



Family-School Partnership

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Educators increasingly recognize that schools cannot raise student achievement alone. Many schools and districts are interested in working with families and communities to improve student outcomes. A research base spanning half a century supports the position that families play a significant role in their children's education; family involvement is one of the strongest predictors of school success. Simply put, students are more successful in school and life when their families are engaged in their education. Family engagement efforts seek to improve student outcomes by increasing family involvement in their child's education. Such efforts incorporate a variety of strategies for schools to employ to welcome and work with families, and for educators and families to use to collaborate effectively.

School improvement efforts that require a partnership between families and schools set the stage for successful family engagement in education, a key area of focus at the federal level. The reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires family engagement, and the U.S. Department of Education has recently released both a [framework on family-school partnerships](#) and a [policy statement](#) (jointly with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) on family engagement. In addition, family engagement has become increasingly important to [states](#), with the majority now requiring districts to implement family engagement policies. Still, even with family engagement as a priority, schools and districts struggle to effectively engage with families. Family engagement efforts can be superficial, consisting only of limited attempts to get families to do certain things (e.g., come to school events or complete surveys) rather than genuine attempts to encourage schools and families to engage with one another in a true partnership.

While this document is not an exhaustive survey of the field, it provides schools and their partners with an overview of key research, best practices, illustrative examples, and funding sources. In addition, this document identifies resources to inform and support local action on this issue.

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The photo is courtesy of the U.S. Department of Education and shows a father and daughter attending a "Read Where You Are" event through the My Brother's Keeper Initiative at a barber shop in Oakland, California on Jan. 30, 2016.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND FRAMEWORKS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services' 2016 [Policy Statement on Family Engagement: From the Early Years to the Early Grades](#) draws on the departments' respective frameworks to promote a set of principles for implementing effective family engagement practices in early childhood programs through third grade. While focused on early childhood, specifically birth through third grade, the policy statement's principles are readily applicable across K-12 systems:¹

Here are 10 key principles worthy of note:

1. Create continuity and consistency for children and families
2. Value respectful and trusting relationships between families and professionals
3. Develop goal-oriented relationships with families that are linked to children's development and learning
4. Engage families around children's physical and mental health, along with social and emotional well-being
5. Ensure all family engagement opportunities are culturally and linguistically responsive
6. Build staff capacity to implement family engagement practice principles
7. Support families' connections and capabilities
8. Systemically embed effective family engagement strategies within early childhood systems and programs
9. Develop strong relationships with community partners that support families
10. Continuously learn and improve

Based on these principles, the policy statement offers recommendations for implementing family engagement practices across systems and within programs. These recommendations include the following suggestions for establishing policies, procedures, and practices at the local level to support family engagement:²

- Provide access to families and invite them to participate in learning activities
- Create family friendly environments
- Support family connections
- Develop family and professional relationships linked to learning, development, and wellness
- Provide two-way communication
- Support families as decision makers
- Establish supportive transitions to new learning settings
- Provide family supports
- Provide voluntary home visits
- Establish formal relationships with community partners
- Make data about children's progress accessible and understandable to parents

¹ [Policy Statement on Family Engagement](#), pages 7-8.

² [Policy Statement on Family Engagement](#), pages 12-17.

THE DUAL CAPACITY-BUILDING FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The main goal of many family engagement initiatives is to build on the strengths and knowledge of families to support their children's learning and thereby increase academic achievement. Yet research indicates that teachers and administrators may also benefit from professional development to build the capacity required to work in partnership with their students' families.

