



Literacy-Focused Family Engagement Events

A Toolkit for Districts

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Introduction

Welcome to **Literacy-Focused Family Engagement Events: A Toolkit for Districts!** We are thrilled to support the families and students in your district and encourage you to explore the various ideas for literacy-focused family engagement events.

Within this toolkit, you will discover information on:



The Difference Between Parent or Caregiver Involvement and Family Engagement



Family Literacy Night Ideas and Activities



Planning Literacy Events for Families

We are proud that our districts, schools, teachers, and entire educational communities are working together to support families. Take time to examine this toolkit and use it to consider engagement opportunities for families to support the literacy instruction happening in classrooms each day.

Thank you for being committed to providing opportunities for all Tennessee families to engage with their children's schools. By working together, we can create a bright future filled with endless possibilities for all students.



The Difference Between Parent or Caregiver Involvement and Family Engagement

Parent or caregiver involvement and family engagement are terms that are often used interchangeably; however, there are slight differences in their approach and depth.



Parent or caregiver involvement usually refers to schools providing opportunities for parents or caregivers on specific ways to be involved with their child's school and school experience. Examples of involvement include attending school meetings, volunteering, or helping their child with homework. Parent or caregiver involvement is often thought of as a one-way street, where the school provides ideas on how family members can participate, and the parents or caregivers participate as they can. Schools take the lead and set the agenda, while parents or caregivers support the initiatives.



Family engagement is more collaborative and is viewed as an active partnership and shared responsibility between families and schools. This is a two-way relationship, where schools and districts actively listen to families, incorporate their ideas, and work together using their input to shape decisions.

Similarities of the two terms are outlined in the table below.

Support Student Success & Development	Both parent or caregiver involvement and family engagement aim to improve student outcomes. Whether through attending events or creating learning opportunities at home, the goal of both is to support the child's academic and emotional development.
Foster Family-School Relationships	Both approaches acknowledge that the relationship between schools and families is critical. Whether through informal settings like parent- teacher conferences or through everyday interactions, the connection between home and school significantly impacts the child's learning experience.
Contribute to a Positive School Climate	When parents or caregivers are involved or families are engaged, it creates a more welcoming and supportive school environment. Both help foster a sense of community where families feel valued and connected to their child's education.

As you consider the ideas for family engagement in this toolkit, think about ways to include opportunities for your families to engage and provide input before and after a literacy event.



Family Engagement in Literacy

This section outlines a brief list of literacy topics that families are likely to want more information about during a literacy engagement event. Districts should consider these topics when planning events or reaching out to parents or caregivers for input on their needs. By addressing topics like building a literacy-rich home, supporting reading challenges, and partnering with local libraries, districts can ensure the event provides meaningful resources and topics that resonate with families.



Topics for Districts to Consider

- 1 Building a literacy-rich home environment
- 2 Tips for reading aloud to children
- 3 Supporting early literacy skills
- 4 Understanding and supporting reading challenges
- 5 Promoting reading comprehension
- 6 Choosing age-appropriate books
- 7 Bilingual literacy development
- 8 Building strong writing skills
- 9 Partnering with local libraries

Literacy Engagement Events

Engaging families in literacy activities is a key strategy to enhance student success across your district. By fostering strong partnerships between schools and families, you can create a supportive environment that boosts reading skills, builds confidence, and encourages a love for reading and learning.

Consider how your district can use the list on the next page to implement effective and interactive literacy engagement activities that bridge the gap between home and school. Such events will equip families with the tools and resources needed to actively support their children's literacy development.



