



**EARLY LEARNING
INTERAGENCY POLICY BOARD**



**PUBLIC INPUT ON
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

FROM: The Advancement Project California
Jessenia Reyes
JReyes@advanceproj.org

1. What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Some key messages we should communicate in a federal policy statement regarding family engagement is to start of with a paradigm shifts in how we see families, we need to see working class families of color from a strength/assets based lens. We continually measure families of color against white, middle class families from a deficit frame; therefore, we need to be centered on the community we are talking about and frame it from a strength lens. We should increase our critique on the institutional barriers more than blaming families. We also need to embrace families as partners for school success and not as a checklist of activities with families. Lastly, emphasizing education as a holistic concept, that happens in and out of the classroom, and has many key teachers – families, as well as classroom teachers. Also thinking about how to define quality in education to include high levels of family engagement (if it is not already?) and to institute policies and requirements that ensure that these crucial components of education are priorities.

2. What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

Some of the barriers to implementing effective family engagement is the systems of privilege, inequity and advantage, school system that see's parents as not good enough or lacking, inequity in our system re race, class, gender, immigration status. There is a lack of culturally competent/sensitive information sharing/distribution to families. When school personnel do not reflect community demographics, it can potentially lead to a lack of understanding community challenges and/or valuing the benefits of family engagement work. There is a need to understand and then meet families where they are, in terms of basics like schedule (cannot engage families who are working if the opportunities are mostly offered during the school day), or more nuanced pieces like concept familiarity, etc.

3. What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

A program that has effective family engagement strategies is Best Start Metro Pointe – engaging parents at a real level where they have the power to make decisions and staff provide ongoing coaching and guidance, but do not get in the way. Other methods of effective strategy are using a popular education model approach in working with families at the school level. Each school, regardless of community has their own culture; therefore, they should be given the liberty and flexibility to be creative and use innovative strategies that responds to the needs of the community/families. Districts need to present culturally relevant information regarding district policies and procedures. For

example: If the majority of the group speaks Spanish, the presentation should be taught in Spanish. The power dynamic between districts and parents shifts when presentations are done in the dominant language of the participants.

4. How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

Look at districts and preschool programs that are partnering between preschool, Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers to build a more continuous pipeline. Capture districts, schools and CBO partnerships that do model family engagement work in other states and work to implement some of these best practices in districts. If successful, we can create policy to run a test project to hopefully go full scale. Potentially consider treating family engagement the same way we try to treat ECE, as a continuum with effective articulation and connections from one step to the next, so family experiences are built upon and supported as a part of an understandable trajectory. Advocate for collaboration time between Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers and their elementary school counterparts around curriculum that would encapsulate family engagement efforts.

5. What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

Some family engagement outcomes states and local programs are targeting are increased reading and math proficiency, increased levels of family engagement within the school, increased leadership of participating families, families given more decision making power within their school site. We measure progress by tracking: family involvement within schools such as committees, back to school night, school volunteer opportunities; family knowledge about their rights as families and their knowledge about school protocol and procedures; family confidence to talk to school personal such as teachers, committees, school administration, etc.

6. How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

A way we can ensure and promote systematic embed family engagement at the local level is by conducting site visits and hosting panel presentations that include school principals, ECE directors, LEA administrators sharing their best practice models. Education leaders are most open to hearing from one of their peers versus advocates. Have a cadre of trained, parent leader advocates ready to share their stories and their communities and how they developed a successful model. Have parent leader advocates train school personal including teachers on effective strategies and best practices on how to work with and engage families at their school/community. Have school administration/teachers share best practices from their school sites with other schools.

Create a support group/committee/toolkits on best practices for districts to readily access. Some shared best practice topics can be around: back to school night family engagement, family volunteer opportunities, report card conferencing, committee involvement, graduation requirements, policies, early care and development information, etc. Since districts have their own database, they can create a “flag”/tag for family engagement outreach efforts for districts to identify how many times schools/teachers has reached out to parents. Since every student has a personal file, this “flag” can be added to determine the points of access for each student. This can help districts determine the number of times a teacher and/or school reaches out to families, which can also serve as a tool to assess which schools might need help with their family engagement strategies/efforts.

Public Comment Regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education's Policy Statement on Family Engagement

Jessica Sager, Executive Director, All Our Kin
July 24, 2015

I am the Executive Director of All Our Kin, a Connecticut-based nonprofit that works to transform quality in family child care programs. We work with over 400 family child care providers who serve primarily low-income families, and our program has been recognized as a model for best practice by organizations such as Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, Zero to Three, and Ascend at the Aspen Institute. All Our Kin also participated in the Early Head Start - Family Child Care Demonstration Project, and we will be expanding our Early Head Start model thanks to an Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership grant.

In our work with family child care providers, we have seen time and again that they can be an extraordinarily valuable resource for engaging with families who are typically difficult to reach. We urge the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education to consider the critical role that family child care providers can play as part of an effective family engagement strategy.

Research shows that family child care providers are more likely than center-based providers to care for children from families with socioeconomic risk factors. Because they are neighborhood-based and more affordable than center-based child care, family child care programs attract low-income families and those who do not have reliable transportation options. Because they tend to have more flexible hours than centers, they can accommodate the scheduling needs of parents who work nights or who have unpredictable employment hours. Finally, many family child care providers are people of color and/or immigrants who serve families from the same communities as themselves.

Parents and caregivers who have low incomes, limited transportation options, nontraditional job schedules, limited English proficiency, and immigrant or minority backgrounds are particularly vulnerable, and they are also the least likely to have their voices heard or to be connected with the resources they need. Family child care providers who serve these populations thus have the capacity to act as community liaisons for those who need information and services the most.

Child care providers are often a key point of contact for families with very young children, who may need multiple services and may be disconnected from other systems of support. Because they have intimate knowledge of and close relationships with families, and because they are so deeply embedded in their communities, family child care providers are uniquely well-positioned to refer families to supports and services, and to recognize and respond to the needs of both children and their parents. In 2012, Lauren Graber, then a medical student at Yale University, spent a year with All Our Kin studying the relationships between family child care providers and parents for her Master's thesis. She found that parents

overwhelmingly trust and follow family child care providers' advice regarding child health and development, as much as or even more than the advice of other service providers including health consultants and pediatricians (Graber, 2012). This research makes it clear that family child care providers already serve as informal sources of information and support.

Furthermore, because family child care providers are often the first teachers that parents encounter, the strength and quality of this relationship may shape parents' future interactions with their children's K-12 educators. With the right investments from national, state, and local governments, this relationship can be augmented and formalized.

Providers can contribute:

- As role models who can demonstrate best practices in child development, reinforce them when practiced by parents, and provide coaching as they see parent-child interactions at drop-off and pick up;
- As builders of social connections for parents, reducing isolation and increasing support;
- As trusted sources of advice and information about culturally sensitive and responsive child development and parenting practices;
- As public health sentinels, identifying high-risk situations and connecting families in those situations to sources of support (or, in some cases, to authoritative intervention, e.g. by the child welfare system);
- As connectors, sharing information about valuable community resources (food, housing, training, employment opportunities);
- As trusted sources of information and referral about children's mental and physical health and development (referring parents to services as needed, flagging potential health issues, educating parents about immunization requirements, etc.); and
- As supports for families under stress.

However, several factors limit family child care providers' capacity to support parents:

- Inadequate knowledge of existing resources and how to recognize when those resources are appropriate;
- Limited available time (providers typically work 10-12 hours a day);
- Discomfort in addressing difficult and potentially sensitive issues with parents;
- Concern about damaging the complex and intimate relationships between providers and families; and
- The need for a strength-based approach to engaging parents as children's first and most important teachers.

These barriers can be addressed, at least in part, by investing in staffed family child care networks, addressing the low wages in the field of family child care, giving providers information about community resources, and training providers to communicate effectively with parents.

The inherent value of the relationships between families and family child care providers has been recognized by the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care and incorporated into the Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership model. I urge the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to explore ways to further invest in family child care providers and programs as part of an overall family engagement strategy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this critical issue. I am happy to provide further information on All Our Kin's strength-based model for working with family child care providers and our experiences involving them in family engagement efforts. I can be reached at Jessica@allourkin.org or 203-772-2294 (ext. 19).

Darlene Anderson
Education Chair
Justice Reform Coalition
PO Box 166065, Sacramento, CA 95817
916-893-9793
www.justicereformcoalition.org
jrc@justicereformcoalition.org

Education in 2015

The education system has changed since I was in school, I graduated in 1976 and still I did not attend all of my personal education in the public school system. But my children did I had three boys and they were all very different but it was my middle child that forced me to get involved in public education he was in the third grade and one day he came home from school and said that he did not want to go to school any more, I could not understand where this was coming from he said that he was not being successful in school but I was attending the parent teachers conferences and everything seemed to be alright the teacher was saying that he was doing alright but he told me that he was not a successful student.

From that moment on I wanted to know what going on he was told me that he was not being successful in the class room and I found out that it was the teacher that we not being truthful, he was not being a successful student. I requested that he be accessed through the Special Education department and then I found and outside doctor to meet with him and I found that he had a auditory disorder where he was only hearing one out of every 10 words. That prevented him from participating in the classroom like the other students. And from that moment on, I got busy understanding what his rights were as far as the services he was entitled to in the public school system. It was not an easy task but understanding the federal laws; parents have rights to help their children become successful. And I must say as long as there is accountability there is success. But the system is far from working properly the system is broken to the point where most children who are coming from higher poverty backgrounds where the parents do not understand, they agree to put their children in Special Education classrooms only to find out that they are below grade level and that is where they remain for the entire life of the public education.

Each one of my children unique, I had a gifted and talented student then I had one that has a specific disability, and then I had a child who was autistic. Each one required support and the system to become successful. And as an African American parent who had all of the support needed because my father was in the Air Forces where they are just there to ensure that all children are successful I have found that it is not that way in America in the public school system.

In the public system of education it is all about continuing to pay employee's that have created programs and services for the last 35 years or more there is no way to ensure that all children benefit . And all children do not benefit I have found that there are a few directions that children go up or down there is no middle ground. Which is crazy they say that it is local control but then they can ignore concerns of all people it is really controversial. People with money who understand the public benefit well they are there to lobby the interest of their children. And then there are those who are there to follow the law and there are law that say that your child but attend the public school system and there are consequences that can happen to you as a parent if your child is not attending school regularly.

What I have found is that State Rights in the public education system means that your are offered a path way it is not making a promise that after 12 years that you will have the ability to be employed. That is and assumption that your public path way would lead to employment. There is no accountability no measure progress for the path ways that the local agencies unitize for a demonstration of achieving success for all students.

In my local district they unitizes school wide and district wide services for title 1 students, with no demonstration of maintenance of effort for the title 1 students. Federal laws require that States demonstrate a minimum of effort for the success of all students when attempting school wide programs but the State of California is not overseeing the effort afforded to title 1 students my local school district provides no data and has not provided any data for the last 10 years to the general public for the achievement of African American Students. I have a real concern for African American students in the public school system in the State of California because the State has adopted maintenance of effort which includes a behavior modification which has to do with social emotional learning with out and effort to teach life skills.

I have attended many local school boards meeting and I have attended the State of California Board of Education meeting only to become a target of local enforcement agencies. I have filed many local complaints and State complaints only to find out that they it has made me a managed user of the personal devices in my home where they are collecting personal information and have assigned a San's policy where all of my personal computer information is stored online. I have learned all about how I have become a target of the State of California because of my advocacy for the children who look like me. Being born in American in any State becomes a State responsibility. Not all States are neglecting their responsibility to produce functional citizens. But here in where keeping people employed for more than 35 years and having no real way to measure productivity has become a real issue of freedom.

I believe that if you're born in America you have a right to believe that services that you receive from the taxpayers will allow you to participate in society. Not become a part of the system of entitlement being trapped in S.D.C. classes

were because you did not have the same early start as your peer's puts you on a path to prison. Because you're not prepared to move forward as other students moves you to a class where there is no oversight because the I.E.P. governs your educational outcomes. And the team determines your level of success that means that you're working two to three levels below your peers of the same age. And no one is ensuring that you ever move forward in life and your parents do not understand that Special Education should just provide a smaller learning environment. You're stuck and by the time you enter in to high school you're on the credit recovery path without the life skills necessary skills to become competitive in the world.

I have been trained by years of participating as an active parent I have served on my local school site council, and I have participated on the local District Advisory Committee for Title 1 and compensatory services. I have participated on the F.A.N that would be the family action network or the States version for Family Engagement under the State of California. I have also participated on a community advisory under West Ed and amazingly enough whenever I have opened the conversation up about African American Students it is just more time that is needed to meet the needs of these students. I say that we are out of time, the practices of denying these parents to participate in the educational oversight of their children has come. It is time that we have a real voice in the failure of the local service providers in the education of our children. It is not acceptable that our children attend public schools and after 12 years they do not have the basic skills to get an entry level job in the local community. It is not acceptable to attend a public service and fail to thrive.

I served as a V.I.S.T.A. for Mercy housing and for Rural California Housing. Where, I served as a V.I.S.T.A. Where sustainability mattered, and the partnerships are still in place that is called sustainability. There is an after-school program at the complex that I had a responsibility in the creation of and there are resident services coordinators that are still partnering with the local school district in the partnerships. I have been involved in my local district but they do not see me as a partner in the children education they see me as a complainer where I focus on what is not working but nothing is working for African American children where they district refused to provide the data regarding the achievement gap.

Their own data demonstrates that they have failure of the African American students; it is time that we change as Americans and have a level of accountability. We can no longer afford to local of a group of people what we have failed to include in our society. I am speaking out because I am tired of my personal property being taken over by the State of California as if I am a criminal.

