



# Commissioner's Back-to-School Meeting

Connecticut State Department of Education | August 15, 2018

## Update from the Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness

### School-Family-Community Partnerships

#### Introduction

Education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's life, from birth to adulthood. Families<sup>i</sup>, educators<sup>ii</sup> and community members make important contributions to student success; the best results come when all three work together as equal partners.

Research shows that well-planned partnerships among families, school and community members can make a powerful contribution to greater student success. No matter what their income or background, students with involved families tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging classes, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college. Families and schools also benefit. Families engaged in partnerships have a greater sense of efficacy, stronger social ties and are more likely to continue their own education. Teachers report greater job satisfaction when they work with families, and families who are more involved hold more positive views of teachers and schools. Increased involvement develops feelings of ownership, resulting in greater family and community support for public education.

#### Definition

While recognition of the importance of family engagement has increased, there is no clear and consistent definition that is shared by professionals, families and community members. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), along with the Office of Early Childhood and the Early Childhood Funder Collaborative (a project of the Connecticut Council on Philanthropy) worked with multiple stakeholder groups to develop a definition for Connecticut. The definition and guiding principles are grounded in research and represent high-impact practices that have been shown to impact student achievement:

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*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.*

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- "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.

### **Evidence-Based Practices**

Building the capacity of staff and families is foundational to creating effective school-family-community partnerships and requires a systemic approach, planned professional learning and school-based implementation of evidence-based practices.

- A Systemic Approach: Successful partnership initiatives are coherent and aligned with educational improvement goals, resourced and sustained over time, and embedded across the district.
- Professional Learning for Partnerships:
  - Aligned with school and district achievement goals and connects families to the teaching and learning goals for the students.
  - Focused on the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for building respectful and trusting relationships between home and school.
  - Builds the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program.
  - Focused on building learning communities and networks.
  - Brings families and staff together for shared learning.
  - Provides coaching and opportunities to practice new skills.
- School Leadership for Implementation: School partnership programs are aligned with improvement goals and are built on evidence-based strategies.
  - Establish a school partnership team to plan and implement comprehensive partnership programs with families.
  - Connect family activities to school expectations and what students are learning in class, in ways that promote two-way and frequent communication.
  - Co-create welcoming and inviting settings where all families are included.
  - Recognize, honor, and learn from families' diverse cultural viewpoints, knowledge and experience, and integrate this knowledge into student learning.
  - Partner with families to maintain high expectations for children and advocate for their access to high-quality programs.
  - Provide training and support for educators to conduct "relational" home visits.
  - Collaborate with community organizations to support children and families.
  - Provide opportunities for parents to participate in parent leadership programs.

### **Resources and Additional Information:**

- [CSDE Evidence Based Practice Guides](#)
- [School-Family Community Partnerships \(CSDE Overview\)](#)
- [National Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#)
- [Linking School-Parent Compacts to Student Learning Goals \(CSDE\)](#)
- [How Welcoming Is Your School?](#)
- [Parent Teacher Home Visiting Project](#)
- [National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement](#)
- [Friday CAFÉ \(Community And Family Engagement\) Connecticut's Professional Network](#)  
Friday CAFÉ is a monthly networking meeting for professionals interested in family engagement.

For further information, contact Judy Carson, Ph.D. at 860-807-2122 or [judy.carson@ct.gov](mailto:judy.carson@ct.gov).

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<sup>i</sup> The terms family/ies and parent/s are used in this paper to represent any adult caretakers who have responsibility for the well-being of a child or children. This includes, for example, biological parents, foster care providers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, or fictive kin.

<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. This includes professionals in schools as well as those in early childhood settings, after school settings and community organizations.