Interactive Literacy Engagement Activity Examples

Author Visits and Book Signings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite a local children's author to speak at the school, engage students and families with storytelling, and offer a book signing opportunity.• Consider reaching out to families about favorite genres to help guide your author search.
Book Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a school or district-wide family book club, where families can read the same book, share their reflections, and engage in activities based around the book. This could include a featured Book of the Month.• Consider offering a page of guiding questions to support family members' engagement and gather input from families for a list of books to read in the club.
Guest Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite community members, local leaders, and parents to be guest readers in classrooms.• Consider family input to create an ongoing list of volunteers to use throughout the year.
Book Walks or Hikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn reading into a physical adventure by organizing a book walk or hike. Set up stations along a path where families can stop and read parts of a story together. At the end of the trail, families can discuss the book and participate in related literacy activities.• Consider input from families as to which books they would like to read on the hike and/or who could volunteer to support the event.
Writing Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage creativity by starting a family writing club where family members and students work together to draft short stories, poems, or personal narratives.• Consider gathering ideas from families on how best to share their writing club stories or poems with others.
Read Around the School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transform different areas of the school into themed reading stations where families and students rotate through the library, classrooms, and other spaces, each featuring a different book or reading activity.• Consider reaching out to families as to which books or genres they would most like to read during the event and who could volunteer to support the event.
Multi-lingual Storytime	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer a story time event in multiple languages, allowing families to hear stories in their native language while promoting inclusivity and a love for literacy in all languages.• Consider offering a follow-up guidance document with friendly phrases in the languages represented in your event using the family volunteers for help.
Book Buddies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pair students with family members or older students for a regular reading buddy program where they meet to read and discuss books together.• Consider extending this event to grandparents, aunts and uncles, older cousins, or close family friends for students to have as a book buddy.
Lend an Ear <i>Listening Campaign</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a space for children to practice reading aloud in front of supportive listeners. Families and volunteers lend an ear as students take turns reading their favorite stories, poems, or excerpts from books.• Consider approved volunteers for your campaign and include input from families on how to increase participation in the campaign.
Poetry Slam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write and perform or share original poetry during an in-person event and/or a family literacy night. This event is a great way to include middle and high school students' work in family literacy opportunities.• Consider family input to organize the poetry event and its theme.



Family Literacy Nights

Developing Family Literacy Night events allows school districts to engage families in meaningful literacy activities while fostering a partnership between home and school. These events provide a space for families to actively participate in their children's learning journey, with hands-on literacy experiences that build reading skills and promote a love for books and literacy.

By incorporating parent or caregiver input and creating opportunities for collaboration, family literacy nights empower families to become active contributors to their children's educational success. When districts prioritize these events, they not only strengthen literacy outcomes for students but also cultivate stronger relationships between schools and families, ensuring they feel heard, valued, and equipped to support their children's literacy development at home.

Below, you will find multiple activities that your district may incorporate into your Family Literacy Night. These activities might spark your own ideas about family literacy events. You could also offer multiple activities at one event.



Book Tasting – At a book tasting, families and students get to sample different books as if they were trying out dishes at a restaurant. Tables are set up with a variety of books from different genres, and each family sits down to browse and read short sections of the books. Families can discuss what they liked or did not like about each book, helping students discover new interests and find books they are excited to read. This book tasting event could be followed by a visit to your book fair. You might also consider allowing parents or caregivers to submit the titles of books they would like included in the book tasting.



Storytelling – Invite families to listen to or share their own stories. This can include storytelling by a teacher, a guest, or families. Parents or caregivers and children can sit together and share stories from their own experiences. Storytelling sparks imagination and connects families through the power of words, while reinforcing the importance of oral language skills. Consider inviting parents or caregivers to select a theme when planning for this event.



Book Making – Families can work together to create their own mini books! With simple materials like paper, crayons, and markers, students and their family members can write and illustrate a short story or create a personalized book. This activity encourages creativity and allows children to feel like real authors, making reading and writing fun. You might consider asking parents to offer suggestions for the types of books that could be created during this book making session.



Scavenger Hunts – Organize a fun literacy-themed scavenger hunt! Families search around the room or school for items or clues that match letter sounds, alphabet letters, or traits of book characters. For example, they might find something that starts with the letter B or locate an item that would reflect a character who is brave. This is a wonderful way to reinforce literacy skills while having an adventure together! Consider providing parents and caretakers with an opportunity to offer suggestions for the scavenger hunt and incorporate their ideas.



Poetry Corner – Set up a cozy corner where families can read, write, or share poems together. Families can create simple poems like acrostics or rhymes, or they can take turns reading their favorite poems aloud. This helps children explore language and express themselves in a creative and enjoyable way. Consider sharing the poems created by families in a special edition of your school or district newsletter.



Book Swap – Families can bring a gently used book from home to swap with another family. For each book they give, they get to choose a new one to take home! This encourages sharing and helps children discover new books, while promoting a love of reading and building home libraries without extra cost. Encourage families to provide input as to how this event could be done in a way that works best for them.



Family Literacy Night Activity Stations

Family literacy night is a wonderful opportunity to bring families together in an engaging, hands-on learning environment that promotes literacy for all ages. Activity stations play a key role in these events by offering interactive activities in meaningful ways for both parents or caregivers and children to explore reading strategies, practice literacy skills, and share the joy of reading together.



