



Newsletter

Stay updated on monthly news, events, & resources for families, schools, and communities!

Welcome to the Engagement Exchange Newsletter!

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Upcoming Events

Problem Solvers Wanted: How to Grow Critical Thinkers at Home

April 14, 2026, from 11 pm to 12 pm

[Registration Link](#)

JOIN THE VILLAGE: Empowering Student Success Through Family Engagement

April 16, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

The Parents as Champions (PAC) Learning Series

(Morning Session) April 15, 2026, April 22, 2026, April 29, 2026, from 10 AM to 12 PM

[Registration Link](#)

Setting the Stage: Family Engagement as Your Superpower

April 21, 2026, from 10:30 am to 11:30 am

[Registration Link](#)

Lunch & Learn: Family Math

April 21, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Motivation That Lasts: Teaching Perseverance & Persistence

April 22, 2026, from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Practical Support for Struggling Learners Part 2: What to Do Next

April 29, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Many Roads, One Future: Helping Students Navigate Career and Education Options after High School

May 12, 2026, from 11 am to 12 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Lunch & Learn: Using School Data to Advocate for Stronger Family School Partnerships

May 19, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)



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A welcome message from the Project Co - Directors

Dear Families, Students, Educators, and Community Partners: Welcome to the fifth edition of our Family and Community Engagement Exchange Newsletter!

We're excited to share not just updates and resources, but also a renewed focus on building meaningful partnerships between home, school, and community.

The name Engagement Exchange reflects our commitment to two-way communication, shared learning, and collaboration. We believe that strong family–school partnerships are essential for student success, and that starts with sharing ideas, celebrating wins, and working together.

In this issue, you'll find:

- Highlights from recent family events and initiatives
- Tips and tools for supporting learning at home
- Opportunities to get involved and make your voice heard
- A sneak peek at upcoming events and program

We hope this new format and name resonate with you, and we welcome your feedback! If there's something you'd love to see featured or a story worth sharing, don't hesitate to reach out.

Visit NJFEHUB.org to access these resources and continue fostering meaningful engagement year-round.

Thank you for being an essential part of our learning community. **Let's continue the exchange!**

Warmly,

Dr. Lanisha Makle-Ridley and Jeannette Mejias

Co-Project Directors

New Jersey Family Engagement Hub



Dr. Lanisha - Makle Ridley
Lanisha Makle-Ridley



Jeannette Mejias
Jeannette Mejias



Math of Food Recipe Book: Call for Submissions!



[Recipe Book Form](#)

Math isn't just in textbooks—it's in the kitchen!

From measuring ingredients and adjusting portions to budgeting meals and timing the perfect bake, math shows up in every recipe we love. We're inviting **families, students, educators, and community members** to help us bring this idea to life by contributing a favorite recipe to our **Food of Math Recipe Book**. Your recipe will help:

- Show how math is used in everyday life
- Celebrate culture, creativity, and family traditions
- Inspire children and families to see math in a fun, meaningful way
- Create a community resource that blends learning and flavor

We welcome **all types of recipes**: breakfast, snacks, main dishes, desserts, and cultural favorites!

Each submission should include:

- The recipe name and ingredients
- Simple preparation steps
- A brief note on how math shows up in the recipe (measuring, fractions, time, budgeting, scaling, etc.)
- **(Optional)** A short story or memory connected to the dish

[Click the link here to submit your favorite recipe.](#) Help us show how math comes to life in the kitchen through culture, creativity, and everyday learning.