My son that is Autistic is performing in the public school system and I am not going to move him from the public school system because that is where he has to live. Parents have a right to reasonably believe that after 12 years in the

public system that their children will become successful. There are only a few programs that I believe in and Head Start is one because it teaches parents to be to successful partners in their children education. I do not believe in the State run pre-schools because these programs are being issued out as gifts to friends and family members of those who have been in charge of the public service sector for the last 50 years. America we all have to be free or none of us are free!

Written Input for the Family Engagement Policy Statement

Alice Bell, M.A., Family and Consumer Sciences
CTE certified Secondary (FACS) Teacher/Emphasis Early Childhood
St. Louis, MO
314-556-0331

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

The family has the primary responsibility for nurturing its children. The family has information that must be accessed for plans that impact the development of children. The democratic policy-makers must first listen to what the family needs are for their children and then provide support without becoming intrusive.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS that local communities must address should result in opportunities for all to participate in our democratic process. What do we want kids to learn? Do we want students to learn how to solve problem by using critical thinking skills? Do we want students to learn soft-skills that helps them accept responsibility, achieve self-control and respect themselves and others? Do they need to be able to communicate both verbally and non-verbally? Do they need to work with others in groups or teams to identify problems and to find common ground?

What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

Historically, our society has systematically adapted policies to reinforce prejudices regarding race and class. The images in media focus on negative stereotypes regarding race. Given this reality that our media and advertisement and/or etc. keep negative stereotypes alive; it is important to note that shaping a new paradigm requires more than simply exchanging the word, "at risk" with the words, "at promise. We must have high expectations that children can reach their potential with differentiated instruction designed to fit their needs by providing opportunities to allow families to be included in the discussions in order to listen and hear their voices regarding the needs that they have identified. Discontinuing the blame game and finding ways that do not marginalize children and families; instead replacing these methods with messages that are culturally sensitive and responsive to their needs. Creating a safe, caring environment that does not penalize as means of control behavior, but inspires children to do their best. It is challenging for diverse groups with varied interest to find common ground.

What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

As an African-American mother of twelve and M.A. family and consumer sciences teacher, focus on developing the capacity for students to effectively participate in our democracy is vital. The theory of social dominance provides a wider lens for understanding how minority families adapt to the mainstream culture (Swadener, B. & Lubeck, S., 1995). Based on this research, the mother was responsible for child development. The conservative view focused on child-centered programs with the traditional family structure in mind for shaping public policy. Whereas, the liberal view of family support provide governmental intervention that impose penalties which

force compliance (Swadener, B. & Lubeck, S., 1995). The public policy debate was addressed by Michelle Fine, a contributor in *Ethos of Brown* (Fine, M., Roberts, R., Torre, M., Bloome, J., Burns, A., Chajet, L., Guishard, M., & Payne, Y., 2004). Political programs such as Head Start and GED options were designed for families with children as interventions. It was noted that despite struggles with racism; some parents had success with their black children. Their parents' successes were attributed to teaching their children appropriate responses to social cues of the mainstream culture.

Effective strategies includes multiple ways to get information to families. Keep in mind different definitions of family.

How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

Kozol (2005) proposes that preschool programs commonplace in affluent communities were missing from poorer neighborhoods. Many children entered first grade without having the benefits of kindergarten and/or preschool interventions. This created a gap between low-income and high-income communities. Along those same lines, Kozol (2005) described the inequalities in education funding for preschool opportunities in many cities such as New York, Chicago, and Ohio. Kozol (2005) suggested that there ought to be a national response to this problem. The New Jersey lawsuit *Abbott v. Burke* court decision ruled that the funding for low-income children should be equal to funds spent in affluent districts. This ruling led to major reforms in school funding. Much research still needs to be done to identify what is a high quality preschool program.

Since Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective supports that a child is affected by his and/or her environment, experiences and interactions with other people, the recommendation to increase one-on-one interactions each day with each child is certainly a step in the direction of removing a barrier in the life of a preschool child (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It is imperative for preschool children to have meaningful relationships with educators who are willing to meet their challenging needs.

Secondly....Focus starts with healthy habits for all family members. Parenting education begins with teaching about the role of family for each individual in the family unit. We address the environmental issues of nutrition and its impact upon development of healthy fetus.
Reduce.....Stress in the family.

What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level? The World Café model offers a means of creating a process for engaging others in sharing through conversations. These interpretive actions can help to build capacity in individual and community while addressing the issues relating to early childhood education. These are the elements identified for the café model: (1). a belief in everybody that come together to focus

on a question, (2). diversity to explore different perspectives of the issue, (3). an Inviting space that create a welcoming and safe environment which is free of labels, (4). participants must ascribe to and practice good communication which involves listening to each other, (5). incorporate movement around the room and rotate groups, (6). formulate key question which provides direction for future research, and (7). find ways to inspire and encourage humor through sharing ideas and insight. (Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & The World Cafe' Community, 2005).

Monitor progress....Likert Scale Survey to collect data.



Additional Commentary from the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading*

For Submission to
Interagency Policy Board, U.S. Department of Education &
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
July 24, 2015

** The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading looks forward to having the opportunity to have further conversations with the Interagency Policy Board regarding the questions raised in the notice of July 14, 2015.*

Key messages to include in a federal policy statement on family engagement

Build on the Dual Capacity and Head Start Family Engagement Frameworks that acknowledge that families play a critical role in helping their children be ready for school and for a lifetime of academic success; that when schools and parents partner with each other, students succeed. Other key messages include:

- The success of all our work in closing the achievement gap depends on whether and to what extent leaders at every level help parents succeed in co-producing good outcomes for their kids.
- The science of early brain development links parent-child engagement with children's capacity for learning, particularly in the early years and the early grades.
- Engaging families must start with the premise that every parent wants their children to succeed; that no one loves their children more than they do. Our efforts must be based on that belief, based on trust and based on relationships.
- The work must go beyond engaging families to helping parents succeed. A first step is to help parents envision what success looks like and to own that vision. Once envisioned and owned, promoting parent success requires providing the information, tools and supports parents will need to chart a course toward success, do what's necessary to achieve it and then mark and celebrate the milestones along the way.

Barriers to implementing effective family engagement

- Most schools and districts have antiquated models of parent engagement programming, particularly in schools. Often, modules, tools and staffing of parent engagement coaches/experts are managed out of central offices and are disconnected from the needs of parents as well as teachers.
- Most efforts lack a focus on a result or outcome for why we are engaging parents. Too few focus on building and supporting key parent competencies that will move the needle, for example, on early literacy, good school attendance, summer learning and third-grade reading proficiency.
- A culture of disbelief that parents matter. A reluctance (or lack of personal investment) to having parents as equal partners in the kind of decision making that engages them in being co-producers of good outcomes for their children.

Effective family engagement strategies

- Those that focus on building productive parent-teacher relationships through home visiting, e.g., Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project and the Parent-Child Home Program.
- Those that build the capacity of parents to be strong consumers of quality education for their children, including skills to understand and navigate the systems, know what quality looks like, know their rights, have the confidence to ask for/demand what their children need, can articulate their expectations and can negotiate effectively to get what they need. Generally, these strategies and programs come from outside of the school system, but in partnership with them. A good example is the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Head Start and Early Head Start are also good examples.
- Those that include tools to help parents understand and track their children's progress, such as the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) developed by WestEd.
- Those that share data across systems that impact families and their children. For example, the school district and public housing in Tacoma, Washington.
- Those that bring providers/teachers and parents to develop a common language, explore together how children learn and learn how to work together to help their children succeed. A key example is Mind in the Making at Earl Boyles Elementary.

Another example is a recent LAUSD pilot:

Our most effective family engagement strategy was when we built the capacity of teams composed of teachers, administrators and parents to learn from one another. This required building team capacity where teams assess the habits of parents and teachers and from their interactive learning build their school-site parent engagement program. The model of inquiry-based implementation for teams at LAUSD included: listening and learning, ideating solutions, defining outreach and engagement strategies, PD for teacher and parent facilitators, implementation, and analysis of engagement practices. We saw increased participation in 10 schools where this model was piloted. The results were impressive as we developed a core of 10 active parents to participate in a workshop model that reached and engaged over 100 parents.

draft

Ways to promote effective family engagement in the early years and early grades

- Embed family engagement in every possible aspect within and across the Department of Education, HHS and other key agencies such as HUD, IMLS, USDA, the Corporation for National and Community Service – demonstrating to schools and other local entities that parent and family engagement is not a nice thing to have on the side, or a “one-off,” but an essential element embedded in everything we do, starting at birth.
- Promote a standards- and results-based approach with clear metrics, benchmarks and accountability.
- Provide technical assistance and consulting support; promote and support ongoing professional development beginning with teacher preparation programs.
- Elicit best practices embodied by both the Dual Capacity and Head Start Family Engagement Frameworks.
- Recognize and promote exemplary and innovative local and state family engagement efforts.

Key measures to consider

More parents:

- Interacting with their kids in nurturing and affirming ways
- Enriching their children’s vocabularies and promoting a love of reading
- Tracking and assessing their kids’ progress toward key developmental milestones
- Recognizing and addressing health needs and environmental hazards in the home
- Seeking support at the earliest signs of attendance issues
- Establishing an expectation and a plan for daily school attendance
- Engaging their children in enriching summer activities
- Encouraging, supporting and modeling healthy eating and fitness
- Accessing technology to facilitate ongoing learning during the summer months

draft

CENTER FOR LAW AND EDUCATION

www.cleweb.org

99 Chauncy Street, Suite 716
Boston, MA 02111
(617) 451-0855
kboundy@cleweb.org

reply to:
7101 Holly Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
(202) 986-3000
pweckstein@cleweb.org

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Interagency Policy Board

Meeting on Family Engagement Policy

July 22, 2015

Statement of Paul Weckstein, Co-Director of the Center for Law and Education

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you about federal family engagement policy. I am Paul Weckstein, Co-Director of the Center for Law and Education. CLE works to make the right of every child to a high-quality education a reality and to help communities address their own education problems effectively, with an emphasis on low-income students. As a national support center, CLE developed enormous expertise about the rights and responsibilities of students and school personnel as well as about key education programs and initiatives, including Title I, career and technical education, and education of students with disabilities. Much of CLE's work has been in both the development and the implementation of policy in these areas, including the intersections among these areas and with civil rights.

I am here to convey to you something surprising. It appears that strong family engagement is already happening, at a *deep* level, not just in some elementary schools, but in *every* Title I elementary school in the nation. You're probably thinking, "What is he talking about???" But in fact, the Department of Education actually has the information in writing. It has been assured that every Title I school is effectively providing the following to all parents in the school, just to name a few:

- Participation in the decisions about the education of their own children;
- Involvement in the planning, review, and improvement of the school's academic program, including *jointly developing* with the school the specific program plan spelling out how each of various elements of high-quality education will be provided to all children (including, for example, accelerated and enriched curriculum, effective instructional methods by teachers who are getting high-quality professional development, and timely and effective help whenever a student is experiencing difficulty learning something);
- Access to staff and to their child's classrooms;
- Assistance to families on:
 - working with and supporting their children's learning at home, including materials and training;
 - helping their children be ready for school;
 - how to monitor their child's progress and work with teachers;
- Frequent reports on their children's progress and assistance in understanding them;

- Help in understanding a wide variety of topics about the Title I requirements, the standards for achievement, student assessments, and the school’s programs;
- Full opportunities for participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children;
- Opportunities for regular meetings among parents and with the school;
- Educating teachers and other staff, with parent help, in understanding the value of parent contributions and how to reach out, communicate, and work with parents as equal partners;
- Involving parents in developing the school’s training of teachers to improve student learning, in order to make the professional development more effective;
- Training for parents on how to enhance the involvement of other parents.

You may say, “Assurances? So what? Anyone can sign an assurance.” Well, aside from the fact that districts and States assured that all these things were happening as a condition of being a Title I school, and they are bound to meet those assurances, it’s *not* just assurances. To make sure that these things are done effectively, every Title I school has *jointly developed with the parents of the school* a parent involvement policy *specifically spelling out how* each one of these and other family engagement elements are actually carried out, including a plan for how the school with the parents will assess and improve the policy annually. Not just consulted on the policy, not just involved, indeed not just engaged – but jointly developed it together as partners. And after jointly developing it, the parents of the school have actually *approved* it. And the districts and States have, as they have said, helped the schools develop the capacity to do all this. So, at least as far as the public school side of early childhood is concerned, effective family engagement? Done!

But no, if you somehow hadn’t previously gotten the news that all this is happening in every Title I school in the land, it’s not your ignorance. It’s because this isn’t happening. Just last month, in a workshop at a national conference on family engagement, I asked a room full of people whose careers were devoted to family engagement whether any of the Title I schools they have worked with were carrying out these obligations. Two people said yes. This is the norm.

These provisions of Title I, both those on providing key elements of high-quality education to every child and on engaging their parents as full partners in making sure it happens, have been in the law since 1994 but have never gotten the attention they deserve, from the Department of Education, through the States and districts, down to the schools and communities. In part, this is because of a false dichotomy between “compliance” and “quality,” in which compliance becomes (ho-hum) largely meaningless -- checking off some boxes – and quality is too often toothless, as something optional. There must instead be meaningful, quality-oriented implementation of what the law requires.

In partnership with Generations United and the Baltimore-based Grandfamilies Parent Teacher Student Association and with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, we are currently engaged in a pilot project to implement these underutilized Title I provisions in a Baltimore elementary/secondary school and bring them to life. The project has two distinct hallmarks:

- It is designed as a pilot of serious implementation of these underutilized Title I provisions.

