



Newsletter

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



Welcome to Issue 7 of *The Engagement Exchange Newsletter!*

1. Welcome Message
2. Hub Updates and Community Highlights
3. Spotlight On! The Partners Driving NJFEHUB Forward
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Upcoming Events

From Piggy Banks to College Funds: Raising Financially Savvy Kids

February 10, 2026, 11 am to 12:00 pm

[Registration Link](#)

From Piggy Banks to College Funds: Part 2: Financial Goal-Setting

February 17, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Executive Functioning: Practical Classroom Tools

February 18, 2026, from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Understanding the School Budget

February 23, 2026, from 6 pm to 7 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Calm, Restore, Thrive Well-Being Workshop

February 25, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

From Piggy Banks to College Funds Part 3: Financial College Planning

March 3, 2026, from 12 pm to 1 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Math of Food Part 1: Finding Math in Family Meals and Traditions

March 5, 2026, from 1 pm to 2 pm

[Registration Link](#)

Academic Roadmap: A Family Guide to Curriculum and Standards in K-12

March 13, 2026, from 11 am to 12 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



*Nurturing bonds
for a brighter future*



NAFSCE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Math of Food Recipe Book: Call for Submissions!



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.



Help us spread the word to the educators in your life—applications for 2026/27 National Book Foundation Teacher Fellowship are now open!

The NBF Teacher Fellowship supports and celebrates 6th–12th grade teachers who use innovative methods to make reading for pleasure a part of their students' school day experience.

During the 2026/27 academic year, NBF Teacher Fellows:

- 🍏 Promote reading for pleasure in their classrooms
- 🍏 Incorporate National Book Award–honored titles into their curricula

And receive:

- 🍏 A stipend and a budget for books and classroom supplies
- 🍏 Access to a professional learning community
- 🍏 Airfare, hotel, and a daily travel stipend for an in-person convening in NYC

Learn more at
nationalbook.org/nbfteacherfellowship



The National Book Foundation Teacher Fellowship

The National Book Foundation Teacher Fellowship supports and celebrates 6th–12th-grade teachers who use innovative methods to make reading for pleasure a part of their students' school day experience. It aims to:

- Support classroom activities that have a direct impact on the development of students as lifelong readers
- Celebrate and highlight creative and effective models for independent reading instruction
- Connect more young people with great literature through National Book Award-honored titles

As part of the Fellowship, teachers will receive a **\$3,000 stipend** as well as a **\$2,000 book buying budget** to develop or continue an initiative that promotes reading for pleasure in their classroom, incorporate National Book Award-honored titles into their curriculum, and collaborate with other Fellows through participation in a professional learning community. The fellowship will culminate in a day of celebration and literary activities, in person in New York City, with travel costs covered by NBF. You can read more about this year's current Fellows and their projects, and check out our Teacher Toolkit on our [website](#).

Eligible teachers must be:

- 6th–12th grade classroom teachers currently working in a public school based in the United States or US territories
- Beginning their third year of teaching (or more) by fall, in which Fellowship would start
- Able to receive sign off from supervising principal (following conditional acceptance)

For the NBF Teacher Fellowship, a classroom teacher is defined as an individual who teaches or provides instruction for students during regular school hours. Educators with a title other than "teacher" may be eligible, depending on the scope of their role and responsibilities.

All interested applicants should submit an online application by the deadline of February 27, 2026, 11:59pm EST.

Testimonials



“New connections for collaboration; information on how to get involved with policy and how to be a resource for other parents; and increased awareness of social-emotional learning strategies.”

Attended the SPAN Conference



“How we can we empower families to believe they are more than just parents and caregivers. Also, that leadership means more than a title. It's about growing yourself, in order to grow others.”

Attended a NJFEH Webinar



“Great presentation and slides. Resources provided in a separate folder were excellent. Physical Health is extremely important to a student's success.”

Attended Parents as Champions Learning Series

Hub Updates & Community Highlights

Webinar Recap: Navigating Digital Tools for Family Communication



On December 9, this practical and informative session explored how digital platforms can strengthen communication between schools and families.

Participants were introduced to popular and effective digital communication tools, along with strategies for ensuring interactions are secure, inclusive, and accessible. The presentation also highlighted ways to encourage

meaningful online engagement and participation. Designed for both beginners and those seeking to enhance existing practices, the session emphasized how thoughtful use of technology can support strong, tech-savvy school family partnerships and promote student success anytime, anywhere.