NJFEHUB News

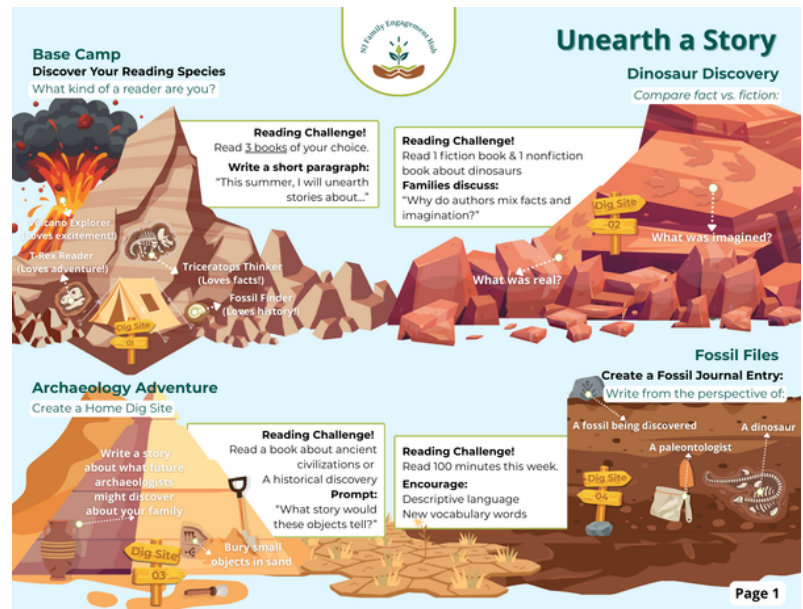


NJFEHUB Website

Join Our Reading Expedition: Unearth a Story!

Pick up your Dig Site Map at in-person events or download it from the NJFEHub website. Available in both **English and Spanish**, this fun-filled adventure invites families to explore 8 exciting “dig sites,” each featuring weekly reading challenges and activities.

Track your journey using the Activity & Reading Log as you progress toward becoming a Master Story Excavator and earn your certificate along the way!



New Jersey Family Engagement Calendar 2026

We're excited to share the **New Jersey Family Engagement Hub's 2026 Family Engagement Calendar**, filled with activities designed to strengthen family connections and support meaningful learning at home. Be sure to look out for the calendar at our in-person events. It's a great resource you won't want to miss.



The New Jersey Family Engagement Hub
is a project of SPAN funded by the U.S.
Department of Education.

Spring Break Toolkit

Spring break is the perfect time to learn, explore, and connect as a family. The New Jersey Family Engagement Hub's Spring Break Toolkit offers reading suggestions, hands-on projects, outdoor activities, and social-emotional supports for children of all ages.

Designed to fit any schedule, it sparks curiosity, creativity, and conversation.

Explore the toolkit together, choose activities your child enjoys, and most importantly, have fun learning as a family!



Family Engagement Toolkit

Our Family Engagement Toolkit offers practical resources to help families understand progress reports and report cards, prepare for parent-teacher conferences, identify concerns early, and set SMARTER goals.

These tools are designed to empower families, build trust, and strengthen collaboration with schools, supporting every child's academic and personal growth.



Access to all of these resources and more by visiting our website using the button below.

[**NJFEH Website**](#)



Testimonials



The presenters were very knowledgeable and provided information in an easy-to-understand way to understand.

Attended a NJFEH Webinar



I learned the use of math in cooking with children, framing math work into diversity and social justice frameworks.

Attended a Math of Food Webinar



The information provided by the presenters and their willingness to have conversations with people attending,

Attended Serving on Groups / Leading by Convening Summit



Hub Updates & Community Highlights

From Piggy Banks to College Funds Series with Mass Mutual Bank Recap



Our five-part From Piggy Banks to College Funds workshop series provided families with practical guidance for building strong financial foundations at every stage of life. *Part 1: Raising Financially Savvy Kids: Financial Wellness Overview.* The series began with a focus on the importance of introducing financial literacy early and at home. Families explored age-appropriate ways to teach saving, budgeting, and smart

money habits, while also gaining insight into planning ahead for college costs and understanding financial aid options. Attendees left with tools and resources to support confident financial decision-making as a family. *Part 2: Financial Goal-Setting* Participants discussed why setting financial goals is essential to long-term success. The session covered how to define clear, actionable goals and provided real-world examples, from emergency savings and debt reduction to education funding and retirement planning.

Part 3: Financial College Planning, this workshop outlined the overall college planning process, including the differences between need-based and merit-based aid. Families learned how college planning fits into broader financial planning strategies to help ensure affordability without compromising other long-term goals.