A core group of families and staff took the time to develop an initial process for the school and the parents to jointly develop the Title I family involvement policy, starting with discussion and definition of what it means to develop it “jointly” in true partnership. That process, open to all families, was then used methodically to look at each of the parent involvement requirements in the law, how it was currently being implemented, including barriers, and what was needed to fully implement it, and drew up, operating by consensus, the policy for how it would be implemented. This was done using the criteria that, in light of current practice and problems, the plan needed to be clear enough, specific enough, and good enough to actually accomplish the requirement. As required by Title I, one of the elements was a plan for how to fulfill the requirement that the school and the parents of the school will jointly develop the school’s program plan for providing every student with the elements of quality education set out in Title I. After the initial draft, the families and the school then engaged in a schoolwide process, also jointly developed by them, for further reviewing, editing, and approving the entire policy. As an initial pilot, the process has by no means been perfect, but rather a way of figuring out what it takes, recognizing challenges, and developing lessons for further improvement.

- It is intergenerational. In particular, it draws on *grandparents* who are raising children¹ as some of the key leaders in the work.

Grandparents bring a depth of experience and wisdom. They have raised children before. They have had a longer lifetime to negotiate challenges and deal with institutions. And school staff may be more likely to treat them with a certain respect as elders, which can sometimes enable them more easily to be advocates for children without triggering defensiveness. In addition, they may have more time to work on school issues than parents holding down multiple jobs. None of these strengths, of course, are exclusive to grandparents, but they are often enhanced. Throughout the pilot, grandparents have been leaders both within the project steering committee and in the larger group developing and implementing the policies.

Here are a few responses to the questions posed by the Board, focused on the school side of the equation:

- ❖ “What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?”
 - These Title I provisions go to the heart of ensuring that every child gets a high-quality education and that families’ right to be fully engaged as joint partners is met. We expect those provisions to be fully implemented and are committed to ensuring it happens. We will provide help in doing so.

¹ Under Title I, “parent” is defined to include not only a legal guardian or someone legally responsible for the child’s welfare but any other person standing in loco parentis, such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives. In some cases, the grandparents in this project are raising the children on their own; in other cases, they are deeply involved with the children alongside the children’s actual parents.

- The importance and value of grandparents who are involved in the education of their grandchildren and their potential for playing leading roles in strengthening family engagement.
- ❖ “What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?”
 - Lack of understanding of the key Title I provisions identified here. Schools have not been effectively informed about them or their significance.
 - Lack of attention to their implementation, in both compliance and technical assistance activities.
 - The bifurcation of “compliance” and “quality” in the ways noted above, draining each of them of their meaning and impact.
 - The degree to which the focus on back-end accountability for achievement results, important as it is, has overshadowed front-end accountability and support for implementing the elements of Title I that would enable children to achieve in the first place (as well as contributing to the NCLB backlash).
 - Use of time: Consistent with everything we know about school reform and high-achieving schools, effective implementation of these provisions depends upon the capacity of school staff as well as families to create a real learning community in which they engage in inquiry about current practice and discourse about what is needed to improve it. Getting beyond superficial questions and answers demands time, as well as skill in pursuing that inquiry. And doing so is all the more challenging in meshing school and family schedules. Schools often need help in creating and effectively utilizing that time.
 - (These are in addition to, and intersect with, other family engagement barriers often identified elsewhere, such as issues of race and socio-economic status; measuring family involvement by numbers of parents at a meeting without attention to deeper levels of actual engagement; traditions of involvement in activities that do not go to the heart of ensuring quality education; etc.)
- ❖ “What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?”
 - See discussion above. As noted, our pilot for implementing the strategies in the law is a work in progress.
- ❖ “How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?”
 - Implement these provisions.
 - Make implementation meaningful, with a new understanding of implementation and compliance – one which focuses on actually fulfilling the meaning and purpose of the specific provisions.
 - In addition to working with States, districts, and schools, provide assistance to and work directly with parents and parent organizations (see below).
 - Engage grandparents.
- ❖ “How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at

the local level?”

- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for full, systematic implementation of the key provisions, integrating: (1) distribution of information, (2) provision of technical assistance, (3) program assessment (which involves looking at program and practice, not just student outcomes), and (4) monitoring and enforcement.
- Provide for an independent study of the extent of implementation of the key provisions at the school level and of district, state, and federal capacity-building assistance for schools and enforcement of school-level provisions.
- Establish a grant program to strengthen state and district capacity for both school capacity- building assistance and enforcement.
- Build (through grants and other supports) independent capacity of parent and community organizations to assist families in participating in these provisions.
- Fund, support, and strengthen parent centers so that they are robust, independent, proactive, unconstrained, and highly skilled sources of assistance for enabling parents to be the real partners the law envisions in implementing these local quality provisions and for effectively bringing attention to problems in their implementation.

Understanding the causes of the twenty-year failure to implement some of the most significant provisions of federal law for fulfilling every child’s right to high-quality education is important. But more important still is a positive commitment, at the federal, State, district, and school levels, to going back now together and doing it right. We would very much welcome the chance to work with you collaboratively toward that end.

**Comments for the
Interagency Policy Board and Public Input Session for Family Engagement Policy Statement**

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Some of the key message to communicate are:

- *there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to families or family involvement. Federal policy should recognize the differences in cultures, interests, strengths and challenges that represent the diversity of families, the variety of types of family engagement and the needs of children. Differences should not be stereotyped, differentially valued or forced into assimilation.*
- *Everyone, parents, caregivers, children, professionals and community come to early learning programs, schools and other child serving systems as learners and leaders. Each has strengths on which each other can build. Each comes to the interpersonal connections of family engagement with knowledge about individual children, about community context, about what works for children (effective and research-based practices).*
- *There is a continuum of family engagement and each type is important and engagement strategies should address the development family capacity in the areas where there is the greatest interest and strength. Parents are caregivers of their children and caregivers of their broader communities. Parents are leaders in their homes, houses of worship, communities, work environments, cities and states. Parents are champions of programs and people who they believe are doing the right thing for their children and families. Parents are critical friends who want successful schools and programs and want to have a voice for improvement and accountability.*
- *Today “parents” are fathers and mothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and surrogates, caring neighbors, and foster caregivers.*

What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

While schools and programs see the lack of resources as a major barrier to implementing effective family engagement, even when resources are available, family engagement as a priority rarely rises to the top of the list. This failure to raise up family engagement as a priority is most often due to a lack of the knowledge and skills to seamlessly embed family engagement as a strategy into everything that schools and early learning programs do. Priorities like implementing new evaluations for teachers and professional development, enacting new standards and assessments, selecting programs and curricular, building construction, intervention program adoptions and others on the list of demands on schools and early learning programs are all opportunities for authentically engaging families as learners, teachers, leaders, partners and champions.

The lack of understanding, skills, capacities, and knowledge of culturally-responsive practices in teaching the diversity in students cultures, languages and abilities is also a barrier. The real or perceived lack of competency in this area results in people being afraid to engage, afraid of communities, afraid of groups of people, afraid of looking awkward or incompetent.

What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

As Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers, we support families in their engagement with the schools, programs, providers and professionals that serve children with disabilities using a model of “parents helping parents.” Parents who have experienced similar emotions, stresses, challenges and successes in raising a child with a disability and negotiating the special education and early intervention systems are the best mentors and teachers. The resource specialists and parent trainers at PTIs and CPRCs have to know their local and state systems and how

to access information on evidence-based practices in instruction, technology, interventions and related services, developmental milestones and disabilities. Parent Centers not only educate and support families in the moment of their need, but also build their capacity to collaborate with professionals with the child's interest as their central focus and to become lifelong advocates for their children and families.

Building parent leaders who organize groups to be supports for families in their communities and also to be advocates for and a champions of program improvement is another family engagement strategy that Parent Centers use to leverage the meager resources received through their OSEP grant funding. In NJ, we support more than 200 parent-led groups who, through local activities like workshops, conferences, extra-curricular activities for children, tutoring centers, and college advocacy centers are scaling up the work of Parent Centers, schools and community programs building the capacity of a diversity of families to engage with schools to improve outcomes for children.

How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

IDEA, ESEA, HeadStart and other programs of DHHS and DoED have promulgated regulations and requirements related to family engagement. We encourage the analysis of each of these areas to include measures as to the extent that recipients of federal funding for these programs are truly implementing effective strategies, versus checking a box on a list of assurances. Each new initiative related to outcomes for children should include specific requirements that strategies for effective culturally responsive engagement of families as learners, leaders, champions and partners be explicitly embedded in the work.

What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

Embedding family engagement outcomes into overall program outcomes is critical. They cannot stand alone. Otherwise our goal of embedding family engagement into all program improvement activities is difficult to accomplish. Smart programs and states are looking at where they want their students to be and what they want them to become as citizens of their communities and setting goals around the building the capacities of families, students and staff that are fully articulate these outcomes.

How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

Professional associations must be partners in this work. Through their communication channels and events, they should share the messages about the critical role that effective family engagement can play in the improving the lives of the children that they serve. Also, tap into the competitive spirit of professionals, especially school leaders by highlighting where their colleagues are achieving student success through embedding family engagement in the school improvement strategies that schools/programs must address.

*Submitted by Debra A. Jennings
Director, Center for Parent Information and Resources at SPAN,
35 Halsey Street, Newark, NJ 07102
debra.jennings@spannj.org
www.parentcenterhub.org
862.214.2807*



July 24, 2015

The Honorable Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20002

RE: Questions from HHS and ED and CCAoA responses for the Interagency Policy Board (IPB)

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to the Interagency Policy Board's (IPB) request for comments, the following are Child Care Aware of America's responses to the IPB's questions.

Q1. What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Excellent family engagement begins with comprehensively defining family engagement and creating clear and measurable goals to moving the engagement needle forward. Once the family engagement platform has been set, the challenge of reaching the diverse set of stakeholders, partners, advocates and families may commence with the ultimate goal of touching the lives of children in a way that meaningfully optimizes social and emotional intelligence, cognitive and physical development, and overall health. Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) recommends the following:

1. Create an evidence-based and comprehensive definition of family engagement. Doing so will set the stage for a clear family engagement roadmap for all stakeholders and result in measurable nationwide improvements in core family engagement principles.
2. Support evidence-based research regarding to advance family engagement policy and best practices
3. Develop and publish guiding practice principles for family engagement and supply a library of best family engagement practices for providers and families.
4. Construct clear, measurable family engagement outcomes to gauge progress and to allow for identification and intervene upon core family engagement principles for which progress is slow or progressing at a less than optimal pace.
5. Once measures are identified, assess nationwide baseline family engagement levels, set goals for improvement and measure progress towards meeting family engagement goals (with a focus on continuous quality improvement principles).
6. Ensure that family engagement initiatives are inclusive of all families, regardless of race/ethnicity, special needs, education or income.

7. Parents are aware of and have ready access to resources to better understand and encourage the development of their children. These resources will be most salient and have maximal effect if they are tailored to the diversity that exists presently throughout the US and be geared for people of all literacy levels.
8. For maximal effect, the business community and various workforce industries must be on board to support their working parent employees. The development of business and community partnerships focused on supporting and raising healthy children and families likely will have a dual impact on the health, wellness and developmental outcomes for children and families and have a beneficial impact on employee satisfaction, absenteeism and productivity.

Q2. What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

There is wonderful opportunity to promote family engagement and influence the use of evidence-based family engagement resources in meaningful and practical ways.

CCAOA has identified the following barriers to successful family engagement:

1. Dual-language learner families, in large part, are at a disadvantage in terms of having access to childcare that is consistent with and supportive of their familial culture. Increased availability of child care settings that are culturally competent, bilingual and equipped to provide care to children from diverse family backgrounds is warranted.
2. Opportunity lies in the systems infrastructure and ready availability of resources to support early identification and intervention of at risk children or those with emotional, physical, social or learning disabilities or developmental delays.
3. The infrastructure to meet the needs of families of children with special needs in their home environment and communities for services also could be enhanced greatly and include better access to child care that is accepting, accommodating, and equipped to meet the needs of children with special needs.
4. There are limited early childcare and pre-school/Pre-K professionals who are professionally equipped to serve young children with special needs. Expansion of the early care workforce expertise and training in evidence-based principles is sorely needed.
5. Presently, there is a widespread lack of awareness by providers and parents of family engagement resources – broad, wide reaching and strategic marketing of family engagement resources will be prudent.
6. State child care resource and referral (CCR&Rs) networks and the child care providers and families they serve on the ground are uniquely poised to affect positive change in family engagement in their communities. CCR&R personnel serve communities of all backgrounds and diversities and could be equipped to lessen barriers to family engagement as they relate to the inclusion of dual-language learner, special need and culturally diverse families.

Q3. What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

Child Care Aware of America has a long history of supporting and engaging parents through a variety of activities and programs. The following are some examples of these efforts:

1. Engaging Parent Advocates: The Child Care Aware Family Network is a community of parents, provider, grandparents, aunts, uncles and advocates dedicated to improving the quality of child care for all children. The network offers a platform for families to voice perspectives, experiences, and challenges related to child care quality, safety, affordability, access and flexibility. Currently, there are 11,246 Parent Advocates representing a diverse consumer base.
2. In the past 7 years, Child Care Aware of America sponsored over 100 family advocates from over 30 states as part of our family engagement activities.
3. In 2014, CCAoA hosted a Family Advocacy summit held September 28th-29th, in Arlington, VA with 20 family advocates from 12 states across the country. Activities included:
 - a. A facilitated focus group on what parents want from quality child care. Bottom line results indicated parents desire more awareness, education, ways to engage better with providers, and access to quality child care that's affordable.
 - b. Parent advocacy training and meetings with their Members of Congress, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the White House to heighten attention to the need to make child care more affordable, accessible, and of higher quality.
4. Child Care in America: Parents' Perspectives: During CCAoA's 2010 National Policy Symposium, held March 9-13, in Washington, D.C., CCAoA hosted 44 parents from across the country from 31 states. These dedicated parents traveled to our nation's Capital to share their personal child care experiences directly with policymakers. All of the stories and experiences are compelling, but they are just a fraction of the millions of parents across the nation faced with similar circumstances. The common thread that emerged throughout these stories was that parents want their children to be safe in child care.

