

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Interim Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** March 6, 2019

**SUBJECT:** Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement

*Executive Summary*

**Purpose**

This presentation introduces the State Board of Education (SBE) to a new definition and framework for family engagement in Connecticut. This effort is aligned with the Connecticut State Board of Education's Five-year Comprehensive Plan, 2016-21, *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*. The Plan commits to great schools that *support and develop authentic opportunities and experiences for meaningful parental engagement by building capacity for families and school staff to partner effectively in support of student success*.

To ensure that parents, educators, public officials and community leaders have a common understanding of the term parent (or family) engagement, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) engaged in a project to co-create a common definition as well as a framework to guide high-impact practice.

The resulting report entitled [\*Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement\*](#) presents a common definition for family engagement and a set of [\*guiding principles\*](#) that articulate a true partnership approach.

**Background Information**

The CSDE, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the Connecticut Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC) joined with the Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education, parents, educators and community members to co-create a common definition for advancing family engagement efforts across the state. The message from all stakeholders was increasingly clear and consistent:

*Family Engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families<sup>i</sup>, educators<sup>ii</sup> and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth through college and career.*

Participants in the process voiced their ideas about the meaning of key words in the definition:

- **Full** means that families, educators and community partners collaborate closely and consistently in promoting children's learning and development. This includes making sure that ALL children not only have access to high-quality learning opportunities, but also the supports they need to succeed.

- **Equal** means that families and educators recognize that both bring valuable knowledge to the table. Parents know their children, culture and community. Educators are trained in curriculum and child development. Their deep knowledge and skills are complementary, overlapping, and essential to ensuring success for all children.
- **Equitable** means that families are empowered to work with educators, public officials, and community partners to remove systemic, structural, and organizational barriers that perpetuate inequities and injustice. This includes ready access to ample opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to become full and equal partners in that deliberate and intentional work.

CSDE surveyed superintendents regarding their family engagement practices and their interest in receiving information and resources. Responses indicated that superintendents were interested in learning more about what *high-impact* practices look like in family engagement. Connecticut’s new definition and framework for family engagement provides districts with a new resource meeting this need and illustrates how [early childhood](#), [elementary school](#), [high school](#) and [after school programs](#) can shift their family engagement practices from lower to higher impact.

Connecticut’s definition and framework for family engagement is designed to encourage common understanding and collaboration, making it easy for all parties – educators, providers, community partners and families – to recognize what is expected of them and what effective practice looks like. The CSDE has also produced a collection of evidence-based practices in family engagement that supports implementation of the framework. The [Evidence-Based Practice Guide for Student/Family/Community Engagement](#) provides descriptions, citations and links to well-designed research studies.

### **Follow-up Activities**

The CSDE, OEC and ECFC are promoting adoption of these resources through direct dissemination to school districts, early education programs, philanthropies and other partners to promote a robust culture of partnership between families and professionals throughout Connecticut’s schools and early childhood programs. The CSDE is also disseminating monthly information to superintendents on evidence-based practices in family engagement. In spring 2019, the CSDE, in collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, will conduct a follow-up survey with superintendents regarding their implementation of evidence-based practices in their schools. Finally, the CSDE will continue to update and inform the SBE on progress as part of reporting on Goal 1 of the comprehensive plan.

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Approved by: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer

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<sup>i</sup> The terms family/ies and parent/s are used to represent any adult caretakers who have responsibility for the well-being of a child or children.

<sup>ii</sup> The term educators is used to mean any person who teaches or is involved in planning or directing experiences that promote learning and development.



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## Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families

Connecticut's Definition and Framework  
for Family Engagement

### Comprehensive Plan

#### Goal 1

Ensuring that students' non-academic needs are met so they are healthy, happy and ready to learn.

#### Strategy 3

Support student academic achievement and school improvement through effective school, family and community partnerships.

#### Definition of Success

Families, districts, schools and community partners are able to cultivate and sustain active, respectful, effective and equitable partnerships that foster school improvement, link to educational objectives, and support children's learning and development.



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## Defining Family Engagement

**Definition** To **co-create** a clear, useful definition of *high-impact* family and community engagement in children's learning and development.

What?

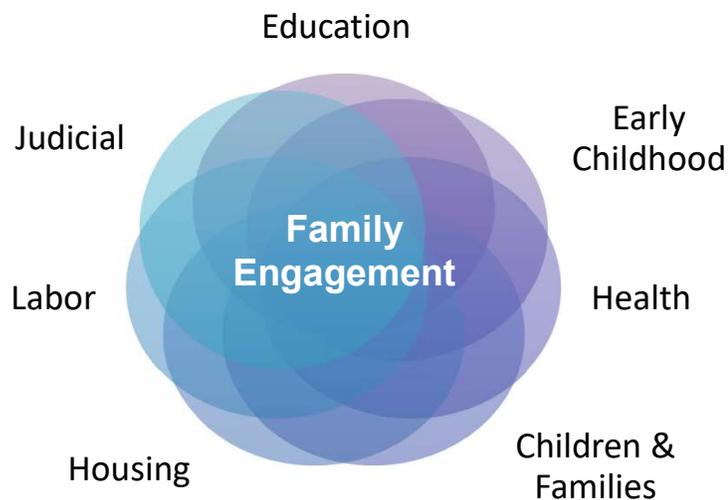
**Framework** To **co-develop** a framework for using the definition that includes core values, effective strategy examples, and user-friendly tools.

How?



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## Common Vision



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# Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families

Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement



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Connecticut Office of  
Early Childhood

Connecticut Early Childhood  
Funder Collaborative  
A PROJECT OF:



CONNECTICUT  
COUNCIL for  
PHILANTHROPY

## Definition

What?

Family engagement is  
**a full, equal and equitable partnership**  
among families,  
educators and  
community partners to  
promote children's  
learning and  
development, from birth  
through college and  
career.

### Full

Collaborating closely and consistently

### Equal

Partners with different roles but equal status

### Equitable

Families are empowered  
Removing systemic and structural barriers



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## Guiding Principles

How?

<b>Trust and Respect</b>	1. Build collaborative, trusting, respectful relationships focused on learning.
<b>Two-way conversations</b>	2. Listen to what families say about their children's interests and challenges.
<b>Link family engagement to student learning</b>	3. Model high-quality learning practices. 4. Share information frequently with families about how their children are doing. 5. Talk with students about how they want teachers and families to support their learning.
<b>Cultural competence</b>	6. Co-develop cultural competence among staff and families.
<b>Parent leadership</b>	7. Support parents to become effective leaders and advocates for children.



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## From Vision to Practice

How?

### CHART 1

What Does High-Impact Family Engagement Look Like in Early Childhood Programs?

### CHART 2

What Does High Impact Family Engagement Look Like in Elementary Schools?

### CHART 3

What Does High-Impact Family Engagement Look Like in After School Programs?

### CHART 4

What Does High Impact Family Engagement Look Like in Middle and High Schools?



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## Major Activities and Next Steps

### Policy

- Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education
- ESSA Evidence-Based Practice Guide
- Commissioner's Memos to Superintendents

### Capacity Building

- Friday CAFÉ (Community and Family Engagement) Professional Network
- Webinars, Book Group, Guide for New Administrators
- Training for Opportunity Districts in Creating Welcoming Schools

### Metric

- Superintendents' Report of High-Impact Family Engagement Practices



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## CCSSO State Consortium on Family Engagement Recognition



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