



Utah State Board of Education

# Family & Community News

March 2024: Share this newsletter!

## Spring Break: An Opportunity for Connection to Shine!

Spring Break is a time to pause, reflect, and pivot. It is also often a time to reset. However, if you choose to spend your Spring Break, note that for many families Spring Break can be a time when they are problem-solving childcare and meals for students whose parents are still working.

Now is the perfect time to seize the opportunity for connection! How can you do this? The first potential option is referring back to, or even starting the process of creating your community asset map! Plan and connect with community

## Promoting Math Literacy and Family Engagement with Happy Bunny!



When it comes to early learning and math literacy, the way that parents engage with their kids at home can have a large impact on future math scores. These math scores then in turn can predict future reading scores, academic success, drop-out rates, college acceptance, and

partners who will be able to meet the needs of your families. Identify what community programs exist in your area that offer free or low-cost out-of-school time programming, what library groups for youth exist, and what community partners are offering meal services for children during these breaks.

Another great week to foster connection is to use these breaks to conduct home visits. For families who are not able to leave the city and for home visitors who are also enjoying a staycation, if interested this break can help to remove time barriers for bridging the connection between home and school.

even incarceration rates! Learn more in this [KSL Article](#) featuring the Utah STEM Action Centers Clarence Ames for full details.

Early math learning can happen at every age and it can be fun for all! Happy Bunny is one at-home game that families can use at home to play with their young children, work on important skills, and have fun! If you would like to learn more about Happy Bunny and other learning games please email [comes@utah.gov](mailto:comes@utah.gov).

Preview the Happy Bunny conversation cards in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

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## Save This Very Important Date!

### Save the Date: Family and Community Engagement Summit

May 24, 2024,  
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Thanksgiving Point  
3003 Thanksgiving Way  
Lehi, UT 84043



**Utah State Board of Education**

Food will be provided and the first 100 people to register will receive a free book!

\$50 registration fee, limited space.

For more information, contact [susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov](mailto:susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov)

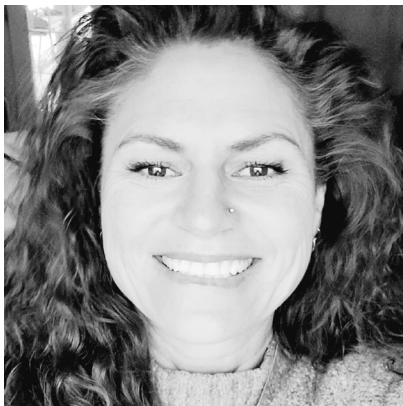
We are looking for workshop presenters and will be able to offer a small stipend to your program or presenters if presenting as an individual. If you are a dynamic, in-person presenter who is willing to share research, best practices, and/or tools please [submit an RFP](#) here! We will have three tracks. All tracks are for those in the K-12 and community partners space as they see fit. The three tracks are Leadership, Educators, and Auxiliary (e.g., Librarian, Front Office Staff, etc.). **Proposals are due April 26, 2024, 5:00 p.m.**

For more information, please contact Susie Estrada  
[susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov](mailto:susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov)

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## Welcome Cassie Hays, the Utah State Board of Education's Parent Liaison and Engagement Specialist!

Cassie's position was created through the 2023 legislative session and reports directly to the USBE's Board Members. Her duties include maintaining and reviewing the [Parent Portal](#) through the compiling or creating of accessible resources for families. As the Parent Liaison, Cassie's work will be hands-on with Utah families if they submit a question or concern via the portal thus fostering a positive relationship between them and Utah's public schools.



Cassie previously worked as an English and Biology Teacher at the secondary level and was the Director of Terra Academy Charter School.