Q4. How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

Effective family engagement spans the continuum of early and young childhood in all community, business, and private sectors. In particular, we should strive to:

1. Develop an expert and certified nationwide network of family engagement specialists who work system-wide across the continuum of care from pre-natal through elementary-aged children (e.g., in pre-natal classes for parents, hospital birthing centers, in-home visits, child care settings, preschool, Pre-K programs and school-aged programs) with both families and care providers.
2. Provide free and easily accessible family engagement resources to families, childcare providers, early childhood education stakeholders and school-aged educators and staff. Ensure that these resources promote the use of family engagement practice principles that not only are proven effective, but also feasible within the typical multifaceted and busy everyday environments.
3. Supply interactive on-line training opportunities in core family engagement principles for child care, early education and elementary school and school-aged program professionals as well as families.
4. Ensure that core family engagement principles are included in state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) efforts.

***Q5. What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting?
How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?***

For the past decade, Child Care Aware of America has been a leader in convening and facilitating parent focus groups and opinion polls to better understand perspectives and choices related to child care costs, child care quality, and child care regulation. Some examples of CCAoA publications on these topics include:

1. Parents' Perceptions of Child Care in the United States: NACCRRRA's National Parent Poll (CCAoA's former name was NACCRRRA: National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies): With nearly 12 million children under age 5 in some type of child care setting every week, we conducted a poll of over 1000 parents to determine their perceptions of child care, thoughts on minimum requirements for caregivers, the kind of care they use, what they look for in child care, what choices that make, and what underlying assumptions they make.
2. Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2010 Update: Child care is one of a family's most significant expenses. This report presents information about the average cost for child care in individual states for infants, preschoolers and school-age children in child care centers and family child care homes.
3. The Economy's Impact on Parents' Choices and Perceptions about Child Care: Economy's Impact on Parents' Choices and Perceptions about Child Care presents information on a nationwide poll of 1,000 parents with children under age 12 and their child care choices and perspectives in the current economy. The report revealed that quality and cost remain the most important factors.
4. Recently, in March 2015, CCAoA conducted a survey of its state and local membership. Membership survey results (not yet published) indicated family engagement was a topic of focus for their organization in 56% of respondents.

We anticipate a sharp increase in this metric in the upcoming year as family engagement becomes better defined and CCDBG requirements surrounding family engagement become more apparent.

Q6. How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

The most expeditious and effective way to systematically embed family engagement at all local system levels that span the early childhood continuum likely will involve infrastructure development for a family engagement workforce network. CCAoA recommends the following:

1. State family engagement specialist networks with a State Lead should be developed to ensure the infusion of family engagement in all corners of each state and within local early care, pre-school and school-aged education programs. A national Family Engagement Lead Agency or Center of Excellence could provide oversight, training and technical assistance and access to new and emerging evidence-based best practices.
2. Progress in moving the Family Engagement needle should be measured and incentivized. Meaningful recognition also should be provided to state and local education, community or other stakeholder organizations that develop innovative programs or make marked improvements in family engagement metrics/outcomes.
3. Regardless of what family engagement system model is used, funding must be allocated and supplied to support the commencement and sustainability of family engagement efforts by national, state and local partners.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the Interagency Policy Board on this very important topic of family engagement. A solid policy statement is just what is needed to propel the field of family engagement forward. If you need any further clarifications regarding my recommendations, please contact me at lynette.fraga@usa.childcareaware.org.

Respectfully,



Lynette M. Fraga, PhD
Executive Director

Testimony

Public Input for Family Engagement Policy Statement

7-22-15

My name is Mark Smith, and I am speaking to you as a member of the Executive Board representing the Division for Early Childhood for the Council for Exceptional Children. DEC has historically served as a major voice for professionals and families in the early childhood field, and family engagement and parent-professional partnerships have been and remain important priorities of our membership.

DEC resource development, practices, and activities that focus on promoting competent professionals and families in early childhood programs reflect three DEC priorities:

- a. Our first priority is enabling professionals and families to implement all of DEC's Recommended Practices and helping early childhood personnel preparation programs to implement relevant Council for Exceptional Children Personnel and Preparation Standards to fidelity.
- b. Our second priority is informing and guiding professionals and families with evidence-based resources and events that promote the full community participation of young children with special needs and their families.
- c. Our third priority is providing various opportunities that foster a sense of community among professionals and families.

These statements support the partnership that professionals serving young children with disabilities must have with the child's parents so they are optimally informed, collaborative participants in the provision of services to their child. Partnerships between parents and professionals regarding early childhood services continue to receive increased support in research and practice. Significant sections of the recently released DEC Recommended Practices reflect these priorities.

The DEC Family Recommended Practices focus on three types of practices:

- (1) Those that promote the active participation of families in decision-making related to their child (e.g., assessment, planning, and intervention);
- (2) Lead to the development of a service plan (e.g., a set of goals for the family and child and the services and supports to achieve those goals); and
- (3) Support families in achieving their goals for their child and other family members.

The DEC Family Recommended Practices encompass three themes:

1. **Family-centered practices** that treat families with dignity and respect; are individualized, flexible, and responsive to each family's unique circumstances; provide family members complete and unbiased information to make informed decisions; and involve family members in acting on choices to strengthen child, parent, and family functioning.
2. **Family capacity-building practices** that help families strengthen their existing knowledge and skills and promote development of new parenting abilities that enhance parenting self-efficacy beliefs and practices.

3. **Family and professional collaborative practices** that build relationships between families and professionals who work together to achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes and goals that promote family competencies and support the development of the child.

The Recommended Practices regarding families include: (***) indicates the RPs that serve as exemplars in the promotion of parent engagement and collaboration.)

***1. Practitioners build trusting and respectful partnerships with the family through interactions that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity.

***2. Practitioners provide the family with up-to-date, comprehensive, and unbiased information in a way that the family can understand and use to make informed choices and decisions.

3. Practitioners are responsive to the family's concerns, priorities, and changing life circumstances.

***4. Practitioners and the family work together to create outcomes or goals, develop individualized plans, and implement practices that address the family's priorities and concerns and the child's strengths and needs.

5. Practitioners support family functioning, promote family confidence and competence, and strengthen family-child relationships by acting in ways that recognize and build on family strengths and capacities.

***6. Practitioners engage the family in opportunities that support and strengthen parenting knowledge and skills and parenting competence and confidence in ways that are flexible, individualized, and tailored to the family's preferences.

7. Practitioners work with the family to identify, access, and use formal and informal resources and supports to achieve family-identified outcomes or goals.

8. Practitioners provide the family of a young child who has or is at risk for developmental delay/disability and who is a dual language learner, with information about the benefits of learning in multiple languages for the child's growth and development.

9. Practitioners help families know and understand their rights.

***10. Practitioners inform families about leadership and advocacy skill-building opportunities and encourage those who are interested to participate.

In truth, the importance of family engagement in evidence-based practice is in fact threaded throughout the full set of DEC Recommended Practices. Examples include:

- Teaming and Collaboration:

1. Practitioners representing multiple disciplines and families work together as a team to plan and implement supports and services to meet the unique needs of each child and family.

2. Practitioners and families work together as a team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity and jointly solve problems, plan, and implement interventions.

- Assessment:

1. Practitioners work with the family to identify family preferences for assessment processes.

- Environment:

3. Practitioners work with the family and other adults to modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences.

- Leadership:

6. Leaders develop and implement policies, structures, and practices that promote shared decision making with practitioners and families.

This and other resources regarding family engagement and collaboration are available to the public on our website: www.dec-sped.org.

Given the limited time, I'd like to at least speak to the first inquiry provided by the Board prior to the meeting, specifically

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

I, and many others in the early childhood disability field, contend that the family voice must be purposefully incorporated at all levels of policy and practice regarding early childhood disability services and supports. In addition, family involvement in policy and practice must be tangibly supported. Finally, professional development must increasingly incorporate building knowledge and skills reflecting the philosophy and best practices around professional/family partnering.

DEC is currently devoting effort and resources to address this and the other areas of concern to the Board. DEC could serve as a significant resource to the Board as it moves forward in its work. Let us know how we can help.

Mark A. Smith, M.S.
Resource and Family Support Coordinator
Nebraska Center on Disabilities
Munroe Meyer Institute for Genetics and Rehabilitation
985450 Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-5450
(402) 559-5744
Fax (402) 559-5737
msmitha@unmc.edu



Remarks Prepared for Delivery
Yolie Flores, Senior Fellow
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

July 22, 2015
Interagency Policy Board
LBJ Auditorium
U.S. Department of Education
400 W. Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C.

Good Afternoon.

My name is Yolie Flores and I am a Senior Fellow with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a coalition of funders, nonprofits, business leaders, states and communities across the nation committed to increasing rates of third-grade reading proficiency – a key predictor of high school graduation and a milestone missed by 80 percent of low-income kids in the United States.

From the start, the Campaign has had a close working relationship with HHS and the Department of Education. Both have been part of federal panels we have convened to explore ways that federal agencies can work together to use existing powers, regulations and the bully pulpit to ensure that more low-income kids and families succeed.

We commend you for demonstrating this kind of critical collaboration and look forward to opportunities where HUD, USDA, the Corporation for National and Community Service, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and others join you in doing the same.

Today's convening acknowledges a central and perhaps inescapable fact: The success of all our work depends on whether and to what extent leaders at every level help parents succeed in co-producing good outcomes for their kids.

We have decades of research that confirms parents have **the most influence** in children's outcomes, including academic achievement.

It is now indisputable, given what we know about the underlying science of early brain development, that parent-child engagement is directly linked to children's capacity for learning, particularly in the early years and the early grades. Yet too little has been done to equip and support parents in that powerful role of first and most important teacher.

For this reason, the Campaign has identified key competencies to enhance parent success in three domains critical to school success – school readiness, school attendance and summer learning.

To move the needle on school readiness, we must help schools and communities assure that all parents:

- Interact with their kids in nurturing and affirming ways
- Enrich their children's vocabularies and promote a love of reading
- Track and assess their kids' progress toward key developmental milestones

To make sure more low-income kids attend school regularly, we must help all parents:

- Recognize and address health needs and environmental hazards in the home
- Seek support at the earliest signs of attendance issues
- Establish an expectation and a plan for daily school attendance

And to prevent the summer slide, we must help all parents:

- Engage their children in enriching summer activities
- Encourage, support and model healthy eating and fitness
- Access technology to facilitate ongoing learning during the summer months

First teacher and brain builder; best advocate and coach; most important role model: This is what all parents aspire to be for their kids. But they can't get there alone, and more of us must step up.

For all parents that have this aspiration, we are grateful for your leadership and attention to this important work.

We look forward to working with you. Let us know how we can help.

draft



Harvard Family Research Project

Heather B. Weiss, Director

To: Libby Doggett and Linda Smith, Interagency Policy Board

From: Harvard Family Research Project

Re: Input on family engagement policy statement

Date: July 24, 2015

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) is pleased to provide input on the development of a joint Federal Policy Statement on family engagement by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). We are a respected national organization whose purpose is to shape 21st century education by connecting the many settings where student learning and development happen. These settings include the family, school, afterschool and youth serving programs and digital media. Addressing issues of educational access and equity and identifying meaningful, effective family engagement policies and practices are central to our work.

We applaud ED and HHS for coming together to support family engagement as a top priority and a key strategy in promoting children's learning. We also support the efforts of both agencies in developing powerful family engagement frameworks that place families at the forefront of their children's educational process. Increasing the synergy across these two agencies – as well as other federal agencies that acknowledge family engagement – is an important way to move forward to help administrators, managers, teachers, and family engagement staff prioritize efforts that lead to meaningful change for children, families and communities. Below we respond to four of the proposed questions.

Question 1: What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

1. Family engagement happens anywhere, anytime children learn. Family engagement should be expanded beyond preschool and school settings to encompass a broader range of organizations that offer learning opportunities for children, youth, and families. On average, children spend 6.6 hours daily in a public school. Researchers [Susan Neuman and Donna Celano](#) offer evidence that the achievement gap is rooted in the out of classroom experiences of children—in afterschool, libraries, and summer programs that do not reach children in poor neighborhoods. Policies such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Head Start-Institute of Museums and Libraries partnership, and ED's STEM initiatives with parks and recreation are solid initiatives that address the out-of-school time achievement gap. Integrating family engagement into these initiatives – so that families can support, motivate, and guide or direct children's learning –will benefit children and youth.
2. Family engagement is a shared responsibility. Family engagement is, above all, relational in nature. From our efforts to build social capital and trust among families, schools, and communities, we believe a positive and goal-oriented relationship is paramount in policy and program guidelines

and tool development. As ED and HHS move forward with their crucial work, we suggest emphasizing a strengths-based perspective, one that honors the commitment and endless possibilities for meaningful and effective family-school partnership.

A true partnership demands concrete roles and responsibilities that families and school staff need to execute together. The responsibilities that schools and families share (i.e. supporting learning, promoting school improvement) are the bridge to developing a working relationship that places families and schools on the same level field and helps them perceive each other as partners – not on two different sides of an equation. Consequently, upcoming family engagement tools and guidelines can provide specific ideas and strategies that help parents and school staff transition from a paradigm of “what can they do for our/their children” and “if they do their job and we do ours children will succeed,” to that of a working relationship in which the central question is “what do we need to do together to support our children’s and school’s success,” and, “we are in this together and need to figure out how to make our joint efforts work for the benefit of our children and school.”

Question 4: How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

1. **Encourage high quality transition practices.** The transition from early learning care and education to school is a critical lever for continuous family engagement. In elementary schools, contact with families typically becomes less individual, more regulated, and increasingly driven by the school. Because of this, families’ connections to the school often undergo a shift, and family engagement can begin to fade.

More widespread use of high-quality transition practices can create positive experiences that build the momentum for sustained family engagement. [Quality transition practices are those in which](#) (a) opportunities are available for all stakeholders to build relationships and work as a team, (b) useful information (about children, academic expectations of kindergarten,, afterschool options, etc.) is shared among all stakeholders, and (c) children experience continuity in the curriculum, assessments, and relationship quality they are exposed to across learning settings.