These stations are designed to foster collaboration between parents or caregivers and children, encouraging families to model positive reading behaviors that can be continued at home. It is essential to tailor activities to the age and literacy levels of the participants, ensuring that everyone from young readers to high school students can participate and benefit.

Activity Stations for Young Readers

GRADES K-2

- **Phonics Fishing Game** – Children fish for paper fish with letters or word endings written on them using a magnetic fishing rod. After catching a fish, they work with their parent or caregiver to form a word by matching the letter sound to the word part or combining letters.
- **Rhyming Word Bingo** – Families play a classic game of bingo with a twist. Instead of numbers, the bingo cards feature pictures or words. The caller will say a word and families must find a word on their card that rhymes with it. For example, if the caller says cat, participants might cover hat or bat.
- **Character Dress Up and Story Retelling** – This station has simple costumes or props such as hats, scarves, or masks and allows children to dress up as their favorite storybook character. Families work together to act out and retell key parts of a familiar story, using the props to bring the story to life.



GRADES 3-5

- **Create a Comic Storyboard** – Families work together to create a short comic strip or graphic novel scene using provided templates. Children can illustrate the characters, write dialogue, and narrate a story with their parents' or caregivers' help, focusing on story telling structure like beginning, middle, and end.
- **Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt** – Place vocabulary words that are related to grade-level topics or books on index cards around the room or school. Families receive a list of definitions, and they must search the room or school for the matching words. When they find the correct word, they write it down or match it to the definition and create sentences of their own using the words.
- **Interactive Read Aloud Corner** – Create a cozy reading nook where families sit together to enjoy an interactive read-aloud session. Parents or caregivers can choose from a selection of short picture books, and prompts are provided to help them ask questions, make predictions, and encourage their child's participation during the reading.



GRADES 6-12

- **Escape Room** – Families work together to solve a series of literacy-themed puzzles based on popular middle grade novels. Each puzzle could involve decoding messages, answering comprehension questions, or solving vocabulary riddles to unlock the next clue and escape the room.
- **Digital Storytelling Lab** – Using tablets or laptops, families create a short digital story using apps. Students can write, design, and record their own stories with their parents or caregivers, adding multimedia elements like images, music, and narration to bring their stories to life.
- **Debate Station: Book Versus Movie** – At this station, families debate the merits of a book versus its movie adaptation. After watching a short scene from a movie and reading an excerpt from the book, they compare the two and discuss which version told the story better and why.



Literacy-Related Themes & Celebrations

One way to keep family literacy nights fresh and exciting throughout the school year is by incorporating monthly literacy engagement themes. By aligning each month with a specific theme, schools and districts can create targeted activities and experiences that deepen student engagement and encourage ongoing family participation.

These themes provide an opportunity to explore different genres, cultural celebrations, and key literacy skills, making each event unique and meaningful. Additionally, themed family literacy nights allow families to connect to literacy with real world experiences, sparking curiosity and reinforcing the importance of reading at home. With a thoughtful approach to monthly themes, districts can foster a culture of literacy that keeps families coming back for more.

Aligning family literacy nights with literacy-related special days and events is a powerful way for districts to increase engagement and bring added meaning to their programming. By coordinating these events with nationally recognized literacy celebrations, schools can tap into a wider cultural movement while offering creative, themed activities for families.

Whether it is celebrating National Poetry Month, Read Across America, or International Literacy Day, these special occasions provide a natural platform for promoting reading and literacy skills. Incorporating literacy holidays into family literacy nights gives families the opportunity to participate in a shared celebration of reading, while reinforcing the importance of literacy throughout the year.

The following table shows special, months, weeks, days, and possible decor/theme ideas beginning with the early months of school to the end of year wrap up.