Part 4: Special Needs Trust Planning. This important session addressed financial planning considerations for individuals with disabilities across all ages. Topics included developing a life care plan, understanding government benefits, and exploring tools such as special needs trusts, ABLE accounts, and other legal and financial structures.

The discussion emphasized proactive planning to help safeguard long-term care, stability, and quality of life. *Part 5: Women's Financial Wellness*; the series concluded with a workshop dedicated to empowering women to take control of their financial futures. The session highlighted three primary financial concerns: saving, investing, and retirement planning, and offered practical steps for building confidence through education, goal-setting, and seeking professional guidance when needed. Together, the series equipped families with knowledge, strategies, and actionable next steps to support financial wellness across generations.

Math of Food Webinar Series – Event Recap



The NJ Family Engagement Hub, in partnership with NAFSCE: The Center for Family Math, recently concluded its engaging three-part Math of Food webinar series, highlighting how mathematics is woven into everyday family experiences. *Part 1: Finding Math in Family Meals and Traditions*. The series opened with an interactive exploration of how math naturally appears in cooking and shared meals.

Participants examined concepts such as fractions, ratios, geometry, and data through family recipes and cultural food traditions. The session emphasized how everyday cooking experiences can make math more relevant, accessible, and connected to lived experiences. Part 2: In the second webinar, panelists shared their personal journeys with cooking, how they got started and how they engage with it today. Discussions highlighted the interplay of nutrition, taste, and cultural traditions in shaping food preparation, and how these choices often involve practical mathematical thinking. Using a variety of culinary examples, families explored how math guides decisions about ingredient measurements, portion sizes, substitutions, and nutritional planning.

Part 3: Supermarket Math, Budgeting, and Smart Choices. The final session turned to the mathematics of grocery shopping. Participants discussed real-world applications such as unit pricing, couponing, reading nutrition labels, and balancing cost with nutritional value. The webinar highlighted how families regularly apply problem-solving and quantitative reasoning skills when managing food budgets and making healthy choices. Together, the series demonstrated that math is not confined to the classroom; it is embedded in daily routines, cultural traditions, and practical decision-making around food.

Webinar Recap: Academic Roadmap: A Family Guide to Curriculum and Standards in K–12



This session supported families in developing effective, intentional approaches to academic goal-setting at home. Participants explored how to help children identify realistic and meaningful learning goals, break them into manageable steps, and monitor progress over time. The session emphasized practical tools for building consistent routines, fostering accountability, and

encouraging reflection as part of the learning process. Families engaged in discussions and activities focused on nurturing student motivation, confidence, and a growth mindset. Participants examined ways to provide constructive feedback and celebrate progress to reinforce positive learning behaviors. By the end of the session, families left with actionable strategies to create structured, supportive home environments that strengthen effort, resilience, and academic success beyond the classroom.

Advisory Committee Update



On February 11, 2026, the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub hosted an Advisory Committee meeting to share updates and strengthen statewide collaboration. Updates included progress on ongoing projects, upcoming community movie screenings across New Jersey, and the development of a full 2026 Family Engagement Calendar based on feedback from the November

2025 review. Regional Engagement Specialists' shared highlights from their family engagement activities across the state of New Jersey. Finally, committee members provided additional updates and input to support continued engagement efforts.

We're inviting more parents to help shape our efforts!
Learn more about joining the Advisory Committee and apply today.

[Get Involved](#)

Serving on Groups & Leading By Convening Summit



Last week's Train-the-Trainer Serving on Groups (SoG) and Leading by Convening (LbC) brought together parent leaders, stakeholders, and professionals for a hands-on learning experience focused on strengthening authentic engagement and effective group participation. Participants explored the foundational principles of Leading by Convening, including co-creation, shared

leadership, and building trust across diverse perspectives. Through guided activities, they practiced strategies for fostering meaningful collaboration and learned how to apply the LbC framework when facilitating or participating in groups. During the Serving on Groups portion, the audience gained practical tools for understanding group roles,

decision-making processes, and how to contribute effectively in advisory, leadership, and collaborative settings. Participants examined how groups function, what makes them successful, and how to elevate family and community voice in structured group work. The sessions equipped participants not only with knowledge but with actionable skills they can now bring back to their teams, councils, and parent-professional partnerships, advancing stronger, more collaborative systems of support.



