

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

A workshop that gives families a chance to connect over coding or persevere through an engineering design challenge is a great first step in family engagement in STEM. But family engagement can be so much more. Jane Albin, Program Enhancement Specialist at the **YMCA of the USA**, offers insights into making family engagement an essential element across an organization. Jane describes that family engagement at the Y is fundamental to their youth development work and beneficial to youth and families at the Y.

For the Y, family engagement is about how staff and volunteers relate with families on an everyday basis. They listen with empathy, identify unique needs, and meet families where they are. Here are three strategies for how the Y supports family engagement.

MAKE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FUNDAMENTAL TO ALL YOUR WORK

1



Photo Courtesy of Techbridge Girls

Provide a welcoming environment for families.

At the Y, they welcome, connect, support, and invite families to engage. Jane Albin explains how these principles make it possible to provide the best quality support for youth and their parents and caregivers. So, how are these ideas put into action? Staff welcome families with a smile, greet them by name, introduce themselves, ask open-ended questions, and reaffirm what they're hearing. By engaging in these simple ways of getting to know parents and caregivers, staff come to understand their needs and can connect them to other Y programs, members at the Y, or opportunities in the community.

2



Integrate family engagement across training for all staff.

Training on family engagement is offered to staff who support different program areas, whether it's day camp, early childhood, or afterschool programs. This ensures all staff, regardless of program area, learn consistent practices when it comes to family engagement.

3



Photo Courtesy of Digital Youth Divas

Request feedback from families.

The YMCA asks for feedback specific to family engagement across its programs. This takes the form of both informal conversations or formal surveys. They also support parent advisory committees – like with their afterschool programs – that offer opportunities for parents and caregivers to voice their opinions and take leadership roles. And on a larger scale, the Y invites community members to serve on their board.

We thank Jane Albin for her input and acknowledge the Y for its comprehensive approach to family engagement. So, how might you enhance family engagement at your organization? What would you need to do this work?

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