

As schools and other organizations recognize the importance of family engagement, new opportunities are being created for families to take on leadership roles or to demonstrate family leadership by becoming members of advisory boards or stakeholders on task forces or committees.

Many families bring leadership skills to the table because of their experiences at work, other service in the community, or simply the skills and traits that they have developed through life experiences. Other family members may be looking at ways to increase their leadership skills so they can take on new responsibilities. Here are some tips that may be helpful for you as an emerging family leader:

Understand your role and possible activities

- Be clear about the amount of time you can commit when being asked to take on a new role.

Find a mentor

- All leaders need help at some point.
- Find someone in a leadership position that you know and trust. Ask them to mentor you.

Communicate

- Communication is a two-way street. Listening to what others have to say and being heard and understood is important.
- Look for ways to increase the effectiveness of your communication. Speak with confidence and clearly state your thoughts and ideas.

Prepare in advance for meetings

- Read the agenda and be prepared to contribute to the discussion.
- Read the minutes from the last meeting and be prepared to vote on them or bring any questions to the attention of the chair when the minutes are adopted.

Attend all meetings

- Regular attendance shows your commitment to the group.

- If you cannot attend a meeting, notify the leader ahead of time. Ask another member to take notes for you or read the meeting minutes as soon as they become available. Check to see if you have any responsibilities before the next meeting.

Be confident

- Believe in yourself and the value of your experiences and contributions.

Be passionate

- Find a cause or interest that you are passionate about.
- Express your passion for the project on which the group is working or the mission and vision of the committee on which you are serving.

Be organized

- Keep a calendar of meeting times.
- Find a way to organize the materials, meeting minutes, and other information that you will need to have readily available.

If you are currently in a leadership position, lead by example

- Be at meetings on time.
- Treat other members with respect and recognize their contributions to the group.
- Keep meetings productive.

Understand your leadership style

- Be aware of your strengths and areas for improvement.
- Find a leadership position that fits you and your personality. There are many roles such as visionaries or strategists.

No matter where you are in your journey as a family leader, remember the important role that parents have played in the history of special education. By serving on committees or advisory boards, parents working in collaboration with professionals can make a difference in improving outcomes for young children and their families in education, healthcare, and human services.