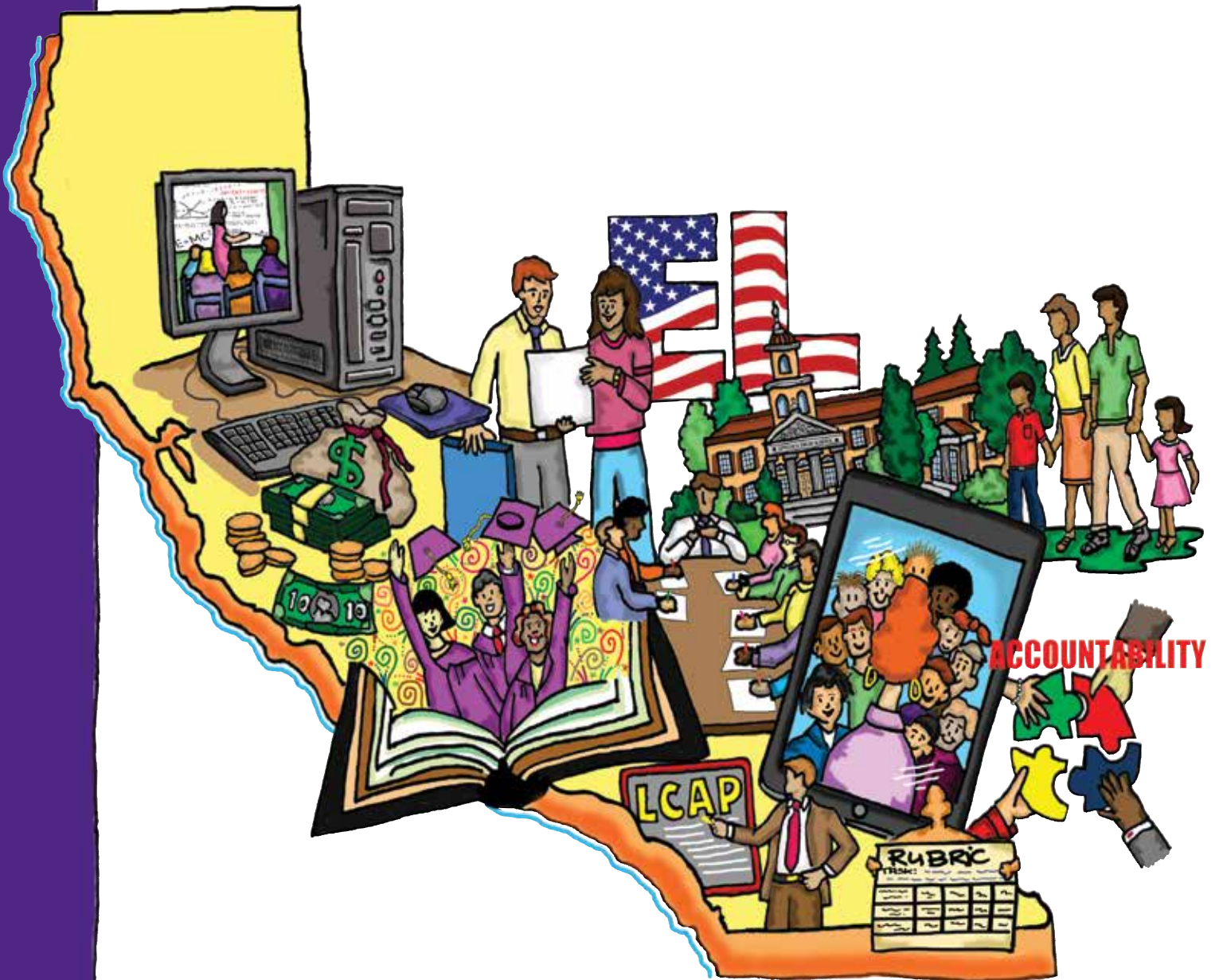


READY OR NOT:

How California School Districts are Reimagining Parent Engagement in the Era of Local Control Funding Formula



Celebrating our

**Families
In Schools**



Building Partnerships for Student Success

15 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword..... | 3 |
| Executive Summary..... | 4 |
| Background: The Promise of Parent Engagement Under LCFF | 6 |
| In Their Own Words: School District Leaders Share Parent Engagement Challenges and Signs of Progress | 8 |
| Conclusion & Recommendations | 15 |
| Rubric for Measuring Parent Engagement | 18 |
| Acknowledgments..... | 23 |

FOREWORD

For generations, parents have held the same hopes and dreams for their children: They want them to be healthy and happy; they want them to thrive and succeed in school; they want to be involved and engaged in their children’s educational journeys.

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is a window of opportunity for California school districts to invest the necessary energy and resources to get home-school partnerships right, and show the rest of the nation the potential and future of family engagement. Through the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and evaluation rubrics, parents will be able to hold districts accountable for fulfilling their commitment to the children and families that they serve.

The LCAP process is not about making perfect decisions that will never be altered. It is about having honest conversations, embracing different points of view, and providing foundational supports to sustain change over the long haul. At its core, it is about building relationships. It is about building the “Four Cs” – Capabilities, Connections, Cognition and Competence – in both parents and school staff, so that everyone is prepared to move forward together to create the conditions and systems that enable all children to fulfill their potential.¹ It is about learning together.

Nobody becomes an educator to see students fail. The term “school to prison pipeline” is not one that makes any educator proud. Yet it is a reality for a disproportionate number of the students in California’s three target subgroups: low-income, foster youth, and English Learners. California’s school districts can choose either to accept the LCFF charge and build unprecedented models of cooperation, trust, collaboration and capacity-building that will help all students thrive, or they can choose to accept the status quo, which we can all agree is not working.

Be bold. Be innovative. Be inclusive. Don’t fear failure. Your parents are watching. Your students are watching. The rest of the country is watching and waiting to learn from your example.

– Karen L. Mapp, Ed.D.



Karen L. Mapp, Ed.D.

A noted authority on the topic of parent engagement, Dr. Mapp is the Senior Lecturer on Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Faculty Director of the Education Policy and Management Master’s Program.