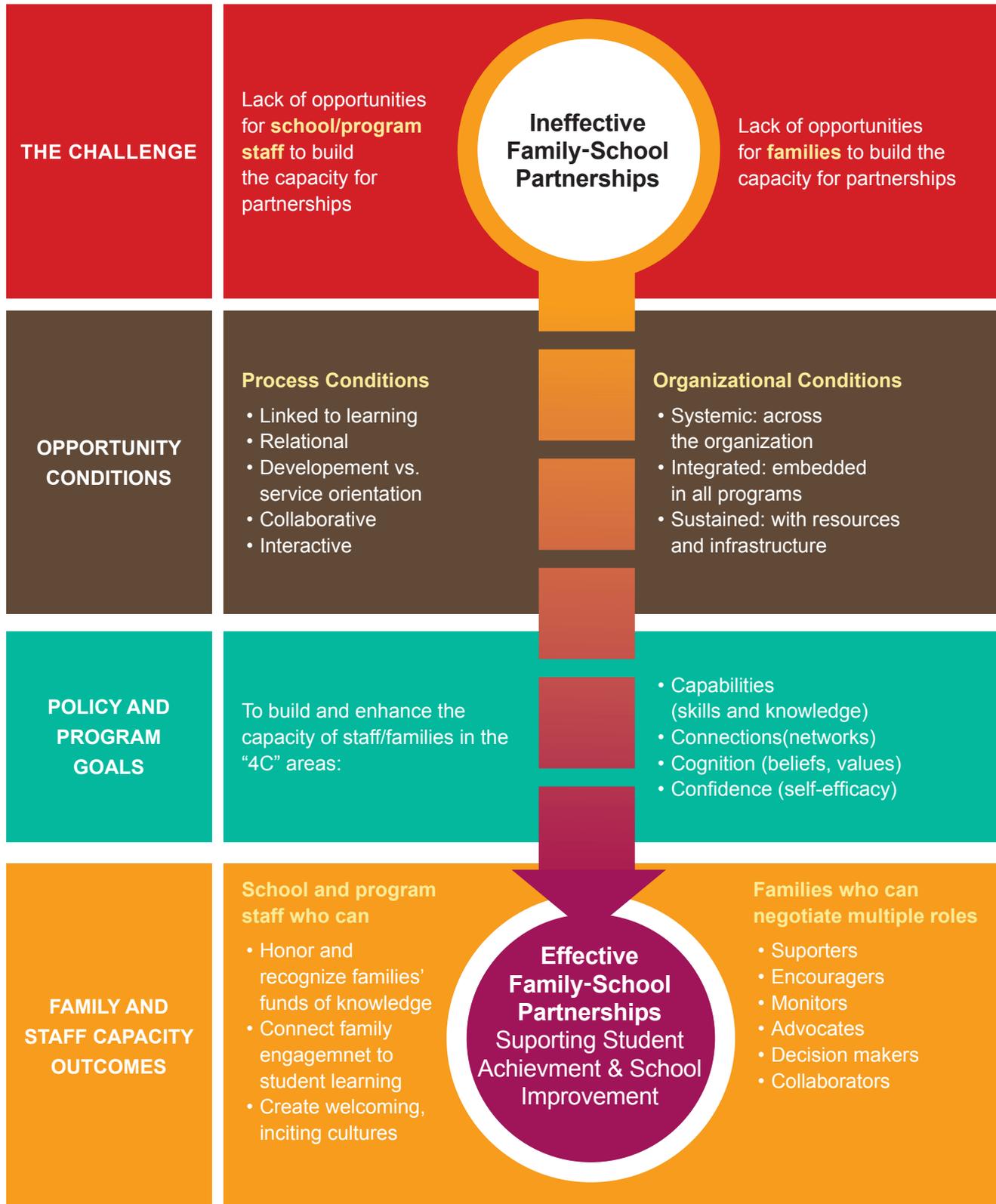
Recognizing that educators and families often lack the skills and knowledge necessary to implement family-school partnerships, the U.S. Department of Education has advanced the [Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) for designing family engagement practices that build capacity among both educators and families to partner for student success and school improvement. Based on the belief that partnerships between families and schools can develop and thrive only when both families and school staff possess the necessary capacity to engage in such partnerships, the framework offers effective strategies for family engagement, family-school partnership, adult learning, and leadership development.

As shown in the graphic on the next page, there are four main components identified in the framework:

1. Capacity challenges that must be addressed to support the cultivation of effective family-school partnerships.
2. Conditions necessary for the success of family-school partnership activities.
3. Policy and program goals for capacity building.
4. Desired family and staff capacity outcomes.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships³

Developed by Karen L. Mapp and Paul J. Kuttner for the U.S. Department of Education



³ Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships; page 8.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: PROFILES OF TWO FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Across the country, districts and schools are implementing family engagement strategies. Below we highlight ongoing work to build robust family-school partnerships focused on dual capacity-building in the District of Columbia and nearby suburban Prince George's County, Maryland. The following examples are offered not to provide case studies of success, but rather to provide a sense of the breadth of experience as partners work to increase family engagement in education.

The efforts in Prince George's County, MD, and Washington, DC, provide examples of sustained efforts to engage families in their children's education and support the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships described above. Both efforts recognize the centrality of families to children's educational success and seek to help families and educators develop the skills necessary for strong and lasting partnerships.

Maryland: Family and Community Engagement in Education to Support Recent Immigrants and English Language Learners—CASA de Maryland and Prince George's County Public Schools

[CASA de Maryland](#) is a community-based organization that seeks to improve the quality of life in low-income immigrant communities in suburban Washington, DC. Viewing its direct engagement in education as key to its community organizing, CASA is a vocal advocate for public education and works to harness and develop the knowledge and skills immigrant families bring to their children's education and schools.

