preferred language. These tools also empower families to advocate for language access in other settings, like parent-teacher conferences or after-school meetings.

"I used a program that our district uses that allows parents to choose their language. When I'm presenting, it's a live interpretation of what is happening. It also encourages the parents to ask for it when they are in a conference."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Organize Purpose-Driven Meetings

Use the WIDA Guiding Principles to organize topics of meetings.

Educators can use the [WIDA Guiding Principles](#) as a foundation for learning and collaboration.

"We use the WIDA Guiding Principles because they are research-based, and they are in different languages. We highlight one part of it and talk about it, then tie it into a shared activity."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Center family voice in school decisions.

When families are included in school decisions, their insights help shape more inclusive and effective outcomes for their students. By creating space for parent participation and providing language access, schools can ensure that all voices are represented in the decisions they make.

"When we started talking about a new curriculum for our district in the elementary level for literacy, we had an adoption committee that included two parents. There were some virtual sessions that happened with the curriculum, with some translators, so that helped the families look at it and give us feedback on one of the curriculums being better than the others."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Share and Celebrate the Community

Follow up after each meeting with notes and photos.

With inclusion and collaboration at the forefront, Pushpanjali sends photos, notes, and feedback from every meeting to families and colleagues. This gives everyone an opportunity to be informed about the meetings and stay involved.

"We send a follow-up message of what was collected through those meetings to parents and the community. We use an application called Talking Points so that families get messages directly translated into their preferred language. This is one way we connect back to the parents saying, even if you were not there, this is what was talked about."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Make family contributions visible.

Highlighting home languages and parent involvement in shared spaces fosters pride, sparks conversation, and strengthens connections between students, families, and educators.

"The families are saying, for the first time, 'We see our words, we see our languages, our thoughts and our dreams come up on the walls.' Some of the students are more open to talking about their culture. One teacher shared that one of their students wanted to share about their culture, so [the student] presented a PowerPoint in the classroom."—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Share family voices with educators.

Encouraging educators to engage with multilingual messages fosters empathy and accountability while honoring families' voices and modeling two-way communication.

"I used to translate everything parents said in English and then send it to the staff. I have stopped because if I am asking our students and families to talk and translate messages in English, then where is our accountability in building two-way communication? If I don't know something, I need to make that step toward understanding. So now I have a small message saying, 'Use your phone, or use one of the translation services to read this in English or any other language you want.'"—Pushpanjali Sengupta

Tips for Getting Started



Click the video above to listen to Pushpanjali's advice to educators beginning this work.