1. 2013. USDOE Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships. <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



There is a powerful connection between student achievement and parent engagement. Decades of research have affirmed that students whose parents are active participants in their learning and in their school experience heightened their outcomes in a variety of measures, from school readiness to graduation rates.

Further, more recent research indicates that schools have a critical role to play in creating strong family-school partnerships for student success. Consider, for example, the 15-year longitudinal study in Chicago which found that in schools with strong parent engagement practices, students were ten times more likely to improve their math performance and four times more likely to improve their reading performance (Organizing Schools for Improvement (2010), Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton).

And yet, sadly, successful parent engagement has eluded California for decades. Now, under the LCFF, education officials and school district leaders have a new opportunity. Districts must demonstrate how they are striving to create powerful partnerships between educators and parents. This is a critical moment for education policymakers and administrators to transition from the compliance-based efforts of the past to authentic, outcome-based parent engagement programs, and to adopt a measurement system to track their progress.

Families In Schools seeks to move California school districts down the path towards excellence in parent engagement. This, in turn, will yield improvement in important learning outcomes including academic performance, particularly among the most vulnerable student populations that are targeted by LCFF, which our communities need and deserve.

This report examines the inner workings of districts across California as they try to meet the parent engagement expectations of LCFF. Drawing on thirty interviews with district leaders and staff members, the report is an honest and highly specific portrait of the very real challenges of parent engagement. It also highlights “signs of progress” that demonstrate districts’ capacity for innovation.

The insightful perspectives and stories represented in this report, supported by research and parent input, have shaped our recommendations – which reflect

THREE CORE THEMES:



School leaders understand the value of building relationships with parents, but most of them readily admit to not doing it consistently, authentically, and meaningfully.



While decades of research correlate parent involvement with gains in student achievement and improving social and emotional behaviors, school administrators are slow to give teachers and staff the tools and training they need to connect with parents.



Schools that traditionally have had little success in getting parents involved need to explore new ideas and approaches, while listening closely to parents and teachers to learn what is working and what is not.

The following are six critical recommendations for state officials and districts as they move to systematize effective parent engagement, as required under LCFF, in 2016 and beyond:



1 DEVELOP STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR PARENT ENGAGEMENT Now that parent involvement (i.e. parent engagement) is one of California’s eight education priorities under LCFF, the evaluation rubrics should include **statewide** and **local** standards to determine how effectively schools and districts are engaging parents. Defining consistent, high quality standards will help educators and administrators measure their success. Best practices and current research should be referenced when designing the standards.

2 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF There is a correlation between the involvement of parents and their positive relationships with the school and staff. Nurturing these relationships through active listening and team-building will foster successful partnerships.

3 INVEST FUNDING AND RESOURCES IN PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO MEET LCAP GOALS Parent engagement should be prioritized as an effective strategy to meet LCAP goals, but success requires an investment of resources and programs. Funding parent engagement appropriately will yield positive outcomes in other areas, most importantly in student achievement.

4 PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND OTHER EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS Districts and schools cannot and should not be expected to engage entire communities on their own. By partnering with community groups and others, districts and schools can leverage pre-existing relationships with parents that these organizations already possess.

5 TAILOR PROGRAMS TO THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF PARENTS Schools can provide varying levels of support to parents based on their needs and roles. For example, training for parent leaders in advisory committees looks significantly different from the kinds of support parents need to enhance their children’s literacy in elementary school.

6 PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT Districts and schools must train teachers, school staff and administrators to understand and practice quality parent engagement, recognizing that it requires a series of skills that can be improved with practice and strong coaching.

The above recommendations are explained in more detail in the **“Conclusion and Recommendations”** section of this report.

BACKGROUND

The Promise of Parent Engagement Under LCFF

When California Governor Jerry Brown signed the LCFF into law in 2013, he elevated parent engagement to a legal requirement as well as one of the eight statewide education priorities in the LCFF.

Unfortunately, parent engagement in California has lacked rigor and authenticity for far too long. Few, if any, school districts have developed successful and sustainable ways of bridging the gap between the home and the classroom. This has contributed to sluggish student achievement growth, particularly among high-need student populations.

With the passage of LCFF, California finds itself at a new crossroads. School district leaders have a precious opportunity to reimagine parent engagement – from the way schools interact with parents on a day-to-day basis to how district officials incorporate parents'



priorities into their budget decisions. In 2013, we issued the report Reimagining Parent Engagement in California: Moving from 1.0 to 2.0. That report painted a picture of authentic parent engagement using the voices and input from parents and

community organizations. This report takes the next step by looking at the inner workings of districts as they try to meet the expectations of LCFF. It aims to answer the question: Is California seizing the moment?

First, we interviewed thirty school district personnel – superintendents, school board members, parent engagement directors, and other key administrators – from fourteen urban and rural school districts, large and small, across the state. We wanted them to speak

PARENT INVOLVEMENT OR PARENT ENGAGEMENT – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Families In Schools defines parent involvement as actions taken by parents to support their child's education at home and at school; while parent engagement refers to actions taken by schools to make it as easy as possible for parents to get involved in the school and in the process.

Though the state uses the term involvement, the intention of LCFF is clear: to ensure that districts are proactively engaging parents, developing powerful partnerships between parents, educators, and administrators.

freely and candidly, so that fear or politics would not prevent them from sharing their real opinions and experiences. So we promised anonymity.

What emerged from our interviews was an honest and highly specific portrait of the very real challenges of parent engagement. We heard from a superintendent who is always “begging parents” to “fill out your forms” and a school board member who lamented the “inertia that plagues the system.” These are the kinds of cultural realities that no one wants to talk about, but everyone knows are impediments to effective parent engagement.

At the same time, we also discovered a variety of what we have labeled “signs of progress” – specific examples of how to address the challenges that were identified. One board member described parents who “stood in tears because they felt their voice was finally being heard,” while a superintendent described a “paradigm shift” and insisted that LCFF’s parent engagement requirement is “a game changer for public education in America.”