With the assistance of a federal Investing in Innovation Fund (I3) grant award from the U.S. Department of Education, CASA has implemented the [Learning Together](#) program, a place-based initiative serving 1,760 families with children under age 18 living in the Langley Park Promise Neighborhood. Learning Together seeks to build families' capacity to navigate the education system despite limited English proficiency, low education attainment, and the challenges of immigration. The Learning Together model includes:

- Parents from the community hired to engage in neighborhood outreach
- Classes offered by parents to support their peers in gaining the skills to access resources for their children
- Opportunities for parents, teachers, and students to come together to learn and celebrate
- Professional development training for teachers

Through its [Leadership Academy](#), CASA trains and empowers parents and families to promote positive education policy changes in their communities.

In fall 2016, CASA opened two high schools in partnership with Prince George's County Public Schools and the Internationals Network for Public Schools. These new schools offer a high-quality, college and career preparatory education to low-income youth of color, those who will be the first generation in their families to attend college, and English language learners. The schools are designed to be [community schools](#), able to respond to the needs of immigrant students, families, and community members. CASA provides wraparound services to support broader family needs and develop parent and student leadership skills to engage in the education system.

CASA's work on family engagement provides an example of the important role of capacity building not only for families, but also for teachers in effective family engagement in education. To help bridge this divide and enable true family-school-community partnership, CASA has developed the Teacher-Parents Connections (TPC) Institute, a credentialed teacher professional development training delivered through a summer institute and throughout the year. The TPC Institute includes training delivered by families to educate teachers on various cultural, immigration, and language challenges faced by immigrant families and to promote a mental shift whereby teachers begin to see parents' assets and recognize they share challenges in communication but also share the goal of improving student success.

District of Columbia: Collaboration Between Families and Educators to Accelerate Student Learning—The Family Engagement Partnership

In 2010, the [Flamboyan Foundation](#) began work on the Family Engagement Partnership (FEP), a whole-school, intensive, capacity-building intervention to improve student achievement through transformation of teacher-family collaboration in Washington, DC.⁴ The FEP model focuses on teachers, rather than family engagement coordinators, and incorporates three central practices:

1. Home visits using the [Parent Teacher Home Visits project model](#), in which teachers and families meet to get to know one another and discuss each family's hopes for their child
2. Family and teacher academic meetings, in which each family receives information about their child's progress and practice activities to support learning at home, and sets goals for their child
3. Ongoing teacher-family communication throughout the school year

FEP partnership schools are chosen based on readiness to engage in a deep change process. Once selected, a school's FEP teacher leads complete over 15 hours of professional development. Flamboyan provides ongoing biweekly coaching and quarterly professional learning community convenings to build the capacity of school leadership teams to lead the initiative in their schools, as well as materials and systems to support FEP implementation. During the 2011-12 school year, Flamboyan piloted the FEP in a group of five schools, working intensively with interested principals and teacher leads in each school. As of the 2015-16 school year, Flamboyan coaches were providing ongoing training, curriculum, and tools to 45 partnership schools in the District of Columbia, including both public schools and public charter schools.

Findings from a 2015 [evaluation](#) of the FEP indicate that interventions designed to build teachers' capacity to engage families improved outcomes for both students and teachers; that stronger relationships between teachers and families established from the beginning of the year through home visits are associated with student academic success; and that longer participation in FEP is associated with larger student achievement gains. On average, by the end of the school year students in families visited at home were absent 2.7 fewer days and were 1.55 times more likely to be reading at or above grade level than their peers who did not receive a home visit.

Noticing academic and attendance improvements in FEP schools, and seeking to improve family-school relations, District of Columbia Public Schools approached Flamboyan about reaching a larger number of schools and educators. In 2013, DCPS and Flamboyan launched the Family Engagement Collaborative to provide training and curriculum for interested teachers not currently teaching in partnership schools. Since that time, more than 250 teachers representing more than 60 schools have been trained through the collaborative. During the 2015-16 school year, families of more than 10,000 DCPS students—one-fifth of the student population and a larger number of students than any other state in the country—were visited by a teacher at home.

Through its work on [family engagement](#), DCPS is thinking differently about how teachers fit into the life of a family and how families can support the work of educators. The district would like to expand the use of these strategies to more of its teachers because it recognizes improved outcomes for students of teachers who make home visits. Because the district wants more teachers who are open to strong partnerships with families, DCPS has begun to include discussion of family engagement as part of new teacher recruitment efforts.

⁴ Information based on June 2016 interviews and email correspondence with Susan Stevenson, executive director, Flamboyan Foundation, and Vincent Baxter, director of school-level family engagement, District of Columbia Public Schools.

THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

A growing body of literature supports increased efforts to engage families and communities in students' education. Here we highlight a sampling of recent research on the effects of family engagement and family-school partnerships by experts in the field.