Quality transition practices begin before the start of kindergarten and include individualized communication with families and children. Transition is a collaborative effort among the different adults (families, teachers, and community providers) and institutions in children’s lives. Quality transition practices continue after formal entry into school with regular communication that focuses on children’s academic and social progress and a relationship-based approach that equips families with the information that they need to help prepare and advocate for their children’s school success.

2. **Expand transition practices to include connections with afterschool, library, and other learning environments.** Researchers [Robert Crosnoe and Carey Cooper](#) find that involving kindergarteners in structured activities outside of school, such as in clubs and music, is associated with improved academic outcomes. Successful transitions involve extending learning opportunities to afterschool programs and other enrichment activities in the community, as well as school.
3. **Address equity issues in the transition to school.** Studies have shown that upon kindergarten entry, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds begin school with higher average

achievement scores in comparison with children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These preparation gaps can be explained, in part, by families from low-income households having less access to high-quality preschool opportunities, fewer resources, less social support, and higher family stress than families from high-income households. One of the most exciting research findings is that transition activities can shield children from these risk factors. Put differently, children and families with increased social and economic risk benefit the most from transition activities. In this way, [kindergarten transition might be a very important tool in reducing preparation gaps across income groups](#). Unfortunately, there are inequities in transition practices. Low-income families, who are the most in need of transition services, are the least likely to receive them.

For quality transition practices to be more equitable, communities need to form transition teams that include multiple stakeholders, including families; create transition plans with an equity lens, with goals for children, families, and practitioners from multiple settings; and view the transition as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. System-level supports, such as responsive leadership and professional development, are necessary for this work. This approach to the transition removes people and their ideas from their institutional siloes (home, preschool, school, afterschool) and brings them together to do the shared work needed to engage families during the transition.

Question 5: What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

1. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework offers clear and specific family engagement outcomes. The PFCE Framework outcomes acknowledge the different roles of families in the home, school/ECE program, and community. From our work with the federal Head Start program as a co-investigator in the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement from 2010-2015, we know first-hand that the Framework offers a useful guide to identify the outcomes that best align with the unique cultural, racial, and socioeconomic characteristics of communities.
2. Measuring progress involves being clear about measures of effort and effect. Measuring progress toward outcomes is twofold: (1) measuring effort focuses on what and how much family policies and programs are being implemented, and (2) measuring effect focuses on the “so what?” - the results of policies and programs. [Oregon](#) and [Massachusetts](#) have developed comprehensive Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) with family engagement measures of effort. Oregon created a policy subcommittee on equity, meant to ensure that family engagement practices respond to the socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of children and families. Measures of effect examine changes in knowledge, relationships, and behaviors as a result of a policy or program. For example, a measure of effect shows how family reading practices change in the home after, or as the result of, a family literacy intervention. Both types of measures are essential to advancing family engagement policy and program at state and local levels.
3. Data and measurement are only valuable when they are used. The [“improvement science”](#) approach to education reform pioneered by Anthony Bryk and Louis Gomez creates a paradigm shift. It focuses on data as a guide to learn from successes and failures and connects these data to improvements in practice. Although we have five decades of research correlating family engagement to student success, we have sparse program evidence for knowing what is meaningful

and effective for different types of families across the pre-k-12 continuum and under what conditions. Using data for learning and continuous improvement is a bold promising approach for creating this deeper understanding and widely disseminating validated practices.

Question 6. How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

1. Be clear about the competencies that teachers and leaders need to carry out family engagement in systematic ways and help local districts and states embed these competencies into school improvement plans and quality reviews. A number of states and local districts have taken the lead in this work. For example, [Massachusetts](#) has developed rubrics that describe specific aspects of professional practice, including family engagement, for superintendents, principals, and teachers and has embedded these competencies into professional evaluation systems. [California](#) has developed a series of competencies for current and pre-service early childhood educators related to family engagement. And, [Washoe County School District](#) in Nevada has developed a district-wide Performance Framework that incorporates the extent to which families are engaged in schools as a measure of school effectiveness.
2. Create a technical assistance and training (T/TA) system that gives teachers and school leaders the support, information, and tools they need to engage families meaningfully and provide families with the information and skills they need to share responsibility for **children's learning**. The Office of Head Start (OHS) has successfully created a T/TA system that is designed to support program staff in their delivery of quality services to children and families. The system consists of three components: direct funding to grantees; state T/TA networks that provide regional coaching, and seven National Centers that communicate best practices and provide content-rich, usable, and practical resources to the broader field. The Department of Education can develop a T/TA Center devoted to family engagement, expanding the OHS model into K-12 education and afterschool, through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. This system can provide a variety of system-wide and school-based tools and resources for both school representatives and families.
3. Help states and local school districts work in tandem with institutions of higher education—including both two- and four-year colleges—to provide teacher and administrative preparation in family engagement. Partnerships with institutions of higher education can help ensure consistent standards for family engagement, develop apprentice-like learning where young professionals have opportunities to work with families in different ways, and create a cohesive learning experience for both pre-service and in-service professionals using a variety of different digital tools and in-person sessions. For example, the [Family Engagement Institute](#) at Foothill College provides teachers in training with summer field placements for children transitioning to kindergarten and their families.

**Extended Statement to Interagency Policy Board Meeting
July 23, 2015
Ginny Norton, President, Hatch
Family Engagement**

The Important Role of Technology in Family Engagement Policy

Good afternoon, my name is Ginny Norton. I'm the president of Hatch Early Learning. We take great pride in being known as the leading technology innovator in the Pre-K space.

We all know Pre-K is an essential building block to a child's success in school. I've personally been involved in Pre-K for 23 years and have observed, like everyone in his room, that we have a problem in Pre-K that grows larger and more complex every year – and that, in spite of the best efforts of many people, and the proliferation of advocacy organizations, not-for profits and think tanks, the gaps in early childhood developments grow wider.

These challenges, unmet, can continue to impact a child's development and learning through their education years – in fact the gaps grow wider and the challenges more daunting with each year that a child advances beyond the Pre-K years.

We believe — and we have seen first hand — that **technology is a critical bridge between the classroom and the home – and the teacher and the parent.**

Don't get me wrong – we do NOT believe that technology is the answer to our Nation's education challenges — that responsibility, we believe, rests where it always has, with the indispensable partnership between parents and teachers. Technology's only role is to be a facilitator.

Family engagement is central to finding and implementing solutions to the widely recognized problems of:

- 1) Teacher quality, which includes teacher empowerment, retention and training and support;
- 2) Educating and activating parents. We need informed and engaged parents who see teachers as partners in the education of their child – who also embrace their own role in this partnership;
- 3) Measuring outcomes. How do standards and outcomes inform a consistent definition of what “good” looks like and aid the teacher and the family in focusing in on the critical areas of learning that are identified in both the classroom and home – identified in a broader ‘family’ of education interests?

We believe that any family engagement policy guidelines should recognize and encourage the adoption and use of appropriate technology to enable and facilitate active and robust communication and engagement between educators, administrators and families.

Hatch has created a technology solution which captures what a Pre-K child knows and doesn't know in 18 literacy and math skills that research tells us children need to be school ready.

Data is collected and provided to teachers to make informed instructional decisions, and the data is shared with parents with the intent to facilitate a conversation with the teacher and engage them in their child's achievements in these literacy and math skills.

We plan to launch a national demonstration project in the near future to explore and shape a

national model for the use of technology in the Pre-K space – aimed squarely at the challenges we face in the Pre-K education of America’s children.

Our demonstration project would focus on, among other things:

- Implementing and supporting efficient technology use.
- Using technology to provide data and content for teacher use and to give to parents aimed at improving academic performance.
- Making sure the technology is user friendly – and where necessary with teachers, have available mentoring to encourage and enable use.
- Bring data and ‘learnings’ to parents through technology that parents/caregivers are comfortable with and already using.
- Allow technology to catalyze conversations through automated interactions prompting follow-up, dialogue and action.
- Provide evidence of progress made and catch gaps in learnings before children enter K-12.

I hope you can see, that we view technology as an enabler of informed and focused teachers, helping them to achieve better outcomes; engaged parents, partnering with teachers to achieve results through their participation at home, establishing early on in their child’s education, a commitment to parental partnership; and one way to measure outcomes and readiness of children and help direct changes in curriculum.

We ask ourselves – and the members of this board – what if families had the same information that teacher’s have, and parents became engaged partners in their child’s education?

Hatch supports policy and funding at all levels to support the collection of data about cognition and providing both teachers and parents with robust measures of their child’s progress.

We all have a role. We all have the same goal – preparing every child for success in K-12 during the time that success can be most influenced: ages 0 – 5

We urge the public and private sectors to commit to something better and work together to address these known issues in the Pre-k space – and applaud the Interagency Policy Board for your interest in the input of citizens, organizations and companies committed, as we at Hatch are, in every child’s success.

Thank you.

I hope some of my input is helpful for your meeting. I'm a parent of a 10 year old in public school in FL. I vote, registered as an independent. I pay property & income taxes. I also went to public school as a child in the same school district my daughter now attends. Times have changed, and not for the better. All the parents are treated like they are being disobedient and need to fall in line. Even parents who are eager to help are treated badly. The feeling is rampant through the community, parents are either joking about it or crying (or both). There is no real family engagement in the schools.

Truly,

Michelle Meeks
sunbelleorchids@hotmail.com

Q:What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

A: Family engagement in the current definition in our government = bossing, dictating, meddling, overstepping and intruding into the family home life of the tax payers/parents and students. Nobody really wants this kind of family engagement. Families want the schools and services they are paying for with their tax money. They also want to be treated with dignity on every level. The current attitude on family engagement is demeaning. Please treat the parents and students with respect. There should be NO FEDERAL POLICY regarding locally controlled schools. The government works for the people, not the other way around! There is never enough time and money for academics, but you have time for this nonsense? Have some manners and don't be rude, this should be a policy.

Q:What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

A: The Federal policies which are encroaching more and more are the major barrier. Let the schools have autonomy and stop dictating how to engage with the families. Professional conduct and manners would also be effective.

Q: What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

A: I suggest looking at the most elite private schools in the country and trying to emulate their policies. It might be humbling for those who want to enforce new arbitrary rules in our government.

Q:How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

A: Wait a minute. Now, this is going beyond education and academics. This is a question on how to create a socialist welfare state. For everyone who thinks this is a nice idea, go live in one of those depressed countries in Europe if you desire. Birth through kindergarten should be when babies are loved, get to play, and develop emotionally/socially. The smallest children should not be in an institution. Just let the parents decide what is best. Stay away from non-school age children (your track record with the school-age children is bad enough).

Q: What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

A: It's all phony engagement. Just like these questions! Parents/Students/Teachers all try to be the voice of reason and are thoroughly ignored. I measure the outcome by the incredible waste of time and money while the actual schools get worse. The outcome is obvious to anyone with a brain.

Q: How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

A: You can't ensure those things, not even in a totalitarian dictatorship. The public schools should have complete autonomy (like back when the USA had the best educational system in the world). How do the elite private schools ensure this? They don't even mention any of this stuff. I suggest a shift in focus onto academics instead of behavior modification. This would improve the 'family engagement' on every level because families wouldn't be livid when dealing with the schools. Family engagement in the current definition in our government = bossing, dictating, meddling, intruding into the family/home life of the tax payers/parents and students. Nobody really wants this kind of family engagement. Families want the schools and services they are paying for with their tax money. They also want to be treated with dignity on every level. Isn't that simple?

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1313 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005-4101

202-232-8777 800-424-2460

Fax 202-328-1846

www.naeyc.org

July 24, 2015

Dr. Libby Doggett
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Dr. Libby Doggett:

We at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are excited that the department is adding family engagement to the areas it is highlighting for policy guidance. We would like to underscore several points about family engagement driven by our work in early care and education for children birth to age 8 (and their families).

Families are natural partners with early care and education programs and schools in supporting children's development and learning. Family engagement has long been emphasized as part of developmentally appropriate practice for programs serving young children and their families. It is a hallmark of high-quality early childhood programs. Family engagement is increasingly being seen as a powerful lever for increasing and sustaining the positive impact of early education programs on child learning and development.

Family engagement is so central to high quality learning experiences that it is built into NAEYC's accreditation system, long considered to be the gold standard in defining quality for young children. The NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Criteria include a number of criteria within our program standards that speak to family engagement. For example, Standard 7, "Families," states: "The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture." The Families standard is organized into three topic areas reflecting different aspects of family engagement: knowing and understanding the program's families; sharing information between staff and families, and: nurturing families as advocates for their children. These engagement standards are infused with recognition of and appreciation for the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists across (and even within) families, as well.

Finally, we articulate 6 [Effective Family Engagement Principles](#) for programs, derived from our Engaging Diverse Families study that are important guides:

- [Principle 1](#): Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child
- [Principle 2](#): Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication
- [Principle 3](#): Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal
- [Principle 4](#): Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community
- [Principle 5](#): Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts

- [Principle 6](#): Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement

Mounting research shows the importance of family engagement in supporting the learning and development of children that spend some time in settings away from their parent(s). We are excited that U.S. ED is making strides and bold statements to support this important aspect of children's lives.

Sincerely,

Marica Mitchell

Marica Mitchell
Deputy Executive Director
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
1313 L Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTERS

On behalf of the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), an organization representing over 400 private specialized programs through our national membership and our 8 Council of Affiliated State Association members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Parent Engagement questions.

NAPSEC member programs, located across the United States, serve both publicly and privately placed students with disabilities. NAPSEC members have a long history of working with families to help ensure their children receive appropriate services based on their individual needs.

NAPSEC feels strongly that providing families with educational information and resources is fundamental for positive student outcomes. The following paragraph says it best...