But this report does more than depict the reality of parent engagement in California in 2015. It offers a series of recommendations to help school districts transition from a culture of compliance to one of deliberate, outcome-oriented parent engagement.

Finally, it provides the framework for a research-based rubric that will help administrators measure their progress as they seek to strengthen and, ultimately, perfect parent engagement. Families In Schools urges California to use the evaluation rubric to craft statewide and local standards, creating concrete expectations for meaningful parent engagement.

WHO WE INTERVIEWED



Thirty school district personnel, including superintendents, school board members, parent engagement directors, and other administrators



These leaders represent fourteen urban and rural California school districts of varying sizes



The smallest district has approximately 1,500 students, while the largest has 430,000



The total number of students enrolled in these districts in 2013-14 was 763,000, which represents 12 percent of California’s total student population



Of the students in these fourteen districts, 24 percent are English learners and 79 percent are low-income¹



The interviews were conducted between November 2014 and March 2015

¹ Data for foster youth unavailable.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

School District Leaders Share Parent Engagement Challenges and Signs of Progress

In the pages that follow, we are confident that school district officials will see their own stories, struggles, fears, and hopes, as well as an abundance of inspirational ideas for reimagining parent engagement. Six recurring challenges are presented, followed by signs of progress in certain districts to overcome those challenges. Along the way we changed the names of specific programs and the names and genders of the interview subjects to protect anonymity.



CHALLENGE: Engaging New and Different Parents

“It’s usually the same parents who get involved with everything.”

– Superintendent

Almost any administrator or educator who has made a habit of reaching out to parents has encountered the problem of “the usual suspects.” As one parent engagement director put it, “no matter how many times we offer trainings, the same people come.” This can discourage districts from connecting with most of their families because it’s easy to assume that the same parents who have already shown an interest are the only ones who will participate in trainings or other activities. But in doing so, districts give up on the vast majority of parents who truly want to be engaged, but either don’t know how they can be engaged or just need other ways to engage.

Although it is difficult to reach beyond the usual suspects, some California school districts have shown

that it is definitely possible – by being deliberate about connecting with new parents and adopting a variety of creative solutions to do so. “No matter if you can’t reach all specific targeted families, you still have the responsibility to try,” said one school board president.

A superintendent explained that he and his colleagues were determined to reach “everyday” parents, not just the ones who were already consistently engaging with the district.

“We worked tirelessly, strategizing and reaching out to all the different stakeholders by phone, emails, town hall meetings,” said the superintendent. “No matter how many presentations we did, my board felt we needed to do more.”

They pushed parents to attend meetings, particularly parents and caregivers of the three student sub-groups designated by LCFF – low-income students, English Learners, and foster youth.

“Afterwards, that is whom you saw constantly at the meetings,” he said.

While the district’s commitment to diversifying its parent base was a necessary first step, the superintendent says that a few key decisions enabled their success. He pointed to the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) that he and his colleagues created.

“When we decided to form the PAC, we were determined to invite parents who represented the student subgroups because, in our community, it’s usually the same parents who get involved in everything,” said the superintendent. “We needed the PAC to be representative of the subgroups.”


Another key strategy that the superintendent employed was to recruit Public Education Volunteers. They were trained to use their networks and reach out to parents and community members who had fallen through the cracks.

He also hired a Parent Liaison, whose “task is to reach out to the student subgroups to make sure they are getting to school everyday because chronic absenteeism is one of our issues. We increased attendance in the first quarter for those students because the liaison is working with the parents to make sure they get their kids to school on time.”

The superintendent touted a particularly encouraging example that demonstrates their success in bringing new parents into the fold:

“In our district, it was difficult for an African American parent to get elected to a school site council team,” he explained. “They used to be outnumbered by the other parents. Now those parents have a voice like they never had before. And that’s due to LCFF and the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).”

“My advice is, you can’t drop the ball now. If you want to continue any type of progress with students, you have to build on this momentum. I am thinking a lot about the African American parents who get discouraged and give up. We must keep our promises to them. We must deliver and take them to the next level. Parents told me that whatever you are starting, you have to finish building, because everyone is looking to see if you are going to drop the ball.”



CHALLENGE:
Abandoning the
Check-the-Box
Culture Among
Administrators

“When compliance and regulation become the drivers, we are missing the opportunity at relationships and authentic collaboration.”

– School Board Member

District leaders and administrators, especially those who have been working in the education system for years, have seen policy changes and bureaucratic mandates come and go. So it is no surprise that jadedness persists. As one school board president said, “Typically, boards adopt many policies, but then later they’re forgotten.”

Another board member noted: “Although we have been working on parent engagement, we don’t feel like we’ve moved the needle in any substantial way. Schools have to be focused on relationships with parents and that is why there’s an absence of trust – because information is so inconsistent.”

Unfortunately, this jadedness and “change fatigue” can hinder parent engagement efforts. While LCFF clearly elevates parent engagement to an area of critical focus, this does not mean every district official is on board. Many administrators confess to merely checking boxes.

“People often implement change just for compliance sake,” complained one school board president.

Even for those who want to strive for excellence and rethink old ways of doing things, it can be difficult to push the bureaucratic system to really change.

The district leaders who have found success in parent engagement urged their peers not to view it as just another box to check, or another law to comply with. Instead, they described LCFF’s parent engagement mandate as a genuine opportunity to meaningfully integrate parent engagement into district culture and

actions. To put it another way, parent engagement is not transactional, it is relational – and relationships require mutual trust and respect.

“This was a new paradigm shift for us,” said one superintendent. “We were shifting from a rubberstamp culture to an authentic engagement culture.”

Of course, it is easy to talk about a culture shift; it is another thing to actualize it. But this superintendent and her district have developed a number of new programs and activities that have helped usher in this new culture of authentic engagement. One of those, the superintendent explained, is called “Path-Makers,” where parents and key community leaders “are trained in having conversations with kids, specifically to make sure they’re on the right path to success.”

“We go out as a little army to every one of our high schools and our goal is to have face-to-face, one-on-one conversations with each high school senior this year,” she said.

So far, the district has trained 100 Path-Makers.


