

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES TO WATCH

## Promise South Salt Lake

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**Urbanicity:** Urban

**Location:** South Salt Lake City, Utah

**Grades:** K-12

**21st CCLC Enrollment:** 2,600+

**Percentage of All Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch:** 95%

**Demographics:** American Indian or Alaska Native: 1.6%, Asian: 19%, Black or African American: 28%, Hispanic or Latino: 30%, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 1.9%, White: 14%, Two or More Race: 3%, Data not provided: 0.9%

**Hours of 21st CCLC Program Operation:** Monday through Thursday 3:00-6:00 p.m. and Friday 2-5 p.m.

### Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships Opportunity Conditions Addressed

**Process Conditions:**

Linked to Learning  
Relational  
Developmental  
Collaborative  
Interactive

**Organizational Conditions:**

Systemic  
Integrated  
Sustained

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### Building Bridges Citywide: Aligned Policies & Practices for Family Engagement

#### Family Engagement Motto

South Salt Lake City (SSL) Promise has its own family engagement motto, “What I want for myself and for my family, I want for every person in my community.” The initiative motto came from Mayor Cherie Wood, a leader who walks the talk in making sure family engagement practices are supported by citywide policies that ensure larger impact. Program Director Kari Cutler says family engagement is like other relationships—a series of many small interactions, activities, and exchanges. “Parent/family involvement is not one big thing. It’s many, many small things,” Cutler says. “Anything anyone does anywhere anytime to help a child succeed in school or life is family involvement.”

#### Family Liaisons

One promising practice that reflects the scale and depth of family engagement is the role of family liaisons. The family liaison conducts outreach and builds relationships with families within each Promise SSL Neighborhood Center, ensuring that families have a point person to connect with on a regular basis. Family liaisons spend the majority of their time in the community, conducting constant outreach and, often, in families’ homes. A team of family liaisons “knock and talk all day long.

*They don’t wear uniforms, and they’re not bad police. But they do follow up if a child is absent. We want them to feel like they’re your neighbor,” says Cutler.*

Family liaisons connect families to programs and community services and help them with programs, health care, and employment opportunities. Family liaisons serve as a bridge for families and help to communicate with teachers, organizations, and youth, connecting and supporting families with communication, while also advocating for them with these same entities.

#### Family-to-Family Engagement

Family liaisons help build parent-to-parent engagement, especially with the refugee population (primarily from Bhutan, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan). For newly arrived families, other families from the same country of origin can sometimes connect better and be more persuasive. Family liaisons help to ensure that families who are well connected serve as hubs for other families. Families also connect with neighbors and other families in their community that speak the same

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language, ensuring that outreach is constant and pervasive. As Cutler says, “We have to have active relationships with lots of families to make this work. But (family-to-family engagement) is a great way to deliver information, and more importantly to give a family a voice, so they can let us know what they are thinking about, worried about, wondering about.” Family liaisons make several visits before asking a parent to come to the Neighborhood Center. After parents are invited to the Center, the invitations don’t stop because there is a constant schedule of activities, events, field trips, family science nights, literacy parties, etc.

### **Councils Promise**

SSL has created various councils where some families are encouraged to participate alongside program staff. Issues addressed by these councils include healthcare access, education, community engagement, employment, and college access. Families and city employees work together to address the challenges and creatively problem solve in order to effect sustainable change.

### **Removing Barriers**

Removing barriers for families is pivotal to the success of SSL Promise. SCL’s Promise’s Principles for Parent Family Engagement has outlined the importance of removing common barriers experienced by families at neighborhood centers, schools, and other locations. Five large barriers have been identified: spaces are not welcoming, and there is a lack of translation services, transportation, childcare, and food. Accordingly, five action steps in SLC Promise’s Principles for Parent Family Engagement specifically address these barriers.

### **Community Partnerships**

Because of the connectedness of many institutional and organizational partners across the city, the capacity to provide services such as translation and childcare is more tenable than it might be without the partnerships. To overcome language barriers with families while not burdening children, family liaisons and staff wait to communicate with a family if translation services are not available. They recognize it is not always appropriate for a child to interpret unless the communication is a message of praise or positivity about the child. Tapping into family-to-family relationships can also yield translation services from neighbors when needed.

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*“I’ve discovered that no family will kick me out of their house if I do their dishes.” —Promise South Salt Lake Family Liaison*

### TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Assume that every family is doing its best.** When you meet a family for the first time, assume they are the best parents you have ever met. Then, treat them that way. (If you don’t, you have only a small chance of really engaging them and finding out what they need).
- **Every interaction, message, and opportunity to engage with families is important.** Parent/family involvement happens in a lot of small slices that add up to a larger piece of family engagement. Never underestimate the power of tireless authentic energy, kindness, and enthusiasm in reaching and making connections with families.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- **Public policy that supports educational access can amplify day-to-day family engagement programs and practices.** Aligning public policy efforts with on-the-ground outreach and collaboration with families can greatly increase educational and family engagement outcomes for an entire community.
- **Family to family engagement matters.** Families can be credible messengers and catalysts for new families to access 21st CCLC afterschool programs and other resources. Investing in building and providing ongoing support for families to be ambassadors with other families is worthwhile.

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