



Family Engagement Leadership Institute (FELI)

Designed and led by Dr. Eyal Bergman

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Introduction

The purpose of the Family Engagement Leadership Institute is to equip school principals and district administrators to lead family engagement strategies that directly impact student learning and well-being. Our Institute is grounded in decades of research that affirms that family engagement is not effective as an add-on or an additional *goal* for schools – it is a necessary *strategy* for improving student and school outcomes. We are here to support you in implementing research-based family engagement strategies that ultimately lead to improved outcomes for your students.

We know that school leaders have high hopes and big dreams for building strong partnerships with their students' families, even if they have not always been supported in doing so. This Institute helps fill a void in credentialing programs that don't typically prepare educators for effective family engagement work.

You are joining the fourth cohort of this Leadership Institute. We see you as our colleagues and collaborators. We hope you will tell us what is working for you and what isn't, and that you engage with us as we build a network of leaders who are committed to this work.

Institute Goals & Key Outcome

Progressing through our four goals will prepare participants to achieve the Institute's key outcome: an equity-focused family engagement strategy for the next school year.

Four Key Goals — Institute participants should be able to...

- Understand the most essential research on family engagement in schools
- Develop a deeper understanding of their leadership strengths and growth edges
- Clarify their school or organization's goals/priorities and work with a team to develop a family engagement strategy that helps advance them
- Apply the leadership moves and best-practices in family engagement that drive school improvement

The Essential Outcome of the Institute — Institute participants will...

- Culminate the Institute with an equity-focused family engagement strategy for the next year that:
 - Is integrated into existing priorities and plans (e.g. instructional goals, school climate strategies, etc.)
 - Involves new and/or re-purposed investments (e.g. increased staff time to partner with families, PD funding, etc.)
 - Applies existing management tools (e.g. hiring practices, policies, etc.)

Summary of Institute Activities

To support participants in achieving the goals and the key outcome, the Institute involves synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Synchronous activities are those where you will interact with members of the teaching team:

- Whole-cohort virtual training sessions are on **September 24, October 29, December 2, February 19, and April 22** (12:30-2:30 ET / 9:30-11:30 PT).
- One-on-one coaching sessions to support you in progressing through Institute activities. You can schedule up to 5 one-hour sessions throughout the year. Please let your coach know if you need more time.
- Small-group coaching sessions with fellow leaders from your organization.

Asynchronous activities involve the work of leading your Action Team (details below). It also includes a limited set of prep readings and videos.

Participant & Co-participant Definition

Participants are school principals, LEA system leaders, and County Office or State Agency leaders.

We invite participants to assign a co-participant if they'd like (eg. Assistant Principal, Community Schools Coordinator, Deputy Director, etc). We invite co-participants to attend all whole-cohort sessions and are welcome to join coaching sessions at the participant's discretion. In other words, a co-participant can join alongside the participant, just not instead of the participant.

Co-participants have been assigned a range of responsibilities. Some examples: thought partnership, coordinating the Action Team, and drafting plans.

Action Team Details

The Action Team is a vehicle we use to support participants in applying what they are learning in the Institute. Our pedagogical approach is to promote collaborative learning environments with staff and families that are directed toward collective action. This approach is modeled on Paulo Freire's notion of a praxis – "It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their reality. They must act together upon their environment in order to reflect upon their reality and so transform it." – [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*](#).

What is an Action Team? It is a demographically representative group of families and staff, all of whom are interested in building trust with one another and working together to: (1) determine 1-3 key goal(s) for the school/district, (2) design and implement a few research-informed family engagement strategies called "safe-to-fail experiments" that are meant to help achieve the key goal(s), and (3) support the design of a new family engagement strategy for the following year. Action Teams can take on a formal structure (like a committee) or a more informal structure (like ongoing casual conversations with a consistent group).

What does the work of an Action Team look like? In the fall you will focus on recruiting a team, building relationships, identifying goals, and designing a few safe-to-fail experiments. Throughout the winter you will focus on implementing safe-to-fail experiments with your team. In the spring you and your team will develop a family engagement strategy for the next school year, and you'll share it by the close of the Institute in April.

Key Materials

All of our materials will be available on our [Institute microsite](#). The microsite is designed exclusively for current participants and Alumni.

Anchor texts and primer video – Our two foundational texts are short enough to be manageable, while comprehensive enough to offer an understanding of the evidence on family engagement as well as examples of best practices from around the country. We recommend that participants read both before the first whole-cohort session.