The superintendent and her team are also piloting a two-week mandatory orientation for incoming high school freshmen and their parents. “We will walk

them through all the elements to help their child be successful in high school and college,” she said. For example, the orientation will help parents navigate the financial aid application process. If the program proves effective, then next year, it will be expanded across the entire district.

Finally, her district is working to ensure that educators understand the relational components of parent engagement. “Before, if a parent sat on a school site council, they were probably given – depending upon the school leader – some level of involvement or none at all,” admitted the superintendent. “More than likely, it was a ‘rubber stamp’ kind of effort.”

“Now, we are training our school principals to authentically engage student voice, parent voice, and community partner voice so that their plan begins to reflect evidence of this authentic engagement.”

“It’s about a culture shift,” said the superintendent, who believes that parent engagement under LCFF can result in collective impact. “It’s not just a matter of having large numbers of parents present in the room, but ensuring that parent voice becomes a part of our planning process to close the achievement gap.”



CHALLENGE:
Training Educators
to Engage Parents
Effectively

“With very few exceptions, family engagement is just not something teachers and administrators are naturally equipped to handle without the proper training.”

– School Board President

There is a growing recognition that parent engagement is more than an intention; it is a skill set that can and should be taught. Unfortunately, few educators and administrators have ever received proper training in it. If school staff and leaders are not being trained in parent engagement, is it fair to expect them to excel at it? Several district leaders highlighted this concern in our interviews.

“In all the institutions I have researched, not one offers family engagement as part of the teacher credential program,” said one school board president. “There’s not even a six-week seminar. It’s the same for administrators. Family engagement is not a part of their curriculum when they are taking courses to get their administrator credential. As long as family engagement is not on the radar screen of teachers or administrators, we will continue to go around in circles, offering random acts of engagement.”

Clearly, the credentialing process for educators should include a meaningful study of effective parent engagement practices. So, should districts wait for colleges, universities, and credentialing programs to revise their curricula? Of course not. Districts must provide meaningful training on parent engagement for their current teachers, administrators, and staff. Coaching educators and administrators to integrate parents and families into the learning process at school and at home should be a core tenet of professional development in every California school district. Right now, it is virtually absent.

From listening to district staff, it would appear that they are more inclined to invest resources into training parents than their own staff. They should heed the U.S. Department of Education's Parent and Community Engagement Framework for Family-School Partnerships and the California Department of Education's Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California's School Districts. Each strongly recommends training both parents and educators to increase their capacity to work together, with shared accountability, to help students succeed. In doing so, it honors and respects the knowledge parents bring to school improvement while simultaneously cultivating the skills of teachers, administrators, and staff to work effectively with parents in a culture of purposeful and everyday acts of engagement.

Fortunately, we did find evidence of some districts deliberately cultivating their capacity to engage parents. One administrator – a LCFF coordinator – explained that it all starts with a “two-way conversation.”

“We want to have parents feel that their voice is heard and that they are viewed as a partner with the district and their child's school,” he said.

His district has created several new programs to bridge the gap between the school and the home. One is the home visitation program. “Our teachers visit the parents of our students, and not just those who are struggling,” explained the district's school board president. “They go into homes and ask parents, ‘What are your dreams for your child(ren) and how can we help you achieve them?’”

“We are training school principals on how to engage their parents,” said another superintendent. “We train them on how to involve parents in conversations about the LCAP and academic achievement for all students. For example, our schools conduct parent surveys and convene parents to discuss data and develop recommendations in a collaborative way so that parents know their voices are being heard. We are having conversations versus consultations with parents.”

One district developed a system for holding school principals accountable for parent engagement. Its professional evaluations for school principals include an assessment of how effectively they are engaging parents.

Another district requires principals to provide support to parents and help them make the best academic decisions for their children. Because parent engagement is considered a high priority in the district, the principals' baseline numbers for parent engagement are increasing.

Many districts, however large or small, simply lack the resources and/or expertise to build robust parent engagement programs. They would need more staff, more training, more money, and perhaps even more hours in the day to manage these efforts. With a seemingly endless list of priorities to tackle, many district leaders admit that parent engagement often falls to the bottom of the pile. Although there are districts that are not ready to tackle the daunting task of building sustainable relationships with families, the good news is that some are learning to ask for help.



CHALLENGE: Enlisting External Support in Parent Outreach and Capacity-Building

“We cannot do it alone.”
– Parent Engagement Director

Districts that have created partnerships with community groups, especially those that are experts in parent engagement and facilitating community conversations, have found a great deal of success. They have been able not only to create more impactful relationships, but also are able to reach a much broader, more diverse set of parents and community members.

“Before, we used to call parents together, talk to them for an hour, and then say, ‘Thank you very much’ and send them home,” acknowledged one superintendent. “We called that a parent meeting.” Determined to do better, the superintendent developed a partnership with two statewide organizations that have a history of engaging communities around education issues. The two groups worked closely with the district to enlist parent input in the creation of its LCAP.

“This process was different from anything we had done before,” he said. “Parents were doing all the talking and we were doing none. [The two nonprofit groups] were there to ensure we were doing it effectively. They made recommendations and we modified what we were doing.”

His district held more than fifty meetings to gather input on the LCAP. The number of participating parents increased with every meeting. Ultimately, the process engaged approximately 12 percent of the district’s parents. The two groups then helped administrators interpret the community’s feedback and apply it to the LCAP. The superintendent says that partnering with external groups was crucial to the project’s success. “Historically, our school leaders focused on the inside walls of their campuses, but now they are looking outward to the broader community,” the superintendent said. “They are focusing on their feeder schools and their business and community partners and because of that they’re seeing tremendous outcomes.”

Numerous other districts reported strong results from collaborations with external organizations, especially those specializing in parent engagement. Recognizing that they couldn’t do it alone didn’t discourage them from pursuing parent engagement; rather, it pushed them to seek out allies who could help.

One school board president shared a story about



one of her district’s elementary schools, where parent conferences were not being held regularly, and when they did take place, parent turnout was below 50 percent. So, collaborating with a community group, the school worked with a group of two hundred parents to create a leadership team, which then identified the most important concerns among parents. These included communicating more about their children’s futures, collaborating more with teachers, and helping to develop a culture in which college is an expectation for all students.