- [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#) provides a synthesis of research studies on family and community engagement in education.
- [Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement](#) provides the results of an analysis of existing research on parental involvement in middle school to determine whether parental involvement is related to achievement and, if so, which types.
- [A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Different Types of Parental Involvement Programs for Urban Students](#) discusses the effectiveness of different types of parental involvement programs on urban student achievement.

FUNDING RESOURCES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

For communities seeking to increase family engagement in education, the U.S. Department of Education funds numerous programs and initiatives that can be harnessed to support efforts to build family-school partnerships. Formula or statutory funds that may support family engagement efforts include the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#); the [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#); and the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#). The department's discretionary grants programs may also support family engagement activities; see funding announcements at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/find/elig/index.html>.

NETWORKS AND ASSOCIATIONS SUPPORTING FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The following networks and associations allow those interested to delve more deeply into the topic of family engagement.

- [Coalition for Community Schools](#) is an alliance of national, state, and local organizations in K-16 education, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, and government and philanthropy, as well as national, state, and local community school networks.
- [Family Involvement Network of Educators](#) is a network of community educators committed to strengthening family involvement practices, promoting family involvement education, and advancing professional development in family involvement. FINE produces an [email newsletter](#) highlighting resources for strengthening family, school, and community partnerships.
- The Institute for Educational Leadership's [District Leaders Network on Family & Community Engagement](#) is a peer-learning and action network of school district learners.
- The Institute for Educational Leadership's [Family & Community Engagement Network](#) connects those working on various aspects of family and community engagement across the country who are interested in learning and sharing best practices.

STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

According to [The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships](#) from 2005, administrators and teachers indicate one of the biggest challenges of their work is communicating with and involving parents. Despite this, school staff rarely receive preparation for the important work of engaging families. What is more, decisions about family engagement are frequently based on erroneous notions of what types of engagement actually improve student achievement.⁵ Below, we highlight a variety of effective strategies and best practices for improving family engagement in education.

The [Handbook on Family and Community Engagement](#) contains a wealth of information about effective strategies to encourage families and schools to partner for improved student outcomes, including chapters on parent leadership, differentiating family supports, bridging language and culture divides, engaging minority families, working with families of students with disabilities, family engagement in high school, and family engagement in rural schools. The handbook provides a checklist of suggested practices for state education agencies, local education agencies, and schools based on best practices and principles derived from a wide range of expert views on family and community engagement.

The Flamboyan Foundation's [Setting the Stage: The Family Engagement Field](#) summarizes the research showing family engagement matters for student success and what schools can do to make their family engagement efforts most successful. In addition, the Flamboyan Foundation provides numerous resources and tools, including a [classroom family engagement rubric](#), [a school-wide family engagement rubric](#), [parent-teacher conferences resource tools](#), and [tools for communicating with families about academic progress](#). The foundation's July 2012 presentation, "[Stanton APTT Workshop](#)," features an academic parent-teacher team meeting at Stanton Elementary School in Washington, DC.

[Parent Teacher Home Visits](#) are a fast, inexpensive, and replicable strategy for engaging families, educators, and students as a team. Based on community organizing principles of empowerment, these home visits have a protocol that helps educators and families

overcome barriers to parent-school partnership. The Parent Teacher Home Visits project's December 2014 presentation, [Home Visits & Academic Parent Teacher Teams: A Winning Combination](#), explores the concept behind parent teacher home visits and Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's [Engaging Diverse Families](#) project includes principles for effective family engagement and profiles of programs demonstrating best practices encouraging involvement of diverse families in schools.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's [Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8](#) reviews research on parenting practices, identifies effective practices, and recommends ways agencies and others can support interventions that help more parents learn about effective parenting practices.

United Way Worldwide and the Harvard Family Research Project have developed a [tool kit for family engagement for high school success](#) designed to support at-risk secondary school students by engaging families, schools, and communities. The tool kit highlights lessons learned from a planning process in which 15 local United Way pilot sites brought together schools, community organizations, families, and other stakeholders to create a comprehensive family engagement initiative.

The 2011 [National Education Association report](#) on family-school-community partnerships promotes family engagement strategies; and the [National Parent Teacher Association](#), an organization dedicated to promoting parent involvement in schools, has established [national standards for family-school partnerships](#).

The U.S. Department of Education provides additional resources and tools for families, educators, and communities on its [Family and Community Engagement page](#). In addition, the Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education provides family engagement support to state education agencies and their 21st Century Community Learning Centers on the [You for Youth site](#), including [training and tools on the topic of family engagement](#).

⁵ Flamboyan Foundation. 2011. [Setting the Stage: The Family Engagement Field](#).