Literacy-Related Celebrations & Theme Ideas for the School Year/Summer

AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writers of the Future Award Month National Adult Education & Family Literacy Week (3rd week) 8/9: National Book Lovers Day 8/21: Poet's Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Family Literacy Month Library Card Sign-up Month 9/6: National Read a Book Day 9/8: International Literacy Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International School Library Month National Newspaper Week (1st week) 10/16: National Dictionary Day 10/20: National Day on Writing
Decor: Apples; Pencils; Notebooks Themes: Our New School Year; Back-to-School Reading Extravaganza		Decor: Pumpkins; Apples, Leaves Themes: Apples; Pumpkins & Books (Pumpkin decorating to reflect favorite book); Books & Treats
NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Picture Book Month Family Literacy Month 11/1: National Family Literacy Day 11/21: National Parent Involvement Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Read a New Book Month Bilingual Literacy Month 12/7: National Letter Writing Day 12/21: National Short Story Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Braille Literacy Month National Storytelling Week (last week) 1/2: National Science Fiction Day 1/23: National Handwriting Day
Decor: Turkeys; Pumpkins; Red, white, and blue items with flags Themes: Thankful for Literacy; We Elect Literacy	Decor: Trains; Winter holiday-inspired items (trees or gifts) Themes: The Literacy Express; The Gift of Literacy	Decor: Snowmen; Snowflakes; Scarves; Mittens Themes: Literacy Wonderland; Winter Literacy Extravaganza
FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Lovers Month Children's Authors and Illustrators Week (1st week) 2/14: International Book Giving Day World Read Aloud Day (1st Wednesday) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Reading Month Read Across America Week (1st week) 3/2: Read Across America Day 3/7: National Write Your Story Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Poetry Month National Library Week (1st full week) 4/2: International Children's Book Day 4/23: World Book Day
Decor: Mardi Gras decorations & masks; Hearts & cupids Themes: Literacy Mardi Gras; For the Love of Reading	Decor: Spring; Flowers; Nature; Basketball/March Madness inspired Themes: Springing into Books; March Reading Madness	Decor: Spring; Flowers; Bunnies, chicks, eggs, and baskets Themes: Hopping into Literacy; Poetry in Bloom
MAY	JUNE	JULY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Get Caught Reading Month Children's Book Week (1st week) 5/12: National Limerick Day 5/15: National Biographer's Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Audiobook Month Reading the Classics Month 6/1: National Pen Pal Day 6/21: National Writing Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graphic Novels in Libraries Month National Summer Learning Week (2nd week) 7/30: International Friendship Day 7/30: National Paperback Book Day
Decor: Space-inspired items; Piñatas or sombreros Themes: May the Reading Force Be with You; Literacy Cinco de Mayo	Decor: Summer Literacy Events (swimming pool or beach-inspired items) Themes: Splash into Summer Reading; Books and Beach Ball Bash	

● Month ● Week ● Day



District Planning

Effective family literacy engagement events play a key role in fostering strong home to school connections and supporting student success. This planning tool is designed to guide school districts through each phase of organizing a comprehensive and impactful family literacy engagement event.

As you navigate the planning process, consider the following guiding questions to ensure your event meets the needs of all families, students, and the school community using the district planning tool to capture your responses.

Event Purpose and Goals

- *What are the primary objectives of the event (e.g., increasing family engagement in literacy practices, sharing literacy strategies)?*
- *How will the event support the district's overall literacy and family engagement goals?*

Family Input

- *How will you engage parents or caregivers in the planning of the event?*
- *What areas can you solicit family feedback when planning?*

Target Audience

- *Who are the key participants (e.g., families of early learners, multilingual families)?*
- *How will you ensure that the event is inclusive and accessible to all families, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds?*

Planning and Coordination

- *What date, time, and location will be most convenient for families to attend?*
- *How will you communicate the event details to families (e.g., flyers, emails, social media)?*

Cultural Responsiveness

- *How will you ensure that event content reflects the cultural backgrounds of your school or district population?*
- *Will you offer bilingual sessions or culturally relevant materials to make the event more meaningful for diverse families?*

Hands-on Learning Opportunities

- *Will there be opportunities for families to participate in hands-on literacy activities that they can replicate at home?*
- *How will you involve students in the event to display their literacy skills or projects?*

Partnerships and Resources

- *Are there community partners or local businesses that could support the event (e.g., providing materials, space, or expertise)?*
- *What internal resources, such as staff and volunteers, will you need to ensure a successful event?*

Measuring Success

- *How will you gather feedback from families about the event?*
- *What indicators will you use to measure the event's impact on family literacy engagement?*



District Planning Tool

This tool will guide you through each phase of the planning process, helping to ensure your family literacy engagement event is well organized and meaningful to the families in your district.

[Click here to download a fillable Word document of this tool you can edit yourself.](#)

Theme	
Format (<i>workshop or seminar, family reading night, book fair, literacy carnival or festival</i>)	
What makes this special theme engaging for both students and families?	
What are the primary objectives of this event? What do you want to achieve (<i>e.g., increase family involvement, promote literacy skills, foster a love of reading</i>)?	
How will the event support the districts overall literacy and family engagement goals?	

Target Audience (<i>Families of early learners, multilingual families, struggling readers</i>)	Date	Time	School/Location	Areas/Classrooms used (<i>Create floor plan</i>)

Communication: What types of communication are needed for this event and who is responsible for the development of the communication?