Once the school was able to identify what was important to parents, it embarked on a renewed effort to reach out to them and hold parent conferences. A year later, 90 percent of the parents had completed one-on-one conferences at the school.

As a school board member in another district put it: “Don’t be afraid to involve community-based organizations, libraries, and other groups. Expand your networks. It’s a collaborative effort, not just teachers in the classroom. We are all part of the solution.”

Another district administrator advised: “Go slow to go fast. Take the time to build up relationships with your community. This is not about accomplishing a task; it is about building relationships.”

Districts cannot work in isolation. When parents and community are part of the everyday life of the school, engagement is more likely to be real and lasting.



CHALLENGE: Incorporating Parent Input into District Decision-Making

“Engagement has to be authentic. If you are going to ask for someone’s opinion, you should at some point show how you used it.”

– LCFF Coordinator

There is no substitute for authenticity. And yet, many district leaders agreed that the typical parent training or engagement session can feel like a dog and pony show. They also agreed that this approach does not yield positive results.

“When you ask for the community to get involved, it is not enough to say, ‘please come,’ and then check off how many people came,” said one board president. “The community needs to know we are listening.”

In our interviews, we heard a new emphasis on “listening.” More and more district leaders are recognizing the value of the “two-way conversation.” These authentic exchanges of ideas, feelings and expectations between district officials and parents, across the board, have borne fruit.

“The LCAP meetings were considered a ‘hot ticket’ item,” recalled one administrator. “People wanted to be a part of them. They were very passionate because they felt their input was being taken seriously.”

Another administrator said: “I have learned that you have got to engage parents and the community. If they don’t see their recommendation in the plan, it becomes a bad experience for them and they won’t come back. If we say we are going to provide four workshops for parents, we have to follow through because after our first workshop parents were already asking when the second one was. It takes a lot of planning to make it happen, and staff was saying, ‘I don’t know if we will

have enough time to do this.’ I am responding, ‘No, no, no. Parents are watching us to see if we are going to live up to our promises.’ This is a work in progress. It took us forever to get the parents of the student subgroups involved and we have to find a way to keep them engaged.”

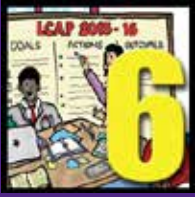
In describing how parent input was supported, one superintendent shared: “I really like that our collaborative process encouraged the ‘everyday’ parents to share because they certainly have a lot to say. We had areas of disagreement where teachers wanted this, and parents wanted that. But, because parents required data as to why a particular program is better than what they had suggested, parents got what they wanted, because the data supported their ask. Parents got more accountability and the ability to say – at the end of the year – this did not work, so we are not continuing this.”

At the end of the day, LCFF has given parents the opportunity to weigh in on what’s working and what’s not.

“We hear all the time from educators, but it was really nice to hear parents say, ‘this is not working,’” said the superintendent. “That often came up. But we needed to hear that. They weren’t afraid to challenge us every step of the way about our programs. They made us look at our programs in ways we hadn’t done before.”

As engagement becomes more genuine, said another administrator, “parents are asking more questions for the benefit of their students. It isn’t just when their kids get into trouble and then they have to visit the school. They are starting to learn the ins and outs of the educational system.”

One superintendent was thrilled to see higher levels of engagement among the parents of English Learners. “Parents’ first contact with the school district can be challenging, specifically for immigrant parents,” she noted. “Many of these parents don’t understand what it means for their child to be classified as an English Learner. So we present information on the reclassification process. Little by little, it starts sinking in and parents start asking questions and sharing information with other parents.”



CHALLENGE: 6 Finding the Right Approach and Recognizing Progress

“The fear is that if we make this investment in parent engagement, are we going to get a return on our investment?” – Administrator

Fear of failure is certainly prevalent in some districts, where administrators have attempted parent engagement in the past and experienced disappointing results. As a result, many are reluctant to develop or invest in new parent engagement programs. “Are parents going to participate over the entire period of the training, or are they just going to attend the first one and drop off midway through the training?” asked one district official, who also worried that “parent trainings are very costly.”

Past failures of parent engagement efforts should not inhibit district leaders from developing new, creative approaches, or adapting others' successful practices. Still, as they undertake new efforts, district leaders naturally want evidence of improved student learning. It is also important to recognize that there are various types of returns on investment and some are more immediately visible than others.

One district, for example, had long struggled to engage parents from their ethnically diverse community. While soliciting parent feedback during the creation of their LCAP, they found out that parents were desperate for district staff who spoke their languages, which included Spanish and Hmong. So the district created “Home-School Liaisons,” who spoke Spanish or Hmong and “facilitated communication at individual school sites,” said an administrator.

“What’s really exciting is to see our Southeast Asian families become more invested in the educational process,” said the administrator. “We did four events specifically for that community last year. Just going back and saying, ‘This is what the draft of the LCAP looks like. What do you think of it? What don’t you understand? What can we put in here? How can we make it more understandable to you?’ It’s been a great tool to really connect.”

Creating these new positions required an investment of resources, but with a clear goal in mind, the district was able to justify the expense. Now, a year later, the district recognizes that the results – diverse, historically-disenfranchised parent groups played an active role in the LCAP process – represent a return on investment.

Again, districts must learn to refine their goals in order to measure their return on investment. Consider the issue of attendance: One district did a presentation where every parent in the room got a printout with their child’s attendance record from their online reporting system. As an administrator pointed out: “Parents don’t realize how tardies can actually affect their student’s attendance. Our parent engagement department has been working closely with the attendance coordinators to deliver the importance of attendance in a way that parents can understand easily.”

Another administrator advises hiring bilingual and bicultural staff in districts with high concentrations of multilingual, multiethnic students.

“When I heard from a number of parents who spoke eloquently in Spanish and other languages about what educational programs they wanted to see for their children, that proved to me that the investment we were making in outreach is on track and we need to continue to build upon that,” said a board member. “Embedding effective parent engagement in school culture shouldn’t be so hard even when leadership changes. Because of LCFF, expectations are different now. It can’t easily change back to the old ways when parents know this is the way we are doing business.”