You can reach Cassie by email at [cassie.hays@schools.utah.gov](mailto:cassie.hays@schools.utah.gov)

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## Parent and Family Engagement: More Than a Checkmark Item

Written by Susie Estrada and Cassie Hays

For those working in education, whether in the K-12, childcare, preschool, or out-of-school time setting, professionals all agree that family engagement is a key pillar in the well-being of every child. Family engagement is so significant that schools are [required to conduct parent and family engagement activities under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended](#). With barriers such as time or staffing constraints, intentionally planning, and executing effective parent and family engagement can be challenging. In the toughest of circumstances, family and parent engagement becomes a checkmark item met through a family cultural night or school newsletter. While these practices hold value, they can become the “checkmark” item “proving” that family engagement is happening at a school. Family engagement practices must be intentional, consist of feedback cycles between the school and the family, and be consistent, accessible, and embedded into school-wide policies. In other words, family engagement does not rely on families showing up, it also requires the school to provide outreach to the family. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education has created a [Title I Parent and Family Engagement Policies Checklist](#) to support schools and programs looking for ways to start this process.

A meta-analysis in 2023 of over forty studies further reinforced the significance of parent and family engagement. Overarching impacts according to Karen Mapp, author of [Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships and Implications for Practice](#) included higher grades and test scores for students, higher rates of attendance, higher reporting of student engagement in the classroom, lower instances of behavioral intervention needs, higher graduation rates, and a higher sense of student efficacy and self-esteem.

For students who receive Special Education services, family engagement can be thought of and defined as

**“[ensuring] that parents play an active role in developing their child’s learning, that parents are actively involved in their child’s education at school, and that parents are full partners in their child’s education and included in decision-making,”** ([Evan, 2011](#)).

It is not enough to invite parents and families to attend meetings whether they be school-wide information meetings or student-specific meetings like a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting. Ultimately, to ensure active and full participation meetings must be accessible. Consider the following recommendations:

- Frontload information: Send all relevant information or data before the meeting date. Doing so will help parents sort through the information and prepare

questions before the meeting. This additional time will also provide a buffer to process any heavy topics and remove any anxieties by providing clear expectations of what is to come.

- Use accessible language: It is difficult to remove our professional hats, but it is important to remember that speaking the professional language of the field is often a third or second language to those outside the profession. Please do your best to keep the language accessible for all families by gearing it towards a third-grade reading level. Also, make sure that you keep your messages concise. According to [Pew Research](#), when it comes to short or long-form news stories on their phones, readers spend between 57 to 277 seconds with an article.
- Have all necessary supports ready before the meeting: If the family will need a translator or would benefit from an additional advocate, have those people scheduled to attend beforehand. The Utah Parent Center is a great resource to help find this support if needed and their information can be found [here in addition to an IEP 101 webpage](#) that can be shared with families before their first IEP meeting.
- Set up the meeting with family input: Make sure that you are scheduling meetings when the family is available and with their agreeance. For school-wide events, a pulse check in the form of asking families as they come in for pick up or drop off can help quickly gather a random sample to help inform the best times to host school-wide events in addition to sending out a survey. For IEP meetings, calling the family directly to schedule when they are available is also recommended.

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## Family and Community Engagement and the Legislative Session

The 2024 legislative session ends today, March 1, 2024. In the April newsletter, I will outline what bills were passed relevant to family and community engagement and potential strategies based on frequently asked questions. If there is anything you want to make sure is addressed, please email me at [susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov](mailto:susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov)

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# It's official! Registration is now open for the 2024 National Community Schools & Family Engagement Conference.



Never been to CSxFE before? Watch the video below to see what all the fuss is about! <https://youtu.be/0TNHT77yoIM>

Starting May 29th, 2024 at IEL's National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference, you'll have the opportunity to learn and engage in pre-conferences, plenaries, workshops, state-based networking sessions, a block party, and much more! To get more information and register, visit [this webpage](#).

Do you have something you want to celebrate?

Email: [susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov](mailto:susie.estrada@schools.utah.gov)

Include a description of your celebration and a picture of what would best represent your celebration. If the picture is of a person, a media release form is required and will be supplied upon request.