How will this event be communicated to families (<i>e.g., newsletter, website, flyer, phone, email</i>)?	
How much notice will be provided to families so they can plan to attend?	
Is communication accessible to all families (<i>e.g., multilingual, QR code to read information to adults</i>)?	
What follow-up strategies will be used to maintain engagement after the event (<i>e.g., providing resources, newsletters with literacy tips</i>)?	
Who is responsible for creating and disseminating the communication?	



Literacy Activity Stations: Consider the stations you will have during your event and the connections between these literacy activities and the state standards.

Activity/Station What is the purpose of the specific activity? How will it support literacy improvement for all stakeholders?	Standard What learning standards are key for all stakeholders to grasp?	Station Facilitator (<i>gathering materials, decorating areas, staffing the station during the event</i>)
1.		
2.		
3.		

Additional Roles: Consider the additional roles and duties that could help your event flow more smoothly.

Greeter	Staff will greet and welcome families as they enter the building.
Registration Table Staff	Staff will monitor families and register them as they arrive. This role helps with tracking attendance and providing data that will help with future family engagement event planning.
Explainer	Staff will explain the layout and event expectations and answer questions as they come.
Traffic Flow Staff	Staff will monitor the flow of families moving throughout the areas as needed.
Library Helper	Staff will be needed in the library if book check out or a book fair is a part of the event.
Door Prize Monitor	Staff will monitor the prize table.
Exit Staff	Staff will thank families as they leave the building and distribute any items for giveaways (<i>e.g., bookmarks, certificates for the children, coupons to local restaurants</i>).

Cost/Fund: Consider the cost of the event and available funds to support the event.

What is the event budget?	
How is this event funded?	
Are there donated items for this event? List all.	

Partnerships: List the community partners and potential resources provided for the event.

Community Partner	Donated Resource/Material
1.	
2.	
3.	

Measuring Event Success: Consider how to gather input from families after the event to help plan for future family engagement opportunities.

How will you gather feedback from families about the event? (<i>online or paper survey, focus groups, phone call, post card</i>)	
What indicators will you use to measure the event's impact on family literacy engagement?	
Who is responsible for this component of your event?	



Measuring the Effectiveness of a Family Literacy Engagement Event

Evaluating the success of a family literacy engagement event is key to ensure it meets the goals of increasing family engagement and strengthening the home to school connection. Below are strategies and metrics to consider when assessing the event's effectiveness.

Pre-and Post-Event Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-event surveys can gather baseline data on family literacy practices, expectations, and understanding of key literacy concepts. • Post-event surveys should focus on collecting feedback about the event itself, such as what families found most useful, how likely they are to implement strategies at home, and suggestions for improvement.
Attendance and Participation Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track the number of attendees, as well as their demographic data, such as the grade level of their children and their language spoken at home to ensure the event reached a diverse and representative group of families. • Monitor engagement levels during the event such as the number of families participating in specific activities or sessions. • Consider the return rate of families who attended previous engagement events to gauge ongoing interest and commitment.
Post-Event Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the event, send follow-up communications to families to assess how they are applying the literacy strategies they learned. You can use brief follow-up surveys or invite families to informal feedback sessions. • Measure family participation in subsequent literacy initiatives, such as book fairs or school-based reading programs as indicators of ongoing engagement. • Gather feedback from teachers on any noticeable changes in students' literacy skills or family engagement in the classroom after the event.
Teacher and Staff Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather input from teachers and staff who participated in the event to evaluate its effectiveness from their perspective. • Staff feedback can also help identify logistical or content-related aspects of the event that could be improved.
Reflection and Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After gathering data, hold a reflection meeting with the event planning team to review findings and make decisions about future events. Consider what went well and how those successes can be replicated or expanded. • Think about the challenges or barriers that families face and how this could be addressed in future planning. • Consider how to improve outreach and engagement strategies to reach more families for the next family event.
Long-Term Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for evidence of sustained family involvement in literacy practices over time. Are families continuing to engage in reading activities with their children at home? Have they participated in other school or district literacy initiatives? • Consider establishing family literacy goals and tracking progress toward them, such as increased participation in home reading programs or workshops offered by the school or district.
Data-Driven Adjustments for Future Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the collected data to make data-driven adjustments to future events, such as adjusting the timing, format, or content to better meet the needs of families. • The continuous feedback loop will ensure each event builds on the success of previous events.



Andrew Johnson Tower, 9th floor
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

tn.gov/education

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