Maine Engagement and Attendance Center (MEAC) Office Hour #5 Follow-up Notes

- Session #5: **Jan. 15 – Strengthening school-home partnerships**

Title 1 Family Engagement: Improving Attendance Through Family and Community Partnerships

Jan. 15, 2026, 3:30-4:30

Recording: To see the MEAC Office Hour Recording, please visit the MEAC webpage: https://www.maine.gov/doe/meac

Video will be posted as soon as possible. The holiday schedule may impact timing.

Slide deck from MEAC Office Hours #5, Jan. 2026: MEAC Office Hours Title I Presentation

As participants arrived, ideas were shared for positive practices schools engage in to strengthen school-home partnerships:

- Our school offers family lunches throughout the year, where we invite families to come in and have lunch with their learners.
- We also offer a few nights a year that are called celebration of learning nights, where families are invited in to see what their kids are learning about and an opportunity for learners to share what they are doing.
    - Families can connect face-to-face with facilitators.
- We hold family engagement nights for math and literacy.
- With translation help, we are using families' home languages for newsletters, texts, and meetings.
- Our school has loved family game night.
- Teachers reach out early in the year with a welcome call/email before any concerns arise.
- It's super fun to share weekly classroom highlights, "what we're learning" snapshots

Summary of Session:

Our fifth MEAC office hour session highlighted **Title I family engagement and attendance strategies**, with Rita Pello, Maine D.O.E. Title 1 Coordinator and ESEA Regional Program Manager, as our content expert. Rita presented ideas to **strengthen school-home partnerships** and to **leverage federal funding for family engagement initiatives**. She shared examples from summer programs across the state of Maine, demonstrating **successful practices**, including transportation solutions, community partnerships, and creative approaches to **overcome barriers** like childcare and language differences. The discussion highlighted how Title I funding can be used for various family engagement activities and emphasized the importance of **making programs accessible** through multiple formats (in-person, Zoom, phone) to accommodate different family schedules. The session concluded with a discussion about implementing **school-wide Title I programs** versus targeted assistance models, and plans for future training opportunities focused on family engagement strategies.

To register for Rita's upcoming virtual training, Wed. Feb. 4, click here: Title 1 Schoolwide Programming.

Title I Funding and Family Engagement:

Rita presented an **overview of Title I funding**, explaining its history and purpose as a federal program providing additional resources to high-poverty schools. She emphasized the importance of family engagement in improving student outcomes and highlighted examples of successful practices from districts across the state. Rita also mentioned an upcoming webinar on February 4th about school-wide programming and shared resources for further information. The discussion encouraged participants to think about Title I ideas presented as a buffet of opportunities and to consider how they could apply these principles even if they work in areas not directly related to Title 1.

Family Engagement Policy Implementation:

Rita discussed the importance of having a living and breathing **family engagement policy that aligns with school practices**, highlighting the **need for policies to be implemented, shared, and understood by parents**. She explained that districts receiving more than $500,000 in Title I funds must allocate at least 1% for family engagement practices, with 90% of that spent at the school level. Rita also mentioned that **Title I funding can be used for reasonable and necessary expenses like food during events, transportation, and translation services to overcome barriers to family engagement**. She shared successful strategies from summer programs, emphasizing the importance of:

- creating a welcoming environment
- maintaining ongoing communication with families

- framing programs in an engaging and positive light

Rita concluded by suggesting that similar strategies could be applied in the school setting, with Title I funds potentially supporting various family engagement initiatives.

Summer Programs' Student Impact:

Sarah and Rita discussed the positive impact of summer programs on students, highlighting **community partnerships and experiential learning opportunities**. They emphasized the importance of attendance and family engagement, noting that **schools often realize success when using incentives and personal outreach to encourage regular attendance**. Rita also shared resources related to Title I family engagement requirements and offered to provide further support to districts.

Enhancing Family Engagement Strategies:

Sarah and Rita discussed strategies for improving family engagement and attendance, particularly focusing on **Title I funding and its flexibility for supporting parent participation**. Rita explained that stipends (for transportation, childcare, etc.) to parents could be covered by Title I funds **if they reduce barriers to participation** and suggested exploring school-wide Title I programs for more comprehensive support. The group also discussed the **importance of early learner attendance and its impact on future academic success**.

Sarah announced the next meeting will be on the 4th Thursday of February (February 26th, 3:30 – 4:30), allowing participants to fully enjoy their winter break!

Our sixth MEAC Office Hour will feature **Courtney Angelisante**, of ***PBIS***, sharing the **implementation of positive recognition and motivation strategies.**

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This month, our TIER 1 Evidence-based practice focus: Strong partnerships between school and home are essential for student success.

The research behind it: (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004**;** Mapp, & Bergman, 2019

JANUARY – Strengthen Home-School Connection
Try This: Host virtual attendance Q&A. Use preferred family contact methods.
Check: Are your messages clear, warm, and stigma-free?

- Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Communication: Train staff to engage students and families with empathy, respecting cultural norms, and avoiding stigma.
- Attendance Metrics & Early Warning Signs: Educate staff and families on attendance tracking, distinguishing excused from unexcused absences, and identifying patterns requiring support.
- Problem-Solving Tools: Provide staff and caregivers with strategies to collaboratively address attendance barriers and establish routines for student success.

➢ **Practices to consider implementing in the next month:**

- **Things to consider implementing in the next month before we meet Feb. 26th –** ***Implementation of positive recognition and motivation strategies*** with **Courtney Angelisante**, of ***PBIS***
    - **Connect with Rita Pello** for support in **improving attendance through family and community partnerships**
        - Rita.Pello@maine.gov
    - **Connect with Rebecca Honig** for support in **developing and implementing consistent growth-focused attendance messaging**
        - rebecca.honig@parentpowered.com
    - Review **growth-focused attendance messaging templates** from Count ME In!, Oct. e-newsletter: October Communication Toolkit
    - **Connect with Jess Anderson** for support in **establishing early warning systems and team-based responses**
        - janderson@countmeinmaine.org
    - **Connect with Jim Boothby** for support in **building routine, relationships, and relevance**
        - Jaboot6280@gmail.com
    - ➢ **Connect with Stacy Barlow** to explore Creating a Culture of Care in Schools using Restorative Practices: Creating a Culture of Care: Training Sequence
        - Stacy.barlow@maine.gov
    - ➢ **Connect with Aubrie Howard** for **school climate supports**
        - Aubrie.howard@maine.gov
    - ➢ **Connect with Signe Lynch** for student / **McKinney-Vento supports**
        - signe.lynch@maine.gov
    - ➢ **Sign up for the CMI** (Count ME In!) **Newsletter**

- Sign up for e-Newsletters HERE

- **Attend future MEAC Office Hours**
  - **REGISTER for MEAC Office Hours HERE**
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Attend future MEAC Office Hours, USUALLY held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, 3:30-4:30. Register HERE for MEAC Office Hours. In February, we will meet on the 4th Thursday, February. 26th.

Strong partnerships between school and home are essential for student success.

Shared practices of what is already working well to make this happen…

Educator feedback from the Ed Summit, Thomas College, August 2025

Student

- create simple holiday or gratitude cards for staff or families

Family

- attend school events and conferences

Educator

- invite family voices into planning
- class dojo messages
- send one warm message per day to a family
- determine the preferred communication method of families
- create a family Facebook group
- parent check-ins: positive and negative
- some students have daily communication sheets
- review upcoming classroom topics/activities with families in a monthly/weekly communication
- use the school website to post important info- schedule, field trips, and what we are doing in our room
- communicate a positive message home each week
- weekly family newsletter

- make time to know and interact with parents and guardians

Administrator

- pleasant, kind, friendly face in the office
- host inclusive (holiday) events, invite family voice in planning, provide interpreters
- open house
- monthly newsletter

Community

- co-host or support cultural events.
- Share a 2-minute gratitude message

Tips from PREVIOUS MEAC Office Hours:

- **Greet students daily at the door, by name, in an engaged and unbusy manner**:
  - Develop your own 'Greeting at the Door' Routine and visual Brain-based Benefits of Greeting Students at the Door
- **Establish morning meetings** or advisory periods
  - Consistency throughout the school, with everyone agreeing to participate
  - Classroom Routines: https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/beh1/cresource/q2/p06/
- Ask students in focus groups how **relevant and connected** they feel **to instruction**
  - Link lessons to locally relevant issues
  - Relevant, Engaging Learning - Attendance Works
- Create a system to **assist students** in **setting their own attendance goals**. Provide their personal attendance **data** to help guide this conversation.
- Use **project-based learning** with **student input**
  - Research Briefs - Lucas Education Research

- Foster TIER 1 practices through **community partnerships**
- Connect with BARR
  - www.barrcenter.org
- **Sign up for the CMI** (Count ME In!) **Newsletter http://eepurl.com/h6FSZT (CMI e-news)**
  - https://countmeinmaine.org/about-count-me-in/
- **Connect with Jim Boothby** for support in **building routine, relationships, and relevance** OR to **visit a BARR school**
  - jaboot6280@gmail.com
- **Connect with Aubrie Howard** for **school climate supports**
  - Aubrie.Howard@maine.gov
- **Connect with Signe Lynch for student / McKinney-Vento supports**
  - Signe.Lynch@maine.gov
- **Connect with Stacy Barlow** to explore **Creating a Culture of Care in Schools using Restorative Practices**: Creating a Culture of Care: Training Sequence
  - Stacey.Barlow@maine.gov

The Maine Engagement and Attendance Team is part of the Maine DOE Office of School and Student Supports (O3S).

For further assistance, please contact Maine DOE O3S Specialist Sarah Nelson at **Sarah.Nelson@maine.gov**.

Remember… we each hold a vital role in increasing attendance.

What can YOU focus on today to support increased attendance in Maine's schools tomorrow?

Maine Department of Education