“Parent involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (b) parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and (c) parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.” *Brookfield, Cherry Hill, NJ.*

Below are responses from our members.

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Parent involvement remains a strong predictor of academic achievement for all students. Keeping parents informed of what is going on in the schooling of their children, not because we have to, but because we genuinely want to, is appreciated by families. Schools cannot be successful without constant communication and openness. Engaged parents are critical to the overall educational process of their child/children.

We need to understand the unique needs of families and make sure we communicate to them in their native language. Interpreters are critical as well. We need to honor cultural differences for the families to ensure they feel valued. We need to know what the family desires for their child and then how to develop programs that show we are listening and working to address these needs.

Have a one stop shop for a directory/web site that provides resources for parents that includes specialized services, support services, federal laws, the services required under the law and the services that are available to support families throughout the school year. This information is out there but not in one place, making it difficult to gather. The more clear, user friendly information that is available, the better able families are to take advantage of current services.

What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

Communication has to be done in a manner that is consistent with how people communicate on a daily basis in today's society. Sometimes it is difficult for a parent/guardian to engage in a phone call, but a text message could be all they need to give them a heads up as to what is going on with their child at school. Another barrier to effective family engagement is that most of the engagement/communication that is done is to relay negative information, or "bad news". More positive engagements have to happen with families in order to be effective. Utilize positive behaviors with families at all levels.

Families are often overwhelmed with life activities. They need to feel connected to the school and that they will receive a positive return by being involved. Child care is a concern as well as programs in their native language.

What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

Programs for families - topics include: Bullying, Reading Readiness, Children's use of Social Media, Home visits related to students who are struggling academically and emotionally, math strategies, book fairs, school carnival, parents are invited in to see projects such as Holidays around the World. This includes foods the children have cooked, their decorated room, art work and posters, etc. We also did a USA program. Each class took a State and shared all they had learned during a parent visitation afternoon. At the Academy, we have had Donuts with Dad asking fathers to join their child at school. We have a spa day for the mothers with the students providing services. These are just a few of our activities throughout the year to get and keep families engaged.

"Remind initiative" this allows us to not only increase communication, but increase effective and worthwhile communication to our families. I also think the various events that we hold for our families that showcase student work and accomplishments are always a good way to engage. We also utilize daily point sheets to send home to parents to give them an update on how their child performed throughout the school day. This form then comes back signed to show that parents actually saw the sheet. In the future, pictures of these sheets can be sent directly to parents via Remind texts.

Providing babysitting services. Having dinner or some type of refreshments. Showing students work both academics and the arts. We invited parents to an ice cream social and provided a skill based class for them. We had Arts fair displaying student art for families/friends. Parents attending events seem more at ease and comfortable talking with staff about their child and his/her progress in school.

Hold Parent Classes: Teach Parents that research has also shown that there are long-lasting effects of parent involvement on the academic achievement of adolescents and young adults. Specifically, parents who hold high expectations for their teens, communicate their expectations clearly, and encourage their adolescents to work hard in order to attain them can make a difference in students' success. Additionally have topics such as dealing with adolescents and strategies that program social workers can help families with.

How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

The biggest way that we can promote effective family engagement is to educate parents and families about their rights and the rights of their students throughout the educational process. In order for anybody to be engaged in something, they must be aware as to how things work. We also need to educate families on what opportunities and options exist for their children to utilize to help maximize their educational experience.

The more programs offered for young children and their parents/guardians through the local LEA the more families will feel comfortable being at school. From birth, library activities for children to be read to and the importance of books and literacy. Workshops on toys and how to play with your child is also helpful. Parents need to see the schools in a positive light and know they are there to help them. States will need to find ways to provide funds so schools can operate more than just from 9 – 3.

Establish opportunities for parents to build their own skills and expand their knowledge:

- ✓ Provide trainings and workshops that model for parents and guardians how to support reading and math skills for younger children and educate families on the middle school and high school selection process. For older students, provide workshops on the college application and financial aid processes.

- ✓ Provide multiple opportunities for families to be involved through a variety of activities at school and at home, and communicate with them regarding the various factors that promote students' academic success.
- ✓ Use a monthly newsletter that informs parents about current curricular activities and that showcases student work.
- ✓ Communicate with families regarding the factors that promote students' academic success.
- ✓ Help families' access data about their child's attendance and performance. (Real Time)
- ✓ Create opportunities for parents to connect and build networks.
- ✓ Some parents may feel more comfortable engaging with other families rather than the school.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for parents to build relationships with each other to facilitate peer learning and information sharing via parent meetings or program events and workshops.
- ✓ Create a welcoming school environment that respects and celebrates language and cultural diversity.
- ✓ Display student work throughout the building and ensure families receive written communication in the home languages they speak, or provide translation services.
- ✓ Actively encourage and facilitate family participation in school events.
- ✓ Publicize events early and often using multiple methods including on the school website or social media, via fliers or phone calls, and in newsletters.
- ✓ Make an effort to accommodate parents' work schedules.
- ✓ Facilitate relationship building and information sharing between families and school staff.
- ✓ Ensure that parent-teacher conferences are productive and maintain regular communication of student progress between formal meetings.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for family contributions and leadership.
- ✓ Regularly solicit parent feedback and input on school activities and events.
- ✓ Encourage parents with leadership capacity to be parent representatives on school leadership teams.

Two-way communication between home and school helps build an on-going, productive, and trusting relationship between parents and educators, which increases parent participation in learning activities both at home and at school.

What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

Increase the level of communication to families as well as the efficiency of the communications. We aim to bring value to our families through communication of school events, positive and negative issues that may occur, and whatever else needs to be communicated in a clear and consistent way.

We use simple sign in accountability for parent meetings and events. We track the number of times parents check the parent portal. We now engage in a new platform that will allow two way communication from home to school, which will provide a realistic view of the amount of involvement in the school our parents are currently committed to. This baseline data will help target specific “fall-shorts” that can be built upon.

How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level

Education of these key school members is critical. This can happen in college-level courses, professional development seminars, etc. Establishing an effective and efficient level of family engagement starts with building a professional administration. If administrators have a working vision as to how to achieve this, the expectations and protocol can be communicated to staff. The vision has to be shared by everyone in the building and this requires an administrator that can unite the staff and get staff buy-in. It needs to be demonstrated to staff that the new initiatives will have value for the students and families.

For new leaders this must be a part of their educational requirements. Generally, if there is a financial incentive, the district administrators will look to see how they could make this happen. The major concern is the time needed to

implement this systematically in a district. Districts are doing more with less staff and money. There are so many mandates at this time for districts to do all the requirements well.



Comments from the National Black Child Development Institute to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED) for consideration in the development of the policy statement on family engagement.

Over our 45 year history, the National Black Child Development Institute has made family engagement a cornerstone of our efforts, and we are thrilled to see this Administration elevate its importance and convey its centrality to the healthy growth and development of our children.

We hope that the federal policy statement will put to rest any lingering questions about the effectiveness of family engagement as a high-impact strategy for improving schools and increasing achievement. Research unequivocally demonstrates that high-performing schools maintain strong communication with families, while low-performing schools are characterized by weak family engagement – which means that the preparation of teachers for family engagement becomes not only an issue of good practice, but also one of equity.¹

As we look to implement policies that make real the oft-quoted maxim that “parents are their children’s first and most important teachers,” we encourage you to operationalize a definition of family engagement as a “systemic and sustained commitment that occurs across time, spans many settings, and requires shared responsibility from all parties.”²

Within this frame, we encourage you to support families’ access to and ability to inform state, district and school budgets, so that they are able to see and compare how much is being allocated to family engagement – and what kind of strategies and activities are being funded. Transparency should be required, so that families are equipped with the information they need to advocate on behalf of their children and their community.

We also encourage you to explicitly support the provision of and funding for two-generation strategies such as home visiting and comprehensive wrap-around services and supports for families and children, which are designed to ensure children are safe, healthy, happy and learning beginning at birth. As a part of this, we recommend establishing an evaluation “pipeline” that supports innovation at the community level, and helps new programs to earn the right to become “evidence-based.”

Equally importantly, we encourage you to focus on engaging higher education systems that prepare our teachers and school leaders. The strength of the evidence on the positive impact of family engagement almost mandates that standards and curricula be revised to substantively inform building a knowledge base of theory and best-practices for our future educators specifically related to family engagement. Even further, because of the critical nature of relationships to this work, and given what we know about the demographics of our children and our workforce, ongoing professional development, including

¹ Caspe, Margaret et al. (2011). *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement*. Retrieved online from: https://www.pta.org/files/Issue_Brief-Teacher_Prep_v2.pdf

² Weiss Heather, et al. (2009). *The Federal Role in Out of School Learning: After-School, Summer Learning, and Family Involvement as Critical Learning Supports*. Harvard Family Research Project, commissioned by the Center on Education Policy.

coaching and mentoring opportunities that help teachers and school leaders effectively apply family engagement strategies across race, class and culture is paramount.

A parent once memorably said, “Educators need to know that for parents of Black boys, resisting the relentless rumors of inferiority about our children and about ourselves as parents is exhausting.”³ We have the responsibility to respond to this reality by transforming our approach, moving away from so-called “random acts of family engagement.”⁴ We must focus our efforts on ensuring that family engagement is defined by significant investment, meaningful relationships and an ongoing series of aligned and comprehensive supports that help families and children build on strengths and create a deep foundation of connection in the early years.

³ Ward, Janie Victoria. (2008). “Helping Parents Fight Stereotypes about Their Children.” Everyday Anti Racism: Getting Real About Race in School, Ed. Mica Pollack. New Press: New York. p. 315

⁴ Caspe, Margaret et al. (2011). *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement*. Retrieved online from: https://www.pta.org/files/Issue_Brief-Teacher_Prep_v2.pdf

Libby Doggett
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20202

Linda K. Smith
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20201

July 24, 2015

Dear Deputy Assistant Secretaries Doggett and Smith,

Thank you for granting the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) the opportunity to speak in support of family engagement on Wednesday, July 22, and for the opportunity to submit expanded written input in response to family engagement questions posed by the Early Learning Interagency Policy Board.

NCFL is a non-profit organization dedicated to inspiring and engaging families to learn together. Since 1989, NCFL has helped millions of families make educational and economic progress by pioneering—and continuously improving—family engagement programs at more than 100 sites across the country. Our body of work ranges from building, supporting, and sustaining family literacy and family engagement initiatives, to the creation of digital family learning platforms like www.wonderopolis.org and www.familytimemachine.com, and providing comprehensive professional development consultation and services for school districts, libraries, and non-profit organizations.

Family engagement is at the core of the work we do. While there is robust work going on around the country, there is much room for improvement on the federal level to support and expand those efforts. We are excited at the initiative the Early Learning Interagency Policy Board has taken to strengthen family engagement, and we would like to respond to each of the questions posed by the Board:

1) *What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?*

NCFL believes the family engagement message should focus on the family unit as the basic building block of society. Engaging more than one generation in learning together positively impacts the entire family, and in turn, the larger community. When this most basic social structure is engaged in an effort to make education a joint affair, the potential to improve America's trajectory is greatly enhanced. Additionally, research indicates that the inclusion of more than one generation in education increases the likelihood that college and career readiness will be passed on as a shared value. What is important is that the family engagement is family led, authentic, and built on a two-way exchange of information, mutual trust, and respect between families and the schools and community groups within which they are engaged.

Today there are more methods of engaging families than ever before, and so we have enhanced our message to stress the importance of using the Internet and other technology as family engagement efforts, including those which we champion are increasingly inclusive of both online and offline opportunities. The Internet poses a major opportunity to engage more families where they spend much of their time.

2) What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

NCFL encounters two kinds of barriers to effective family engagement. The first is a resource barrier. This can be the result of a parent or guardian being unemployed or underemployed. Research indicates that low income families can benefit from parent/guardian capacity building and joint family learning (a concept we refer to as Parent and Child Together Time or PACT) more profoundly than higher income families. Another barrier can be attributed to limited funding for programs and initiatives based on effective family engagement.

Another barrier we encounter is theoretical- often there is a lack of acknowledgement of the positive impact effective family engagement can have on low income and ethnic minority families. We also observe a lack of information about effective family engagement strategies.

3) What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

With programs in 54 cities and 44 Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, we find the following approaches to be the most effective family engagement strategies that we have implemented at the local level: comprehensive family literacy and learning programs; family engagement initiatives that tie research-based interactive learning strategies in the classroom to the same or similar practices in the home and community; and the use of digital learning tools in interactive and intergenerational learning initiatives during both in school and out of school time. Our free online platforms Wonderopolis and Family Time Machine are examples of the successful integration of digital learning into family engagement.

4) How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

NCFL suggests that the Obama Administration can promote effective family engagement through strengthening policy to include deliberate investments in effective family engagement practices. Based on our own success, we also believe that encouraging partnerships that foster effective family engagement practices such as family literacy and learning and removing the above-mentioned barriers to family engagement will be helpful in the promotion of effective family engagement strategies.

5) What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

NCFL strongly believes in rigorous evaluations of its programming, and we work with several independent evaluators including the Goodling Institute for Family Literacy at Pennsylvania

State University to measure these outcomes using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Some of the outcomes we reach include parent or guardian self-efficacy and confidence, parent or guardian implementation of interactive learning strategies, parent or guardian skill-building for college and career readiness (including job acquisition and maximization), student attendance, student behavior and student achievement.

6) How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

Family engagement can be promoted and systematically embedded at the local level by creating systems that encourage family engagement as family led, authentic, and built on a two-way exchange of information, mutual trust and respect between families and the schools and community groups within which they are engaged. Partnerships are critical to serve this purpose. And finally, increasing funding options through policy for state and local communities can significantly foster effective family engagement.

Thank you again for seeking NCFL's input about ways to enhance family engagement. We applaud your attention to this critically important component of education for both children and families. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Joshua Cramer at jcramer@familieslearning.org or Kuna Tavalin at ktavalin@wpllc.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon Darling".