Information Session: Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Jersey



On December 10 and January 14, this engaging session introduced families, educators, and community partners to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives across New Jersey. Participants learned how SEL promotes student well-being, strengthens school culture, and supports academic success. SEL4NJ shared its mission, current programs, and ways for participants

to get involved, while providing practical resources and guidance for schools and families. Through partnerships with The Academy for Social Emotional Learning in Schools and The School Culture and Climate Initiative, the Family Engagement Hub can offer webinars, a Certificate Program in SEL, professional development and SEL coaching, and school climate improvement supports. Attendees left equipped with tools and strategies to foster collaboration, enhance student support, and build a thriving, emotionally healthy learning environment.

Missed the webinar? You can watch the full recording on our YouTube channel—[click here to view it.](#)

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" at Theodore Roosevelt School #10



One of the most legendary songs of the holiday season is Andy Williams' "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!" And indeed, it truly was the most wonderful time of the year at Theodore Roosevelt School #10 in Passaic, New Jersey. On Friday, December 12, 2025, Theodore Roosevelt School proudly hosted the first of many community events, the Holiday Cheer Event. A joyful celebration of the

of the season and a meaningful way to close out the year. Open to the entire school community, the event welcomed students in grades K–6 and their families. With more than 50 families and over 80 attendees, the Holiday Cheer Event quickly became a highlight of the season. Families enjoyed a wide variety of festive activities, including photos with Santa Claus and his elves, make-your-own-



cookies station, a hot cocoa station, holiday games and activities, themed photo stations, and a holiday tattoo station, all provided free of charge by school event staff. Students gathered in the center of the room to take photos, chat with friends, and, of course, create TikTok videos. Every staff member who volunteered along with the Action Plan Team and school leadership, including

the principal fully embraced the joy of the moment and didn't want the fun to end. The room was truly filled with love, laughter, and light. Beyond the festivities, the event strengthened family engagement and highlighted the importance of community and togetherness. It also provided students and families with memorable holiday some of which may not always be accessible at home due to varying family dynamics or life circumstances.

These are moments and memories that will last for years to come. Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School is one of our valued district partners, working closely with our Northern Regional Family Engagement Specialist, Faith Victor, to foster connection, inclusion, and meaningful experiences for all families. We eagerly look forward to the next event and many more opportunities to celebrate together.

By Faith Victor,
Northern Region Family Engagement Specialist
NJ Family Engagement Hub

Lunch and Learn Series: Family Engagement in Literacy Family Part 3: Partnership - Working Together for Success



On December 16, part three of the *Lunch and Learn: Family Engagement in Literacy: Partnership - Working Together for Success* series emphasized the importance of strong, intentional collaboration in supporting student literacy achievement. The session examined common challenges that can prevent effective school-family partnerships and guided participants through identifying barriers to collaboration. Attendees learned

practical, actionable strategies to remove these barriers, with a focus on communication styles, shared understanding, and mutual responsibility. The discussion highlighted how enhancing communication approaches and working in partnership can create more cohesive support systems for students and lead to improved literacy outcomes. By strengthening collaboration, schools and families can work together more effectively to support long-term student success.

Join us for our next Lunch & Learn: From Piggy Banks to College Funds: Part 2: Financial Goal-Setting

Welcome to the Team! Evann Hardy



Evann Hardy earned her B.A. in Criminal Justice from Kean University and has worked at the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network for nearly five years. She started as an intake specialist and was promoted to Intake Coordinator after creating a more efficient intake data system for the Parent Training & Information (PTI) Center. Evann has also worked as an Administrative Assistant

and Office Manager, and has contributed to projects like the Community of Care Consortium. She currently serves as the Central Regional Family Engagement Specialist for the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub.

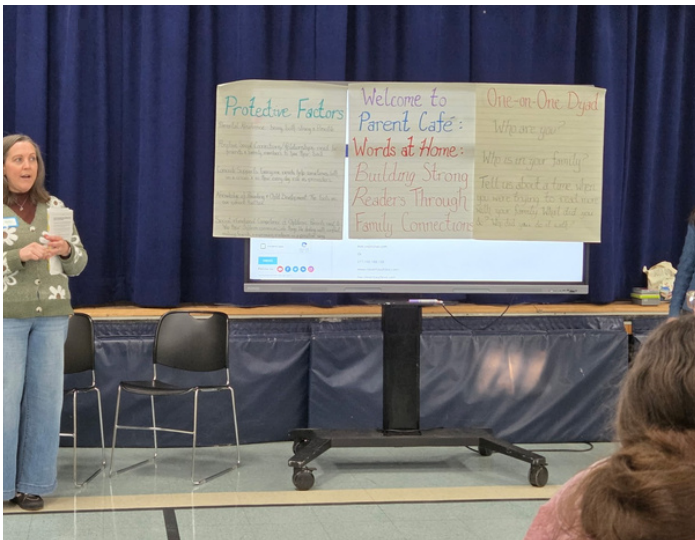
Webinar Recap: From Intentions to Achievements: Family Strategies for Academic Goal-Setting at Home



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.

