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## New Ways to Engage Parents: Strategies and Tools for Teachers and Leaders, K-12

Tanya Christ  
*Oakland University*

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# New Ways to Engage Parents: Strategies and Tools for Teachers and Leaders, K-12

by Tanya Christ, Ph.D.

Edwards, P. (2016). *New ways to engage parents: Strategies and tools for teachers and leaders, K-12*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.  
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Parents are children's first teachers, and their participation in their children's educations is critical. Patricia Edwards's latest book, *New Ways to Engage Parents*, provides a road map to guide teachers and leaders with ideas for better collaboration with parents and communities to support children's educations. This book has a strong narrative voice that makes you feel the author is in conversation with you as you read. Simultaneously, it presents clear, concise, research-based methods for improving parent engagement.

Critical aspects for improving parent engagement are presented across each of the book's eight chapters:

1. Collect good data that describe students', families', and communities' characteristics.
2. Use data to identify families' and communities' strengths and needs, and create an action plan that uses strengths and addresses needs related to developing collaboration.
3. Make opportunities to engage with parents count—e.g., by engaging in successful interactions with parents at teacher conferences.
4. Integrate technology to communicate with parents to reduce the constraints of time, place, and schedules—e.g., voicemail, email, texting, Skype, Google Hangouts, video, websites, PhotoCircle, or Twitter.
5. Create spaces that provide opportunities and empower parents to inform and participate in their children's educations—e.g., parent information



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meetings, parent peer mentoring, and using local literacy networks.

6. Reach every parent by better understanding their differences and needs, and also by creating spaces for comfortable collaboration – e.g., suggesting audio books for parents who may have difficulty reading with their children at night, using parents' preferred form of communication to share their child's activities at school and successes, helping families whose primary language is other than English to connect with other school staff and parents who speak their primary language, providing ways for parents to participate that take into account their unique needs, engaging in curriculum that incorporates opportunities to learn about the families and cultures represented by students in the classroom or school in an ongoing way, etc.
7. Understand the history of parent-teacher relationships in the school to better understand the present dynamics, then build trust and find ways to make parents feel welcomed and valued as important participants in their children's educations.
8. Consider models of effective family-school partnership—e.g., know the differences between a partnership and traditional orientation toward family-school relationships, and work toward developing the seven defining characteristics of the *partnership* orientation.

Throughout the text, Edwards provides advice, examples, checklists, and figures to model and guide the

reader toward engaging with her recommendations for more effective partnership with parents. For example, sample demographic profiles for schools, neighborhoods, and families are presented (Figure 1.3), as are suggestions for activities to develop knowledge about school communities, such as “scavenger hunt of certain facilities,” “community service weekend,” community “fun day,” and “workshops for community members” (p. 10). Likewise, checklists for developing plans to partner with parents (pp. 20-21; Figure 2.4) and communities (Figures 2.5 and 2.6) are presented to support readers’ engagement in these processes too. Throughout the book, the level of support for implementing ideas is substantial. If you want to more effectively engage with parents in your classroom, school, or district, this is the book to guide you to do it.

Ideally, I would suggest reading this book with a group of teachers, leaders, and parents to discuss how to implement these ideas collaboratively in your school or district. However, teachers could read this book to improve their collaboration with parents in their own classrooms as well. It is high time that we improve the ways that we collaborate with parents to support their children’s educations, and this book lights the path and provides clear markers toward that goal. If you are serious about improving parent engagement, I highly recommend this book.

To further explore these ideas, you might also be interested in the following videos:

- Dr. Edwards presenting on the importance of parent partnership and community engagement to improve student achievement: <https://youtu.be/3b3nkJoluOI>
- Drs. Edwards and Piazza discussing “The Impact of Family on Literacy Development”: <https://youtu.be/hodO0kn8Kik>

## Author Biography

**Tanya Christ** is an Associate Professor of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University. She teaches courses related to reading assessment and instruction for K-12. Her research focuses on early childhood vocabulary, comprehension, and digital literacies learning and instruction; culture, access, and equity in literacy education; and literacy teacher education. She has taught both inclusion and general education in Title 1 classrooms in Brooklyn, NY. Her work appears in journals such as *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Young Children*. She can be reached at [christ@oakland.edu](mailto:christ@oakland.edu).