- [Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement](#)
- [Unlocking the How: Designing Family Engagement Strategies that Lead to School Success](#)
- [Anchor Text Primer Video](#) – a 12-minute video that summarizes the two texts

The Three Pillars & The Leadership Look Fors – The *Unlocking the How* reading includes two important resources that we utilize throughout the Institute: the three pillars of effective family engagement and the Leadership Look Fors.

- **The Three Pillars** of effective family engagement are trust, student learning and well-being, and infrastructure. Throughout the Institute, you will be encouraged and coached around ensuring that these three pillars guide your family engagement strategies.
- **Leadership Moves**, found in the Appendix of *Unlocking the How*, is a tool designed to support school leaders in reflecting on their family engagement leadership. Throughout the Institute, your coach will use the Leadership moves as a guide to help support your leadership development.

Unlocking My How: Your One-Stop Slide Deck – Your deck will be a “one-stop shop” for you and your coach to capture your learning and progress throughout the Institute.

Coaches are available to support participants in documenting their progress in their decks because we want to reduce the writing burden on busy leaders. The purpose of the deck is not to complete paperwork but to serve as a personal resource to help track your team’s plans, progress, and learning. It will also help you tell your story to a wider audience.

Learning Arc: Our Year Long Agenda At-a-Glance | See a [one-page visual](#) of our Learning Arc.

Fall 2025 – Learning What Works and Aligning Family Engagement Strategies to School/District Goals

We begin the Institute by getting to know each other and building relationships. An initial one-on-one with your coach will give you a chance to ask questions, get oriented to the Institute, and consider your options for the year.

Throughout the year you will work with your coach during one-on-one’s to reflect on your beliefs and engage in personalized leadership development. In the fall, you’ll have a chance to set leadership goals that support your experience in the Institute.

You will also identify 1-3 goals for your school or district. The idea is to focus on *real* goals in your context (e.g. absenteeism, culture/climate, proficiency rates). Your coach will ask you to share relevant site plans. The goal(s) you identify will serve as an anchor for the strategies that you and your Action Team work on throughout the year. The goal of FELI is not just to help you improve your practices (like better family events) – the goal is to support you in developing a family engagement strategy that helps you meet the existing goals for your students.

Following your initial conversation with your coach, we recommend you take 1-2 hours to read the anchor texts that will help you prepare for our first whole-cohort session on **September 24**.

At the first session, we will dig into the research on family engagement and gain an understanding of family engagement best practices that lead to improved student and school outcomes. You will also hear from past FELI participants, who will share their experience in recruiting and launching their Action Teams. Following the first virtual session, you're welcome to schedule a second one-on-one with your coach and draft out a plan.

At the second virtual session on **October 29**, you will continue to deepen your understanding of what works in family engagement by hearing from successful principals and district leaders from around the country. We'll provide quiet working time for you to refine your plan.

You'll also have a chance to convene with your district peer group to hear how your colleagues's plans are emerging.

Winter 2025/2026 – Applying What Works in Your Context

The focus of the Institute shifts from learning about what has worked in other schools to applying what might work in yours. Participants work with their Action Teams in implementing their safe-to-fail experiments, and receive support from their coach as needed.

At the third whole-cohort session on **December 2**, participants will be invited to bring their Action Teams so they can also receive the benefit of the training experience. We'll share examples of successful safe-to-fail experiments and give teams a chance to plan.

Participants will work with their coach to finalize a plan by winter break. Sometime between December and February, you're welcome to continue meeting with your coach, and we're happy to continue convening the district peer group.

The fourth whole-cohort session is on **February 19**. During this session, we will begin shifting from action mode to planning for next school year. We'll reflect on what's been learned and consider how the lessons can inform your approach to your family engagement strategy for 26-27.

Spring 2026 – Redesigning Systems to Promote What Works

The remainder of the Institute will be focused on supporting you and your Action Team in planning for next year. Between February and April, you will meet for your remaining coaching sessions. Coaches will provide you with tailored support for developing your 2025-2026 family engagement strategy. At the final virtual session on **April 22**, Action Teams will again be invited to celebrate and share their plans, reflect on their learning, and explore ways to continue their engagement as Institute alumni.

Teaching Team

We have an amazing teaching team! Dr. Eyal Bergman designed FELI and has led it since its inception. Windy Lopez-Aflitto supports the day-to-day operations of the Institute. We have a robust evaluation process known as our Knowledge-Capture Process (KCP), which is led by a PhD candidate at Harvard, Darien Day. Our incredible team of coaches all have experience leading schools and systems. Most of them have full-time jobs and work with FELI as independent consultants.

You can read our teaching team beliefs and bios for each of us on our [microsite](#).



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