Sharon Darling

President and Founder



Libby Doggett
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20202

Linda K. Smith
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20201

July 24, 2015

Dear Deputy Assistant Secretaries Doggett and Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the Early Learning Interagency Policy Board on the proposed Family Engagement Policy Statement. Parents as Teachers is an internationally recognized network of organizations and professionals that supports thousands of families in all 50 states and more than 100 tribal communities and Urban Indian organizations through a proven parent education model featuring in-home visits with parents and children.

Parents as Teachers is always pleased to partner with the Department and welcomes the leadership demonstrated in these policy statements and we would like to respond to each of the questions posed by the Board:

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

- Acknowledge that families come in many varieties. In some cultures uncles play a key role in child development, in others it is elders and grandparents. Families may be single-headed, include same sex parents, are headed by a grandparent or fictive kin. The role of fathers in their children’s development should be uplifted. Family structures must be respected.
- Parents are their child’s first and most influential teacher and must be held central to all child development decisions.
- Family engagement involves partnering with parents. Partnering requires: mutual respect, shared power, openness, shared investment, trust, acceptance, encouragement, shared responsibility. Parents must be listened to, and their opinions valued. Parent involvement/engagement needs to start early. The earlier it starts, the more active parents are in their child’s life.
- Child settings – including childcare, pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten, school, and college – must be open, welcoming and supportive to parents and families.
- Recognize that there are levels of engagement; all families will not be at the same level, nor engage in the same way. Meeting the parents where they are and building on that is key.

Board of Directors 2015–2016

Officers

Thomas C. Melzer
(Chair), MO

Patricia Kempthorne
(Vice Chair), ID

Tom Curran
(Secretary), MO

Donald D. Roberts
(Treasurer), MO

Members

Christopher “Kit” Bond
(Life Member), MO

T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.
(Life Member), MA

Sheila Casey, DC

Maxine Clark, MO

Steffanie Clothier, J.D., CO

Katrina F. Farmer, MO

Mark R. Ginsberg, Ph.D., VA

Luis A. Hernandez, FL

Stephanie M. Jones, Ph.D., MA

Colleen A. Kraft, M.D., OH

Michael L. López, Ph.D., MD

Carolyn W. Losos
(Life Member), MO

Arthur L. Mallory, Ed.D.
(Life Member), MO

Mary Anne Mathews, SC

David L. Morley, SC

Janet Newton, KS

Gregory L. O’Donnell, IL

Jane K. Paine
(Life Member), MO

Stacey Preis, Ph.D., MO

William Reichmuth, MO

Steven Rosenblum, MO

Richard Sems, MO

Don Senti, Ph.D., MO

Renee Welch, Ph.D., IL

Sharon Wells, NM

Edward F. Zigler, Ph.D.
(Life Member), CT

President/CEO

Scott Hippert, MO

Ex-Officio Members

Governor Jay Nixon, MO

Margie Vandeven, Ph.D., MO

Founding Director

Mildred Winter

Our Vision: All children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential.

2228 Ball Drive Saint Louis, Missouri 63146 p 314.432.4330 f 314.432.8963 www.ParentsAsTeachers.org



AN INDEX OF TOP NONPROFITS



CREATING SOCIAL IMPACT

What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

On the part of childcare providers, caregivers, teachers:

- Lack of training in family engagement skills and not recognizing its importance
- Insufficient time to spend with families; too many responsibilities and too little time
- This workforce is often underpaid and may also suffer from the stresses which their families experience. While this could encourage empathy, family crises, financial, health, or other issues may leave the worker simply stressed
- Not presenting a welcoming attitude
- Cultural ignorance or incompetence
- Language barriers

Parents:

- Too exhausted, too busy working multiple jobs, or too stressed (relationship crises, finances, health issues) to be able to fully engage
- Negative past experiences that trigger caution or distrust
- Low cognitive level
- Mental health issues
- Lack of motivation or value in the parenting role
- Conflicts with family culture
- Engagement is dynamic, parents may be ready and willing at one time and disengaged at another
- Families in poverty and/or with multiple risk factors may require more patience, creativity, and persistence
- Family doesn't feel welcomed to engage.

What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

- Evidence-based home visiting that partners with parents from as early as during pregnancy and helps families identify and build on their strengths. These programs also help parents learn to become advocates for their children in the childcare and school settings.
- Work with families on transition strategies – home to childcare to kindergarten to K-12 to college
- Build trusting relationships, maintain confidentiality, acknowledge and accept the family roles, respond flexibly to the family's needs and routines, recognize personal resources and support systems, work collaboratively to set and achieve goals
- Meet parents where they are and build from there.

How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

- Fund evidence-based and promising practices in home visiting
- Share best practices through professional learning sessions and peer-to-peer discussions
- Provide funding and resources for skill building and training

Our Vision: All children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential.

What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

- Engagement is a dynamic and complex topic with a variety of definitions.
- HOVRS – is a measure used by some home visiting programs to measure parent engagement during visits.

How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

- Help them understand the return on investment; if families are engaged, children are more likely to show up regularly at school and prepared to learn.
- Educate them on the range of evidence-based models.

Thank you for the opportunity to add our input to the important work you are doing in regard to family engagement. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at Alison.Gee@parentsasteachers.org.

Sincerely,



Alison Gee
Vice President of Government and Community Relations

Our Vision: All children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential.



Interagency Policy Board
Public Input Session
Policy Statement on Family Engagement
June 22, 2015

Remarks Submitted by Deborah Roderick Stark
Secretary of the Board, NAFSCE

Introduction: I am Deborah Roderick Stark, Secretary of the Board of NAFSCE, the only professional association focused on advancing high-impact family engagement policies and practices to improve children's learning and eliminate achievement gaps.

I appreciate your leadership in bringing the departments together to develop a federal policy statement on family engagement. It is upon a foundation of strong, engaged families and communities that the quality and effectiveness of America's public education system rests. Engaging families in children's learning is essential for strengthening our educational programs from birth to college so that all children will have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

I come to family engagement from the Head Start and Early Head Start world where family engagement is a core component of all programs. The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework issued by Head Start explains that family engagement activities must be systemic and integrated in programs from top to bottom.

Not only has Head Start developed a research-informed framework, but HHS has put real dollars into building resources and a technical assistance system to help programs transform practices. What happens in Head Start spills over to other early childhood settings, so that the Department's contributions support the broader early learning community to create environments and experiences where teachers and parents work together in positive and goal-oriented relationships to advance school readiness.

The same level of investment is needed in the K-12 space. NAFSCE commends the U.S. Department of Education for issuing its Dual Capacity-Building Framework in 2014, but urges you to make investments comparable to those at HHS to advance high-impact family engagement strategies.

What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

1. Family engagement is an essential strategy for promoting child development and improving student learning.
2. This is not about “fixing parents,” it is about parent-teacher collaboration to support children’s achievement.
3. Both educators and families need support to collaborate, and information about effective practice.
4. Family engagement is a shared responsibility -- this must be made clear.

It would help the field if a policy statement offered a clear definition of family engagement that would apply to all federal investments. At NAFSCE, we define family engagement as a *shared responsibility* between home and school. When done well, schools and other community organizations commit to working with families in meaningful and *culturally respectful* ways, and families commit to supporting their children’s learning and development. Family engagement is *continuous across a child’s life*, from cradle to career, and *carried out everywhere children learn* – at home, in early childhood programs, in school, in after-school settings, in faith-based institutions, and in community programs.

What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

Despite the research, too often school reformers have bypassed family engagement, failing to recognize it as a core element of school improvement. If it is discussed at all, family engagement is often an add-on rather than a core component. Further, few educators have the training to know how to engage families in ways that support student outcomes.

1. Teachers and administrators lack knowledge about how to engage families. They say engaging families is their biggest challenge and the area where they are least well prepared. (Met Life Survey of the American Teacher, 2005)
2. Family engagement is not recognized as a high priority and is starved for resources.
3. Engaging families is seen as a responsibility in Title I but not across other federal programs.
4. Teacher preparation programs need to improve curriculum on family engagement and embed the content across their course of study.

What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local or state levels? What works?

Abundant research documents the importance of what we call “high-impact” family engagement. Integrating and combining effective family engagement practices (such as frequent and positive communication, face-to-face contact, and sharing learning

materials) into early childhood and elementary school instruction can significantly accelerate and sustain student gains (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001; Jeynes, 2005).

Organizing Schools for Improvement, an acclaimed study on school transformation, found that forming close ties with families and community members is one of five “essential ingredients” for turning around low-performing schools. In this rigorous study, “close ties with community” means that teachers understand local community issues and use community resources. “Close ties with families” means that teachers give parents an opportunity to observe in class, make an effort to understand families’ concerns, and see families as partners in improving student learning (Bryk et al., 2010).

Some examples of high-impact and research-based family engagement strategies are:

- Building personal relationships and mutual understanding between teachers and families;
- Sharing data with families about student skill levels;
- Modeling effective teaching practices so families can use them at home;
- Listening to families about their children’s interests and challenges and using this information to differentiate instruction;
- Incorporating content from families’ home cultures into classroom lessons;
- Aligning family engagement activities with school improvement goals.
- Developing families’ skills to advocate for improved learning opportunities for children.

How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school at the state and local levels?

- Build strong family engagement practices from the earliest years so that families embed them into the home environment.
- Create transition programs to incorporate those practices into elementary school settings.
- Create welcoming, inviting cultures at all levels of schooling. Parents say that Head Start is welcoming but going to elementary school is like hitting a wall.
- Tie family engagement to school improvement plans and quality rating and improvement systems.

What family engagement outcomes are states and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress?

We highly recommend looking at the Illinois State Board of Education’s Framework on family engagement. The state has developed a guide for all state and federal programs based on current research and lists effective practice and expected outcomes for each practice. **Go to:** <http://www.isbe.net/family-engagement/html/framework.htm>

How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators and other leaders promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

Principals and program administrators need to understand and value the role of families in supporting children's learning. They need to set family engagement as a priority and build it into the structure of schools and programs. Family engagement is not just for Title I schools. That means funding to train and implement family engagement is included in the school budget; professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators are available; and teacher performance is measured in part on how they are engaging families.

Higher education needs to be challenged to bolster curriculum on family and community engagement and align it with research. It is imperative that we build the knowledge, skills, and capacities of educators to engage families in service of children's learning.

The *State Education Agencies (SEA's)* can offer very clear guidance on what constitutes high-impact family engagement, including delineation of appropriate uses of Title I funds. Many, like Illinois, are already working on this. Increasing dedicated resources to support state family engagement offices will enable all SEA's to have the necessary capacity to prioritize developing high quality frameworks, standards and assessments which promote culturally responsive family engagement as a key strategy to student achievement and school improvement.

At the *school, and district level*, family engagement should be tied to school improvement plans. In the early childhood space, family engagement should be part of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.

It is also important to support capacity via *state and local family engagement centers* that can provide the training and technical assistance needed for early childhood programs and schools to implement high-impact practices.

Finally, there needs to be much greater investment in *research and evaluation*, funded by the federal government, with strategic sharing of findings so that they influence both practice and policy.

The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) was launched in September 2014 to advance high impact policy and practice, to promote child development and student learning, and to erase achievement gaps. NAFSCE engages in policy development and advocacy but does not conduct lobbying. For more information and to join the listserv, go to www.NAFSCE.org

Comments submitted by Angel Rich, Founder and CEO, The Wealth Factory
angelrich27@gmail.com

1. What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Family engagement should be a requirement enforced by all schools. If parents do not participate in family engagement activities they should be fined. Family engagement should be from pregnancy to higher ed.

Students should be required to be a certain weight bracket at certain ages to prevent sickness which leads to lower attendance. Parents should be required show proof of physical checkups and healthy planning. If a student is highly unhealthy for preventable reasons the parent should be fined.

2. What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?

Teacher engagement is the highest barrier. We must incentivize teachers to build strong relationships with parents and provide rewards for parents for having high family engagement. Both parties are at odds right now. There is often a weekly altercation in most DC schools between parents and teachers.

3. What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?

- **WealthyLife** teaches students financial literacy and workforce development through education technology games. We walk students from birth to retirement in 12 interactive modules that simulate financial principles. We track students from the time they enter our program through college graduation with real-time data to help influence decision making. Students are required to engage their family in each module, creating family financial goals.

- **The Financial Empowerment of Urban Youth.** In partnership with the Charter School Development Corporation and Building Hope, The Wealth Factory recently launched The Financial Empowerment of Urban Youth Research Study Brochure. The study analyzes the pre-post testing of WealthyLife's implementation in three DC charter schools in Fall 2014, points to the glowing results of the program, such as 85% more likely to graduate high school and 76% more likely to own a home. It also highlights the growing racial wealth-income gap that stems from a systemic lack of financial literacy in urban communities. This research primarily focused on K12 students, minorities, low-income environments, single-parent homes, at-risk youth, special needs, occupational therapy, behavior modification and policy reform. This study has been recommended to the Dept. of Ed, The House and The White House. Attached below.

- **Partnership with Department of Insurance Securities and Banking.** In partnership with the Dept. of Insurance, Securities and Banking (DISB) and the Dept. of Employee Services (DOES) WealthyLife is being integrated into the government's performance management software, Lifecents, for the Summer Youth Employment Program - Bank on DC – that manages 15,000 students annually across 480 government agencies and companies. The program, currently using NEFE and Everfi, is replacing these products with WealthyLife for higher engagement with students, research based content and more desired outcomes. Development has commenced and students will begin using the product on June 29, 2015. The agency would like to expand our program nationally through this vehicle! The Wealth Factory will also be leading DISB's annual financial literacy research study that examines all financial literacy programs sponsored in DC; helping to increase accountability across DC via performance metrics. (<http://bankondc.org/>)

- WealthyLife was honored to be featured as one of the top 9 edtech companies of 2015 at the **National Association of Public Charter Schools Conference**. We had over 70 schools, state board associations and companies express interest in partnership. Due to the large amount of association interest in our program, we have decided to offer sliding group discounts for a limited time. We have also permanently added Special Needs, Occupational Therapy and Parenting/Family Strengthening to our list of services. Schools may use direct funds, Title 1 or their 21st Century Learning Grants to budget for WealthyLife.