To learn more about our upcoming in - person and virtual events, visit our website using the button below.

[NJFEH Website](#)

NJ Working Group on Special Education Releases Recommendations



New Jersey's parents of students with disabilities could soon have more resources and a stronger voice in shaping their child's special education program following recommendations drafted by a state-mandated working group. The 27-member group made up of educators, advocates, and parents outlined 17 recommendations aimed at making individualized education

programs, or IEPs, more consistent, accessible, and effective for New Jersey students. The report calls for significant improvements in how schools develop IEPs and emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, measurable goals, and parent involvement in the process. SPAN staff members Peg Kinsell, Policy Director, and Stefanie Babits, Project Director, E-PATH, were proud to serve as members of the state working group. **To learn more about the group's recommendations. [Click here.](#)**



Community Connections

My Black is Beautiful, Black History Month Pop-Up Shop Business Expo with *Lincoln Avenue Elementary School, Orange, NJ*



We kicked off the celebration at the My Black is Beautiful Black History Month Pop-Up Shop Business Expo at Lincoln Avenue Elementary School in Orange, NJ, on Saturday, February 7. The event brought together local businesses, partners, and community leaders who are helping shape the future for our students. The school became a vibrant marketplace where families explored

explored unique, locally owned businesses such as Indy's Chocolate Treats, Isaiah's True Lemonade, Fashion to Perfection, Capable Women Candle, Candles by Cecilia LLC, Infinity Sisters Jewelry, Meditations of a Mother's Heart by Anika Davis, and Solace in Secrets. Students and families connected with entrepreneurs, learning how ideas can grow into opportunities. More than a pop-up shop, the expo celebrated culture, community, and inspiration while highlighting the strength and creativity within Orange. Together, we celebrate, uplift, and invest in a future led by those who dare to dream and do. By Faith Victor, Northern Region Family Engagement Specialist, NJ Family Engagement Hub.

March into Reading with *Jackson Avenue Elementary School, Hackensack, NJ*



On Friday, March 13, Jackson Avenue Elementary School in Hackensack, NJ, hosted its lively "March into Reading" event, bringing literacy to life for the community. More than 67 families attended, filling the building with excitement as students shouted "BINGO! BINGO! BINGO!" during the evening's activities. Families enjoyed pizza, snacks, and refreshments while

participating in fun literacy stations like First Sound Fantastic, Street Sign Scavenger, Word Wizardry, Climb to the Top, and Fast Fast Bingo, all designed to reinforce reading skills in engaging ways. Events like this matter. 'National research shows that only about 33% of fourth graders read at or above proficiency, while children who are regularly read to at home are far more likely to develop strong literacy skills.

It was inspiring for families, faculty, and staff to see the impact of the NJ Family Engagement Hub. The Hackensack community is fortunate to have Jackson Avenue Elementary School fostering connection, growth, and a love of reading. By Faith Victor, Northern Region Family Engagement Specialist, NJ Family Engagement Hub.

Vision Board Day!

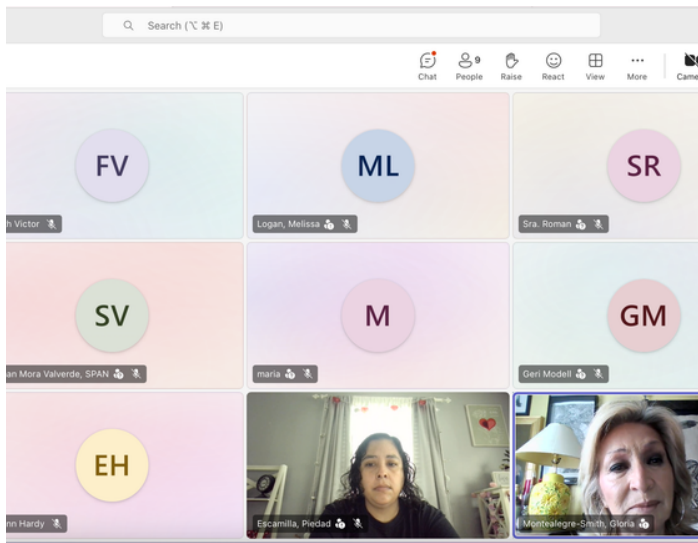


On January 28th, Plainfield Jefferson School buzzed with excitement as students and parents gathered for a special vision board day. Over a warm breakfast, families and students crafted colorful boards filled with their dreams and ambitions, using an array of magazines, markers, and stickers provided by the school. The cafeteria was filled with laughter and conversation

