

Family Engagement Capacity Building Framework



The Challenge

The importance of the families' role in children's academic, social and emotional development appears to be widely accepted throughout the education sector. Many districts and schools, however, struggle with how to execute these family and community engagement mechanisms and with how to cultivate and sustain positive relationships with families. A common refrain heard from multiple stakeholders—state education agency staff, district and school leaders, teachers, community partners, and parents—is that they have a strong desire for more families from diverse backgrounds and cultures to be engaged in their children's education and for stronger partnerships of shared responsibility for children's outcomes to exist between the home and school, but that they do not know how to accomplish this.

Current policies and programs designed to support the engagement of families operate on a flawed assumption: that the multiple stakeholders charged with executing these policies and initiatives have the requisite collective *capacity* to succeed in these endeavors. The draft Family Engagement Capacity Building Framework is designed to address this challenge of limited capacity by providing a direction and focus for future policy, programming and practice in the area of family engagement.

Policy and Programming

Future policy and programming in the area of family engagement should focus on building and enhancing the capacity of school/program staff and families to partner in ways that support student achievement and development as well as school improvement. Capacity refers to the *capabilities*, one's human capital, skill mastery and knowledge; the *connections*, the important relationships, networks, in other words, a person's social capital; the *confidence*, one's individual level of self-efficacy; and cognition, a person's assumptions, values, beliefs and worldview.¹ The building of all four components of capacity are required to enable stakeholders to cultivate and sustain effective family engagement initiatives.

Conditions for Success

Research on adult learning, leadership development, and promising practice family engagement programs identify important *system* and *process* components key to the success of capacity building initiatives:

System (Organizational) Components

LEAs and schools struggle to create family engagement initiatives that are coherent and aligned with educational improvement goals. The following *system (organizational)* components shape the direction, focus and insure the sustainability of capacity building initiatives:

- *Systemic* – purposefully designed as a core component of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround.
- *Integrated* – embedded into structures and processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, and community collaboration.
- *Sustained* – operates with adequate resources and infrastructure support. Multiple funding streams are resourced to fund initiatives, and senior level district leadership coordinates family engagement as a component of the overall improvement strategy. School leaders are committed to and have a systemic vision of family engagement.

Process Components

The following five *process* components are key to effective capacity building interventions:

- *Linked to learning* – initiatives must be aligned with school and district achievement goals and connect parents to the teaching and learning goals for the students.
- *Relational* – a major focus of the initiative is on building respectful and trusting relationships between families and district, school and program staff.
- *Developmental* – the initiatives focus not only on providing a service but also on building the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program.
- *Collective/Collaborative* – learning is conducted in group versus individual settings and focused on building strong networks and learning communities.
- *Interactive* – participants are given opportunities to test out, practice, and apply new skills.

¹ Higgins, 2005

Outcomes

Intended outcomes for LEA and school staff

Districts and schools cultivate and sustain active and effective partnerships with families, strengthening one of the identified essential supports—parent and community ties—needed for school improvement

District staff, school leaders, teachers, and other relevant school staff:

- Respect and honor families' existing knowledge and their potential contribution to the work of schools
- Have the skills, knowledge and confidence to create welcoming and inviting learning communities for students and their families.
- Demonstrate a commitment to family engagement as a core strategy to improve teaching and learning
- Engage in initiatives with families that focus on academic achievement and connect families' to student learning
- Work in partnership with families to support and share the responsibility for student achievement and school improvement

Intended outcomes for families

More families are actively engaged in their children's education and school improvement

A critical mass of families in school communities, regardless of their race/ethnicity, educational background, gender, or socioeconomic status:

- Have developed the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to negotiate the multiple roles (supporters, encouragers, monitors, decision-makers, advocates, collaborators) of effective family engagement
- Are actively engaged, from cradle to career, in their children's academic, social, and emotional development
- Feel honored and respected by school staff
- Work in partnership with school and LEA staff to support and share the responsibility for student achievement and school improvement