- **Rich Estates** In partnership with the Dept. of Housing and Community Development, Dept. of Insurance, Securities and Banking and Bank on DC, WealthyLife transformed a ballroom into a live real estate game - Rich Estates - at the DC Housing Expo at the Convention Center. Students from the Dept. of Employee Services Summer Youth Employment Program joined us for a day of real fun with finance. Other local students and special needs youth joined us. The game taught youth how to buy and sell real estate as a wise investment. A 13 year old boy won the game on the buyer's end, receiving tickets to Six Flags. There were two winners on the seller's end. Interestingly, one of the young adults is homeless while the other is a high school student. Both were SYEP Young Money Managers that felt they benefited greatly from playing Rich Estates as they had never been introduced to real estate before, gained confidence in their ability to buy a home and discovered sales skills they didn't know they had. Although, they were very excited to win their six flags tickets, both decided to give them to the 13 year old so that he could take his family with him!

4. How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?

Leverage WealthyLife education technology to provide tasks for family engagement with concrete instruction and track student performance from birth to higher ed. Our company would be able to provide unprecedented data analytics to understand how best to support family engagement and what level of engagement is needed to optimize student success.

5. What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?

We conduct pre-post assessments of student performance every 12 weeks as well as track their financial IQ, habits and outcomes. Our metrics include confidence, wellness, knowledge, budgeting, academic planning, career planning, retirement planning, credit management, risk protection, auto financing, healthy living and more.

6. How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?

Schools should serve as after school family engagement centers, with family engagement counselors. These centers should provide business resources such as financial literacy, workforce development, healthy living, certification classes, clothing drives and more.

FROM: Linda Zang, Branch Chief
Collaboration and Program Improvement
Division of Early Childhood Development
Maryland State Department of Education
200 W. Baltimore Street, 10th flr.
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-767-0140
linda.zang@maryland.gov

Interagency Policy Committee July 22, 2015

1. What are the key messages that we should communicate in a federal policy statement on family engagement?

Family Engagement is:

- a. **A shared responsibility of families, schools, and community programs**
- b. **Continuous from birth into the school-age years**
- c. **Sustainable, operating with adequate resources to ensure meaningful and effective strategies that have the power to impact student learning and achievement**

Family Engagement Means:

- d. **Supporting family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and the ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike**

Family Engagement Encompasses:

- e. **Beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and activities**

2. What are barriers to implementing effective family engagement?
 - **Child Care, Head Start, PreK , home visiting, and other early childhood programs operate under differing rules, regulations and funding streams.**
 - **Parents in at risk communities face many challenges (housing, budgeting, safety, sometimes language and culture, etc.)**
 - **Service providers have many obligatory responsibilities that limit the time available to spend with families**
 - **Limited opportunities for leadership**
3. What are the most effective family engagement strategies that you have implemented at the local (program/school) or state levels? What works?
 - **Maryland Family Engagement Coalition - representatives of family and child serving agencies that oversee initiatives and implementation of *The Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework: Maryland's Vision for Engaging Families with Young Children* that is found at**

http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/child_care/challenge/engagement.html

- **Maryland EXCELS – (TQIS) that allows licensed providers to move up levels and receive incentives if they meet the criteria, including for family involvement and engagement.**
 - **Community Cafes – Parent input and networking on early childhood and family topics held at libraries and other community sites.**
 - **Learning Parties: Community-based small meetings on early childhood topics with a topic expert and community representatives. Very successful in rural communities and with English Language Learners.**
4. How can we promote effective family engagement from birth through elementary school, at the state and local levels?
- **Assure a local early childhood council is working well in each locality or jurisdiction with active parent members/participants.**
 - **Support transitions between preschool programs and public schools; between infant and toddler programs and preschool programs; and between preschool programs for children with disabilities and programs where these children will transition. Methods include MOUs and providing relevant parent information.**
5. What family engagement outcomes are States and local programs targeting? How are you measuring progress on these outcomes?
- **Families will improve in their ability to navigate systems and achieve goals in the areas of education, health, and economic security (annual Kids Count data)**
 - **Families will be supported in effectively achieving child/family program transitions (Results of the annual Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, including results of prior care)**
 - **Better connections will be established between families and peers; service providers and families; and families, service providers, and their communities (Participation in Community Cafes, Leadership Academies, Learning Parties)**
6. How can we ensure school principals, early childhood program directors, LEA administrators, and other leaders, promote and systematically embed family engagement at the local level?
- **Encourage and support local council membership that reflects a wide range of early childhood stakeholders. Provide incentives/seed grants to improve family participation and, if possible parent cafes and local coalitions.**

- **Provide thematic leadership academies involving local school systems and principals, local council members, community-based partners (i.e. themes of curriculum, assessment, foundations of early learning)**



ZERO TO THREE COMMENTS ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BEFORE THE INTERAGENCY POLICY BOARD

July 22, 2015

Presented by Patricia A. Cole, Director of Government Relations
Claire Lerner, LCSW, Senior Parenting Strategist

*It is **HOW YOU ARE** with families as much as what you do.*

From our inception over 35 years ago, ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) has focused on the family and had a deep appreciation for the critical importance of understanding and supporting parents and other primary caregivers for nurturing healthy child development. Family engagement has been an integral part of all the work we have undertaken. In addition to our extensive work on specific projects that support families of young children, our [Parent Portal](#) provides a range of science-based tools and resources that are designed to help parents nurture their children's health and development.

PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

If we care about promoting the long term healthy development of children, we need to care deeply about their parents, as they have the greatest impact on their child's development. The better able we are to connect and provide parents with support, resources, and guidance, the greater the positive impact on children. Family engagement is not an add-on, it is an integral component of service provision for all children.

Recent research ZERO TO THREE conducted with a diverse group of families shows that parents are hungry to talk about the challenges they face. They want to learn and to do better. They would be eager to be engaged in their children's programs or schools if there were opportunities to talk with providers or teachers about their struggles and concerns, and to have a chance to reflect on their parenting, provided that they felt they were not an annoyance, or being blamed or talked down to. Important issues on their minds include how their own childhood experiences impact their parenting; how to manage their own big emotions and reactions; and how to find effective ways to discipline. When parents have opportunities to explore these issues that are at the root of much of their parenting practices, they are much more likely to make positive changes.

In crafting family engagement programs, we should not assume that parents come with a ready-made toolkit to be their child's first and best teacher—or to navigate the role expected of them as their children enter the more teacher-directed world of elementary school. They are often as fearful and intimidated as their children—not knowing what to expect or how the system works.

KEY MESSAGES:

It is HOW YOU ARE with families as much as what you do. It is a way of being with them that has to be embedded in all interactions with families—that makes them feel welcome, understood, and respected.

- **The foundation of family engagement is empathy and respect.** This means validating the challenges parents face in childrearing—not blaming, which only alienates parents. All communications need to respect parents’ beliefs, values, and perspectives, and avoid being patronizing—in other words, telling parents what to do, as if they are a pitcher to be filled up. Parents come with their own beliefs, values, goals and perspectives. These need to be heard, understood and respected in order for parents to build trust and be positively influenced by teachers and other providers.
- **The power is in partnering.** Families need and want a partner, someone who sees them as an equal, and who will collaborate with them to problem-solve whatever challenges may arise, versus telling them what to do.
- **Family engagement is not an add-on, but an integral part of any program serving children.** This means it’s not just about pizza night for families, but using every touchpoint with families as an opportunity to connect, support and inform.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- **Family engagement often IS an add-on,** not an integral part of a program.
- **Talking down to, judging, criticizing or blaming parents.**
- **Focusing just on the needs of the children, not the parents.** Unfortunately, **parents who have risk factors in their lives are often seen as the problem.** Such factors could include living in poverty, parental mental health issues, substance abuse, or domestic violence. Indeed, public investments often focus on supporting their young children, not the whole family. This makes parents feel like they are the problem, and that if only the child had different parents or a more advantaged family, they would be fine.
- **Staff seeing parents as adversaries, not partners;** feeling that the parents are just making their lives harder. Further, staff often may make assumptions about parents’ intentions or level of interest in their child’s education, rather than asking—being curious and wanting to help problem-solve. (For example, interpreting a parent’s absence from a school event as a lack of interest in their child when it turns out the parent works evenings.)
- **Parents may see staff as adversaries rather than supporters.** Parents who have had negative experiences in the past with institutions or programs, or who had bad experiences themselves in school, may approach staff with a defensive or dismissive posture. Rather than being reactive to these signals, staff should show an eagerness to understand the parent’s starting point—their perspective—to open up an honest discussion about what their past experiences have been and how their relationship can be different: more of a partnership characterized by mutual respect.

- **Staff are not adequately prepared for, or feel the burden of, an additional job responsibility.** Often staff do not have adequate training on forging strong, positive partnerships with parents; or they may feel this task is beyond their job responsibilities—one more item on an already full plate—and feel resentful.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- **Provide training for all staff on partnering with parents.**
- **Integrate attention to parents at all points of connection**—drop-offs, pick-ups, email updates, etc.—not just at specific family events. Just as early development unfolds via the everyday moment, so does the most effective family engagement. This might mean:
 - Empathizing with a parent who is clearly stressed-out and harried at drop-off about how tough mornings can be, and asking what the staff can do to help mom transition her child to the classroom.
 - Sending a quick email to share some new developments staff have noticed about a child and acknowledging the parent’s part in these developments—pointing out what they have seen the parent do to support their child.
 - Showing empathy versus criticizing when there are tough times with a child, acknowledging how hard it must be for the parent and reaching out to work together to address the problem.

It is these everyday moments that make the difference—staff showing parents that they feel their pain, and are there to support and partner with them, not to judge or blame. This is the glue that bonds parents to programs and leads to greater participation and thus impact on the child

- **Co-create the family engagement approach.** Staff should ask parents what they need from the program/staff to best support their child; and staff should share what they need from parents to best support the child in the context of the program.
- **Create opportunities for parents to connect with each other:** It is easy for parents to feel like they are going it alone—that they are the only ones who are having a particular issue. Seldom is that the case. Facilitating peer-to-peer discussions about common childrearing issues can be very supportive to parents.
- **Infuse cultural competence into family engagement:** This is of critical importance. Differences in parenting styles and cultural beliefs and values, the degree of knowledge about what a program or school expects, and language barriers, can all contribute to misunderstandings, intimidation, adversarial feelings, and ultimately sub-optimal care for a child.

Consider the case of a parent we know in a low-wage job, who lacks financial resources, has a language barrier with the school, but who desperately wants to help her kindergartner succeed. Instructions came home from the teacher that the family should have new books available to her kindergartner every week. This mom thought that meant she must buy books on her small income. She had no idea that the school had resources, namely a library, to help. Approaching the teacher was intimidating, given the parent’s limited command of English. One of our bilingual staff guided this mom; she helped her get a public library card, and also encouraged her to reach out to the school, which led to her discovering that the staff was more than willing to help. The moral of the story is that when there are language barriers, it is essential that staff reach out to

parents to be sure they understand what is being asked of them to avoid a whole array of miscommunications which ultimately alienate parents and erode the quality of care for the child. Such outreach is a good rule of thumb for approaching all parents.

- **Help parents put the joy back in parenting:** For many parents, childrearing has come to feel more like a job—to fill their child up with a whole bunch of skills to get them ahead in the world. This can be stressful and erode the joy of parenting. Help parents see the power of everyday moments to shape children’s development. Focus on what really matters: tuning in to children; reading and responding sensitively to their cues—both verbal and non-verbal; engaging in reciprocal back-and-forth play and interaction; and incorporating lots of rich language into everyday moments. Help them connect with their kids and understand that strong, positive, parent-child relationships are the foundation of all future development.
- **Be attuned to parents’ needs:** Successfully engaging parents in their children’s early learning also means being attuned to the parents’ needs. For example, mental health issues such as maternal depression can affect a parent’s relationship with his or her child, as well s with the program. Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) can be a key strategy to boost programs’ abilities to offer help to parents.

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FROM BIRTH THROUGH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

- **Start early—even before birth—with *supporting parents in understanding and embracing the powerful role they play in shaping their child’s development.*** When parents are supported and feel competent in this role—that they are the guide for their children’s development and learning—it is easier for them to continue in this role and remain a prime partner as their children enter more formal education systems that are less likely to be family focused.
 - Early Head Start (EHS) is a prime vehicle for getting parent involvement off to a good start. They use the term *empowering parents* to mean staff supporting family members to recognize their influence on their children and build their sense of competence and confidence. EHS emphasizes supporting families’ self-efficacy, counseling avoiding the term “parent education” in favor of letting families reflect on what they know and take the lead. EHS research shows that children’s cognitive and social-emotional outcomes were improved when families came into the program during pregnancy. These families tended to stay in the program longer, benefitting from an increased period of services.
- **Some important recent steps in federal policy** can help in increasing family engagement:
 - **Extension of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program:** Like EHS, home visiting helps parents understand and become competent in the powerful role they play early on in their child’s life.
 - **Creating the EHS-Child Care Partnerships:** Because parent and family engagement is a core function in EHS, partnerships can help provide tools to child care programs that previously may not have had the time or the resources to actively engage their families.
 - **Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization:** The new legislation added requirements related to consumer information, in particular giving parents more information about the safety and quality of available programs. But states also will have to make information available about early childhood development, expulsion and suspension policies, and developmental screening. Promoting greater understanding about developmental screening—what it looks for, what a delay or disability is, and how to access services—can help demystify a process and an aspect of development that can seem overwhelming to parents.