



FAMILY LISTENING GUIDE

Have you ever prepared a great at-home activity that families didn't use or hosted a fun family night with a low turnout? Do you know why?



Now, imagine hearing directly from families about how they would like to be engaged as partners in their child's education. By listening to families, you can tailor your engagement strategies to meet their needs. A great way to start is by conducting a "listening tour". A **listening tour** is a series of conversations with families to gather their insights, ideas and perspectives. Listening tours can be conducted as focus groups or as 1:1 interviews with families.

This Listening Guide offers suggestions for planning a family listening tour, including tips for developing the right questions, a bank of sample questions and an introductory script for opening up a focus group with families.

SOME TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

- Many schools and districts provide incentives, such as gift cards, to encourage families to participate in listening tours, especially focus groups.
 - For in-person focus groups, incentives such as meals, childcare, and transportation vouchers (e.g. Uber gift cards) can help to ensure equitable participation.



- The ideal size of a focus group is representation from 6 to 7 families, and the conversation should take about 45 to 60 minutes.
- Get families' permission to audio record so that you can be fully engaged in the conversation. Send the recording to a transcription service (or transcribe yourself) so that you can thoroughly review what families share and make a plan to respond.

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- Send a thank you note to each family after your listening tour.
- Share high level themes, takeaways and next steps with your school community (educators, families, etc.) after you've completed all of your listening.

DEVELOPING YOUR QUESTIONS

Asking the right question is important to uncovering families' experiences, points of view, and the most impactful ways to engage them as partners in their child's education. Questions for families should be:



ALIGNED TO A CLEAR PURPOSE. To establish your purpose for listening, ask yourself, *“what do I need to better understand from families to be sure our family engagement approach meets their needs?”* You may want to ask about relationships, communication, collaboration around academics, and partnering with community organizations, among other topics.

OPEN-ENDED. This means the answers require a more detailed response than a simple “yes” or “no”. Open-ended questions help you to gather insights and understand a family's experience in their own words. These questions can start with words like *what, when, and how*.



You can make your questions open-ended by asking families to:

Tell me a story about...
Give me an example of...
Describe a time that...

AUTHENTIC. The questions you ask should be questions that you genuinely don't know the answer to. They should follow your curiosity, and guide the conversation without leading families to a predetermined answer.

EMPOWERING TO FAMILIES. Families should feel empowered to talk about what's important to them. Your questions should provide families with the opportunity to share their expertise on their child and their preferences for partnership with your school.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

The sample questions below explore families' perspectives as partners in their child's education. When creating questions for your listening tour, ensure they align with a clear purpose and are phrased to elicit families' experiences.



Tell me a story about a time when you felt welcomed into a school community. What did the school do to make you feel welcomed?

How would you describe your current relationship with your child's teachers or school administrators?

How and when does your child's teacher or school communicate with you about their learning? How confident are you in understanding your child's progress? What information has been most helpful to you?

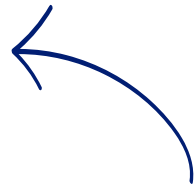
Is there anything about the information you receive from your child's school or teacher that confuses you?

Can you share a time when you hesitated to voice your opinion or ask questions to the school? What would help you feel more comfortable in advocating?

Which school or district services have been most helpful to your family? What additional support would benefit you or your child?

If you could give our school/district one piece of advice for partnering with families, what would it be?

Is there anything you'd like to share that I haven't asked?



SAMPLE ZOOM MEETING INTRODUCTION

Thank you all for being here today! My name is [Your Name], and I'm a [Your Role] at [School Name]. I'd love for everyone to introduce themselves in the chat—please share your name, the school community you're part of, and your child's grade level.

Before we dive in, here are a few housekeeping items:

Our goal today is to better understand your experiences with our school community. The insights you share will help us strengthen how we partner with families and community organizations to support student learning and well-being. Specifically, we're interested in hearing about your experiences with [School Name] and exploring ways we can deepen our partnership with all families.



If you can, please add your name to your Zoom screen name. It would also be great if you can stay on screen, so we ensure everyone's voice is heard.

(Optional: If it's okay with you, I'd like to record this session to fully focus on listening to you. The recording will be used only by our team and won't be shared publicly. Any quotes we use will be anonymous.)



Following up with families after listening is crucial for maintaining trust and demonstrating that their perspectives are valued. After conducting your listening tour, be sure to **reach out to families** to say thank you and to let them know what you learned and what your next steps are.