as participants shared their goals, exchanged ideas, and encouraged one another. Some students focused on school-year achievements such as improving grades, joining clubs, or making new friends, while others teamed up with their families to set shared goals like traveling together or building better routines at home. The school also offered clothing to those in need, ensuring that every family felt cared for and included.

Meanwhile, SMARTPlainfield, a nonprofit dedicated to enriching public education and civic life, delighted students with a selection of free books, fostering a love of reading and learning. The event set an inspiring tone for the new year, helping everyone picture their hopes taking shape and reinforcing the sense of community. By Evann Hardy, Central Region Family Engagement Specialist, NJ Family Engagement Hub.

Stronger Together: Our Families, Our Rights Immigration Information Session



Jefferson Elementary School in Plainfield hosted a virtual information session, "Stronger Together: Our Families, Our Rights Immigration Info Session," to educate families about their immigration rights. Guest speakers: Johan Mora-Valverde, Project Co-Director, Youth Programs, SPAN and Amari Verastegui, Senior Program Director, Rutgers University. Sharing personal experiences

and practical advice on dealing with ICE, identifying judicial warrants, and preparing emergency plans. The event provided vital resources and strengthened community preparedness for immigration-related challenges. By Evann Hardy, Central Region Family Engagement Specialist, NJ Family Engagement Hub

Liberty Science Center



Jefferson Elementary School of Plainfield organized a community evening at the Liberty Science Center on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, providing students and their families with a unique educational experience. Participants traveled by bus or car to the event. The Liberty Science Center offered free admission for the school, allowing attendees to explore a variety of interactive exhibits, attend

science demonstrations, and visit the planetarium. The event was designed to foster interest in science, encourage family involvement in learning, and create memorable educational opportunities outside the classroom. The partnership between the school and the Science Center ensured a successful and enriching experience for all who attended. By Evann Hardy, Central Region Family Engagement Specialist, NJ Family Engagement Hub.



Featured Articles and Resources



Learning Enviroments

*"Could the design of a classroom be the hidden key to student success?"
Explore what research says:*

[Read Article](#)

Physical environment | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE). (n.d.). <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/physical-environment>



Cooking Counts

*"Looking for a tasty way to practice counting and shapes with your child?"
See how quesadillas can become a hands-on math lesson.*

[View Video](#)

Family Math. (2024, June 12). Count and find shapes while making Kid-Friendly quesadillas | Cooking Counts | Family math [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfkwuoOy4iQ>



Rainbow Relaxation

*"Looking for a fun mindfulness activity to help kids reduce stress and improve focus?" **Try this rainbow relaxation exercise.***

[View Video](#)

The Mindfulness Teacher. (2020, May 6). Rainbow Relaxation: mindfulness for children [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlbBI-BT9c4>

Check out NJFEHUB Fridays and Youth Engagement Saturdays on Instagram!

Get inspired with awesome activities and epic highlights.

Follow SPAN on Instagram today!





Stay Connected

Get the latest on SPAN Parent Advocacy Network and the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub (NJFEH)-- stay informed, connected, and be part of the journey!

[SPAN Eventbrite](#)

Need to reach us? We're here to help!

Visit the SPAN Office: 570 Broad Street, Suite 702 | Newark, NJ 07102

Contact SPAN: Toll-free in NJ: (800) 654-SPAN (7726)

Tel: (973) 642-8100 | **Fax:** (973) 642-8080

Email: info@spanadvocacy.org

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The New Jersey Family Engagement Hub is a project of SPAN funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

