




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** Superintendents of Schools

**FROM:** Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer 

**DATE:** December 13, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Family Engagement Definition and Framework

The Connecticut State Department of Education (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.

I am pleased to provide you with this new publication, "[Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement](#)," which presents not only the common definition for family engagement but also a set of co-created [guiding principles](#) that articulate a partnership approach.

The 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.

For example, many elementary schools hold curriculum nights for families. The impact on students' learning and development would likely be higher if schools offered interactive homework for students and families with tips for home learning. The impact would likely be higher still if parents were able to participate in classroom observations during which teachers model strategies to support specific learning goals at home, followed by an opportunity for families to ask questions, practice strategies with each other, and go home with a "tip sheet."

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 understand 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.

The CSDE, OEC and ECFC are promoting use of these resources to develop a robust culture of partnership between families and professionals throughout all education and human service programs. In the coming months you will be receiving additional resources for implementing high-impact family engagement practices.

If you would like additional information, please contact Dr. Judy Carson at [judy.carson@ct.gov](mailto:judy.carson@ct.gov) or 860-807-2122.

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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.