Words at Home: Building Strong Readers Through Family Connections



On January 15, Tara Szymanek from the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub hosted a Parent Café at Woodbine Elementary School titled “*Words at Home: Building Strong Readers Through Family Connections.*” A Parent Café is a safe, welcoming space where families and professionals come together to have open conversations, share ideas, and support one another. These discussions

allow families to reflect on their own parenting experiences, exchange practical strategies, and learn about helpful community resources. Family engagement is strongest when the community is actively involved, and this event was supported by strong local partnerships. Community partners included, Woodbine Elementary School, Cape May Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), Cape Assist, the Cape May

County Children's InterAgency Coordinating Council (CIACC), and the Shore Family Success Center. Together, these partners collaborated to plan the event, provide resources, and create a warm and inviting environment for families. During the Parent Café, families shared a meal, exchanged resources, and participated in meaningful conversations focused on family literacy and ways to support reading at home.

Parents openly discussed both the challenges and successes they experience while helping their children build literacy skills. Families also received books and literacy-related items as a thank-you for sharing their stories. Overall, the event strengthened family engagement, encouraged collaboration, and helped build trust between families and professionals.

By Tara Szymanek,
Southern Region Family Engagement Specialist
NJ Family Engagement Hub

Lunch and Learn Series: Winter Wellness and Self-Care



The recent Lunch & Learn on Winter Wellness and Self-Care addressed the physical and emotional challenges of winter, emphasizing mindfulness and intentional self-care. Participants learned practical strategies to manage stress, maintain energy, and support overall well-being during the winter months. 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.

The New Destiny Family Success Center's Fathers Advance Initiative (Go F.A.R. — Fathers Advancing and Reconnecting)



The New Destiny Family Success Center's Fathers Advance Initiative (Go F.A.R. — Fathers Advancing and Reconnecting), a name chosen by the fathers who lead and participate in the program, has partnered with the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub to provide training and support to fathers across New Jersey in our partnership school districts. Go F.A.R. is a free

father-led-program designed by dads for fathers and father-figures—that fosters connection, personal growth, and empowerment. The program's mission is to build a strong, supportive community where fathers are encouraged and equipped to be active, engaged, and nurturing parents. We support fathers in developing lasting, healthy relationships with their children and partners while embracing their roles as protectors and positive role models.

Go F.A.R. is guided by dedicated fathers who serve as peer coaches, offering mentorship, encouragement, and practical support to fellow dads. These coaches work alongside fathers seeking growth in key areas, including:

- Building and maintaining healthy relationships with their child's mother
- Practicing responsible, engaged, and consistent parenting
- Achieving economic stability to support their families
- Navigating complex systems such as courts, social services, employment, healthcare, and substance abuse recovery
- Reintegrating into society after incarceration and addressing other critical needs

Through shared experiences and peer support, Go F.A.R. Coaches empower fathers to strengthen their roles as caregivers, role models, and active contributors to their families and communities.

To learn more about: The New Destiny Family Success Center's Fathers Advance Initiative (Go F.A.R. — Fathers Advancing and Reconnecting)—[click here to view it.](#)

Featured Articles and Resources



Discover fun, hands-on ways to turn everyday moments into meaningful math learning. **Click to explore how measuring with kids can spark curiosity and confidence.**

[View the Video](#)

Exploring Different Ways to Measure with Kids. (2023, September 12). PBS SoCal.
<https://www.pbssocal.org/education/exploring-different-ways-to-measure-with-kids>



How many shapes can you spot in your everyday groceries, and what might they teach your family about math? **Click to watch how families turn a simple grocery trip into a fun learning moment.**

[View the Video](#)

WATCH: Families find shapes in their groceries. (2022, October 17). PBS SoCal.
<https://www.pbssocal.org/education/pbs-socal-family-math/watch-families-find-shapes-in-their-groceries>



What if math could be tasted, baked, and shared? Discover how **How to Bake Pi** turns everyday cooking into a creative exploration of mathematical ideas for students, families, educators, and curious minds alike.

[Buy the Book](#)

(How to Bake Pi: An Edible Exploration of the Mathematics of Mathematics: Cheng, Eugenia: 9780465097678: Amazon.com: Books, n.d.)

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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