

Partnering with Parents and Caregivers

Oregon Department of Education

<https://youtu.be/DUny9-bIFlg>

Narrator: In this video, we will hear educators respond to the question, what strategies do you use to invite parents and caregivers as partners to support their students' literacy learning? We will first hear from Bekah Sabzalian, education consultant; then Melissa Standley, first grade teacher; and then Francesca Aultman, district language arts specialist. Connecting to home experiences.

Bekah: A strong way to create a sense of belonging in the classroom is to start off immediately, preferably even before the school year begins, right? Reaching out to parents and families when the school year begins, making sure that you're sending home ways in which parents can let you know the things that they love about their kids, the things they know about their kids, and the things that can support their children. Because we do have several multilanguage learners, we want to make sure that we understand what are the home languages as best possible and make sure that we are sending materials that are connecting to the parents so they actually have a chance to give us that information. But if you have an ability to know what the home languages are of your students, making sure that you learn a few words and incorporate those daily in your conversations to bring their home language and their home experiences— have them alive in the classroom. Making sure that every student feels known by you and valued by you. And that's where, like, the beliefs come in about what we believe about our students before we even know them or before we even meet them. Like, what do we believe about children? That they each hold brilliance, that you're going to learn something from them, that they have something to offer you as well as you to offer them.

Narrator: Welcoming families.

Melissa: I have my initial welcoming letter that goes home at the year, but there's also a survey that goes home and parents have a chance to fill it out with me or separate from me. Things that are important to them, holidays that are important to them. Then I use that information to make sure I communicate monthly with things that are happening. Special dates, things that we celebrate through the month—cultural, important moments like women's history, Hispanic heritage. And this year I've had parents ask to come in and do some activities with kids during those times that have been important to them, and I wouldn't have known about those without that first piece. Then I can look at my curriculum and I can know what's coming, and I can send information home to my families and say, "Hey, I've got 3 or 4 stories coming up in this unit, and two of them take place in the country you were born. I would love for you to come in and talk with us about that country. I would love for you to bring things from that country. I would love for you to just come and read this book to the class." So it's a lot of pre-work before I think about what my curriculum is. And I think that pre-work of learning who you are serving that year is even more important than the curriculum that will come up.

Then I know that I can say, "Hey, Maria, would you like to come in, please?", "Hey, Tony, would you like to come do a presentation?", "Hey, Penny. Okay, it's your favorite Jewish holiday. Are you ready to do the blessings and prayers for us?" and they get excited because I already know that it's coming, and I give them that opportunity to do it. And sometimes they become the experts.

Narrator: Valuing students' families.

Francesca: Learning from students and their families is so important. I think as the year goes on, really valuing and respecting students' families is key, having a key role in their literacy journey. Our students' families have so many assets and so many strengths to offer, and may not know how to be a part of that school community. And so when we open those doors and we intentionally not only bring families in, but reach out to them as well and really provide tools that are supportive and that ideally are translated or that are accessible to our families. We show them that we respect them as their child's first educator, and that we can work together to really achieve those goals that we both have for their child.

Narrator: To learn more, visit the framework website at oregoninstructionalframeworks.org and download the Early Literacy Framework.