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Reviewing the candid words of school district leaders across California, it is clear that we are at an exciting, if daunting, moment in educational history. In this new era of LCFF, we have the opportunity to shed our complacency and to abandon practices that have become stale and fruitless. We can finally reimagine parent engagement.

But are we ready or not? Although this report highlights signs of progress underway throughout the state, let us be clear: they are still the exception, not the rule. Overall, most districts continue to neglect their parent engagement duties, or flounder in executing them.

However, let us also emphasize that district leaders genuinely want to succeed at parent engagement; they just lack the tools and expertise needed to do it right. And in too many cases, they still fail to see the connection between effective parent engagement

and improved student learning, despite ample evidence proving otherwise.

The good news is that most districts are ready to reimagine parent engagement, as long as they have a roadmap to help them chart their new course. The parent engagement component of the evaluation rubrics is meant to help administrators determine what effective parent engagement looks like and how to measure it.

California is arguably more committed than ever to delivering an excellent and equitable education to all of its students. One administrator told us, “in my entire career, I have never seen district administrators so involved at this level!” This is the promise of LCFF. However, that promise will not be fulfilled unless we can finally succeed at engaging parents and families where they are. The journey from routine compliance to authentic engagement is long, but our students are counting on us to get there as quickly as possible.



The following are the Families In Schools recommendations for districts and state officials seeking to practice and systematize meaningful parent engagement:

1

DEVELOP STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Now that parent involvement (i.e. parent engagement) is one of California's eight education priorities under LCFF, the evaluation rubrics should include **statewide** and **local** standards to determine how effectively schools and districts are engaging parents. Defining consistent, high quality standards will help educators and administrators measure their success. Best practices and current research should be referenced when designing the standards. Families In Schools recommends reviewing the following key documents:

- California Department of Education's "Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts"
- The U.S. Department of Education's "Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships"²
- Families In Schools Rubrics for Parent Engagement Research-Based Measures

2

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF

There is a correlation between the involvement of parents and their positive relationships with the school and staff. Nurturing these relationships through active listening and team-building will foster successful partnerships.

- *Rather than training teachers and parents separately in parent engagement activities, train them together in the same series of workshops in order to develop shared understanding, trust, and empowerment, enabling them to work together as partners.*
- *Create teams of parents and educators that examine key issues at schools.*
- *Give teachers and parents the tools and data and the understanding of how to collaboratively use these tools and data to build their LCAP programs and evaluate trends.*

3

INVEST FUNDING AND RESOURCES IN PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO MEET LCAP GOALS

Parent engagement should be prioritized as an effective strategy to meet LCAP goals, but success requires an investment of resources and programs. Funding parent engagement appropriately will yield positive outcomes in other areas, most importantly in student achievement.

- *The LCAP should provide concrete budgetary allotment dedicated to parent engagement activities that are linked to metrics and outcomes.*
- *Investment should include the human capital needed to perform effective outreach to hard-to-reach communities, which may include new district and/or school site positions and resources to meet parent engagement goals.*
- *Ensure that specialized needs such as bilingual staff and translation services are taken into consideration in financial allotments.*

2. 2013. USDOE Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships. <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

4

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND OTHER EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Districts and schools cannot, and should not, be expected to engage entire communities on their own. By partnering with community groups and others, districts and schools can leverage pre-existing relationships with parents that these organizations already possess.

- *Forming partnerships with community-based organizations, advocacy groups, universities, and other external organizations can help reach disenfranchised communities.*
- *Forming partnerships can also leverage training resources and programs to build capacity of teachers and staff.*
- *External partners can also help districts translate and adopt parent feedback into policy and budget decisions.*

5

TAILOR PROGRAMS TO THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF PARENTS

Schools can provide varying levels of support to parents based on their needs and roles. For example, training for parent leaders in advisory committees looks significantly different from the kinds of supports parents need to enhance their children's literacy in elementary school.

- *Ensure that programs exist to serve both “parents” and “parent leaders.”*
- *Rather than adopting generic programs, tailor parent engagement to the unique language and cultural realities of communities in each district.*

6

PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Districts and schools must train teachers, school staff and administrators to understand and practice quality parent engagement, recognizing that it requires a series of skills that can be improved with practice and strong coaching.

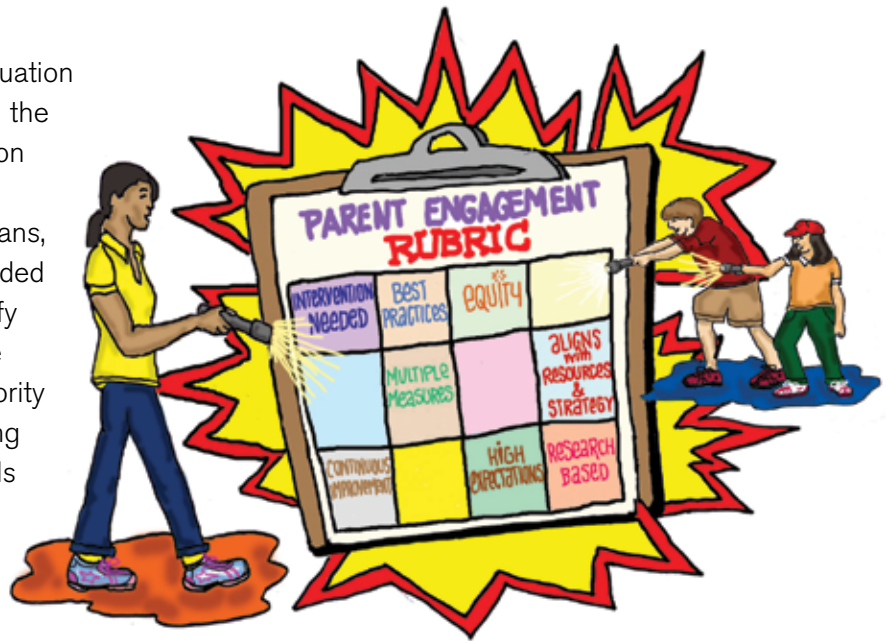
- *Build a professional culture that highly values and rewards effective parent engagement.*
- *Identify experts in parent engagement and position them as mentors to other educators.*
- *Embed parent engagement as part of the annual professional development plan.*



RUBRIC FOR PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH-BASED MEASURES

The development and approval of the LCFF evaluation rubrics (October 2016) are a critical next step in the effective implementation of LCFF. State regulation indicates that the rubrics will serve as a tool to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in district plans, inform the types of support and assistance provided as related to state and local priorities, and identify the conditions under which intervention from the state is warranted. This shift of control and authority to the local level needs to be matched by a strong accountability framework that can ensure schools are using the funds efficiently and effectively on behalf of the students and families they intend to serve. Ultimately, the rubrics are the cornerstone of the new statewide accountability system, and should be used to keep districts accountable for meeting the vision of LCFF.

It is imperative that the state set the standard for what authentic parent engagement should look like at every school. The state can do this by including indicators in the rubric that all districts should address. Authentic parent engagement at schools cannot be optional. There is enough research and best practices to establish baseline standards of parent engagement that lead to student achievement and vibrant democratic schools.



Families In Schools has developed a rubric comprised of three broad categories of indicators recommended for measuring BOTH the engagement of parents in the LCAP development process AND the practices districts are implementing to improve and grow their partnerships with parents on a day-to-day level. The proposed indicators and metrics were drawn from research, existing frameworks, interviews with urban and rural school districts across the state, and input from parents and caregivers, educators, and family engagement experts. These measures establish a clear expectation of how schools should engage, reach out to, and partner with all parents, especially those whose students are low-income, English Learners and foster youth. The indicators and metrics place strong emphasis on building the capacity of both staff and families to engage in partnerships, as proposed by the federal *Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*, as well as identify areas of strength and areas for growth and improvement.

*Measuring our progress is not just wise;
it is our legal and moral responsibility.*

EC Sec. 52060

(3) Parental involvement, including efforts the school district makes to seek parent input in making decisions for the school district and each individual school site, and including how the school district will promote parental participation in programs for unduplicated pupils and individuals with exceptional needs.

(Article 4.5 added by Stats. 2013, Ch. 47, Sec. 103. Effective July 1, 2013.)

CATEGORY 1

Quality of Parent Engagement in the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) Development Process

Assessing and reflecting on the conditions, practices, and strategies that promote meaningful parental participation in the LCAP process.

| INDICATORS & METRICS | EMERGING | DEVELOPING | ACHIEVING |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>1.1 Quality of engagement with parents and caregivers of LCFF-targeted student populations</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of parents and caregivers attending LCAP input meetings (year-to-year comparison) • % of parents and caregivers attending LCAP input meetings who report feeling their participation was valuable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCAP input meetings are easily accessible with timely notice given • Translation and interpretation are readily accessible by parents when needed • Meeting materials are provided in primary language of parents and caregivers • District reports back to parent committees and community on how their input was included in the LCAP, and publicly responds to questions from district parent committees | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings are interactive, meaningful for parents, and held at times and at locations convenient for families • Multiple communication and outreach strategies are employed, with targeted efforts aimed at parents of LCFF student subgroups • District reports progress on academic goals and closing of achievement gaps • Food and childcare is provided when needed • District and school staff members are provided with professional development on how to reach out to families • District is transparent with data and budgets | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District provides sufficient funding and human resources for conducting strategic outreach activities related to LCAP input process • District partners with community organizations to reach out and co-facilitate LCAP input meetings • District employs non-traditional communication and outreach strategies (e.g. Telephone Town Halls, parent-hosted meetings, block meetings, etc.) |
| <p>1.2 Quality of engagement with district-level Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and English Learner Parent Advisory Committee (ELPAC)</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of PAC and ELPAC members who report feeling they played a valuable role in LCAP decision-making • # of meetings PAC and ELPAC met specifically to discuss LCAP content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAC and ELPAC have a parent majority • District supports a transparent and open process for parents and caregivers to serve on PAC and ELPAC Committees • Training on LCFF is continuous and informative | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District staff recruits new parents from commonly underrepresented groups to serve on PAC and ELPAC committees • Parents have access to disaggregated student data and budgetary information to make informed recommendations • District evaluates effectiveness of PAC and ELPAC input process | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAC and ELPAC parents are actively encouraged to inform and seek input from other parents • District is actively incorporating feedback from school site councils in the LCAP process • District partners with community groups to provide technical support, information, and professional development for parent leaders and district staff • District employs joint training and teambuilding activities for staff, PAC and ELPAC members |

References:

"EdSource California Parent Survey on LCFF, December 2013." (Results suggest that a majority of parents want to be more involved in LCFF). <http://www.scribd.com/doc/189418174/EdSource-Parent-Survey-Summary-Report>

2012. "Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts States" http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/cpei/family-engagement-framework.pdf : 42

CATEGORY 2

Quality of Engagement of Parent Participation

School practices and strategies that promote meaningful parental participation in their child's school and at home.

| INDICATORS & METRICS | EMERGING | DEVELOPING | ACHIEVING |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>2.1 School environment is welcoming and culturally responsive</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of families that feel welcomed at their school • % of parents, caregivers, students, and staff that complete annual survey • % of students that feel their teachers care about them • % of school staff that have received training on family and community engagement in the past two years • # of complaints submitted annually through the Uniform Complaint Process (or other) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development plan for staff includes training on parent engagement, and cultural competency or equity, or both • Staff completes surveys and evaluations to communicate support needs and the quality of that support • School evaluates the quality of staff training (e.g. pre/post surveys, satisfaction surveys, etc.) • School staff volunteers for afterschool and community activities | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District conducts Climate Walks at all schools twice a year • School holds information sessions for families of English learners before registration begins • School and district have a clearly defined process for addressing parent concerns and questions | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District's curriculum is culturally relevant • Teachers incorporate examples of people and events from the community in lesson plans • District has a comprehensive plan to hire and retain teachers of color relative to student demographics |
| <p>2.2 Effective school-family communications</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of families that complete annual parent satisfaction surveys • % of elementary schools that conduct home visitation programs • % of parents that report understanding the English Learner program options • % of parents that report their child's school provides adequate language support (e.g. translation of materials, interpretation needs, multilingual signage) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School administers annual survey to students and families (e.g. California School Parent Survey and California School Climate Survey) • Translation and interpretation are readily accessible to parents when needed • Teachers meet with parents and caregivers to review academic progress and strategies that support learning at home | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School implements school-family compacts to outline clearly rights and responsibilities of school staff and families • School applies targeted outreach strategies to connect with underrepresented families (e.g. home-visits) • Parent-teacher conferences are led by students • School has classroom observation procedures in place that are accessible and welcoming to parents | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has Academic Parent-Teacher Team in place to support student success • District has a policy for a home visitation program • School staff is aware of community resources available for families • School website allows families to easily search and contact teachers and administrators (i.e., email addresses and phone numbers) |

Quality of Engagement of Parent Participation

(Continued)

| INDICATORS & METRICS | EMERGING | DEVELOPING | ACHIEVING |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>2.3 Meaningful resources for parents and caregivers</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of district's LCFF budget allocated to family engagement • % of schools that offer parents a minimum of four academic workshops per year • % of schools that have a FTE dedicated to family and community engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School provides families with workshops and training on how to support their student's learning at school and at home • School evaluates the quality of parent and trainings (e.g. pre and post surveys, satisfaction surveys, etc.) | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School allocates 1 FTE (parent coordinator, community liaison, etc.) to coordinate school-wide family engagement activities • School allocates resources to support out-of-classroom activities that support parent and student learning (e.g. stipends for staff, transportation to college visits, health fairs, etc.) • District allocates resources for foster youth counselors and social workers to identify educational strengths and needs, and progress, of foster youth • School designates on site space for Family Resource Center • District provides service list of community organizations as a resource to all schools in the district | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District has plan to expand Family Resource Centers at high-need schools • School has formal partnerships with external organizations to bring resources, training, and support to school staff and parents • District has joint use agreement with community partners to provide services to families at the school sites (e.g. wellness centers, afterschool programs, summer programs, tutoring, etc.) |

References:

Sebring, Penny Bender, Elaine Allensworth, Anthony S. Bryk, John Q. Easton and Stuart Luppescu. September 2006. "The Essential Supports for School Improvement" The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

2012. "Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts States." http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/cpei/family-engagement-framework.pdf

2012. "Reimagining Parent Engagement in California: Moving from 1.0 to 2.0. Families In Schools.

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams: <http://www.wested.org/service/academic-parent-teacher-teams-aptt-family-engagement-in-education/> September 2015. "The Family Engagement Partnership Student Outcome Evaluation." Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

Parent-School Compacts. <http://www.indistar.org/app/wiseways/1113.pdf>

Research Brief on Student Led Conferences. http://oemanagement.com/data/_files/studentledconf.pdf

October 2014. "Measuring School Climate, Using Existing Tools on Climate and Effectiveness to Inform School Organizational Health." <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED553169.pdf>

CATEGORY 3

Quality of Engagement of Parent Leaders

Assessing and reflecting on the conditions, practices, and strategies that promote meaningful parental participation on district and school-level committees.

| INDICATORS & METRICS | EMERGING | DEVELOPING | ACHIEVING |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>3.1 Leadership development and capacity-building</p> <p>METRICS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of parent leaders on committees who report they have received training and tools to carry out their roles • % of parent leaders who report feeling their input is respected and valued and reflected in school/district plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School offers volunteer leadership opportunities (e.g. parent training, mentoring, and outreach) • Parent leaders complete surveys and evaluations to communicate their support needs and the quality of that support • Training addresses needs specified by parents • Meetings are accessible, and materials and discussion are in primary languages | <p>Emerging, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent leaders' representation on committees reflect demographics of student body • School provides parents with disaggregated student data and budgetary information to make informed decisions • Leadership training aims to build parent leaders' knowledge about educational systems, and strengthen confidence • District and schools work at expanding base of parent leaders to include LCFF families | <p>Developing, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School employs "joint" training and capacity-building activities for principals, staff, and parent leaders • School staff is reporting back to parent committees how parent input was included in the LCAP and budget planning process • Parent advisory members are utilized as liaisons to "everyday" parents and community • Parent leaders participate in school site and district administrator evaluations |

References:

2012. "Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts States. http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/cpei/family-engagement-framework.pdf

2015. "The Family Leadership Self-Assessment Rubric: An Indicator Tool for School Districts and Lessons from Central Falls, Rhode Island." Brown University, RI. Annenberg Institute for School Reform

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep appreciation for the thoughtful feedback and comments from Dr. Marisa Saunders, Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, and from Kim Lewis, and education interns Amalia Mejia and Yvette Martinez. This work would not have been possible without support from the Heising-Simons Foundation and The California Endowment, whose unwavering commitment to building strong school-family partnerships – in the service of improving public education – empowers so many parents, educators, administrators, and education leaders.

Also, many thanks to our partners California PTA, Parent Organization Network, Parent Teacher Home Visit Project and PICO California for the time they contributed to reviewing research and identifying relevant metrics for parent engagement. Your collective wisdom was influential in the development of our evaluation rubrics.

Finally, thank you to the fourteen school districts across California that participated in this report and to the thirty district personnel who shared their time, experiences, and candid opinions about the real challenges and opportunities of parent engagement. Their honesty and dedication should guide and inspire all of us as we strive toward excellence in parent engagement.

And, many thanks to:





Families In Schools (FIS) serves low-income, communities of color knowing that education remains the single most important opportunity for them. FIS seeks to help parents become knowledgeable and confident advocates for their children's education, and allies and partners with schools.

Students are more likely to succeed when schools, families and communities work together in partnership to maximize and support student learning.

OUR MISSION

To involve parents and communities in their children's education to achieve lifelong success.