

# State Consortium on Family Engagement

## Project Description

### Context and Rationale

Family engagement is an integral component of success in education. Primarily during the early years of a child's life, the imprint of socialization and early learning is greatly influenced by the family and its surroundings and engaging families in the education of their children continues throughout their school careers. State and Federal education agencies recognize the importance of family engagement and defined policies that guide practitioners in implementing effective strategies on engaging families in the educational process. State policies on parental involvement and support structures for families are prevalent as is Federal policy through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Its latest version, the Every Student Success Act (ESSA), places special emphasis on family engagement and repeatedly, throughout the statute, refers to the inclusion of early childhood education as a critical element of family engagement. Not unlike previous iterations of the law, ESSA includes provisions for States to provide funds to local educational agencies to conduct outreach to all parents and to implement programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents and family members in programs with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children<sup>1</sup>. In fact, ESSA lays out the management and performance by local districts to:

- provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist and build the capacity of all participating schools within the local educational agency in planning and implementing effective parent and family involvement activities;
- involve parents in the activities of the schools which may include establishing a parent advisory board;
- coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs and activities with other Federal, State, and local programs, including public preschool programs; and
- conduct, with the meaningful involvement of parents and family members, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parent and family engagement to design evidence-based strategies for more effective parental involvement.

State education agencies (SEA) play an important role in supporting local districts in implementing effective family engagement policies and strategies. While SEAs provide funding

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<sup>1</sup> Sec. 1116, 20 U.S.C. 6318

to local districts to implement effective family engagement strategies, they also interact more collaboratively with districts in the areas of school improvement as well as general multi-tiered support for schools and students. Early childhood education, Birth to Kindergarten, which is typically outside the governance of SEAs is an essential element to effective family engagement strategies and, thereby, the foundation of a Birth to Grade 12 family engagement framework. In 2011, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Education (DOE) released the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework which uses a research-based, organizational development approach to high performance family engagement. It specifies the structures and functions in early childhood organizations that can be integrated to bring about continuous learning and improvement, and to institutionalize and sustain effective family engagement practices. There is a strong emphasis on engagement that is systemic, embedded and integrated across organizations.

This Framework has been applied to the work of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) which created a coalition of stakeholders with a vested interest in family engagement to embark on an ambitious pathway to improving the fundamental levels of engagement by families in education. Over the past two years, and with the support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the SEA in Maryland not only developed a comprehensive Family Engagement Framework under the advisement of the stakeholder coalition, but expanded its scope to K-12 education, thereby creating a seamless framework of engaging families from a child's infancy to high school graduation.

In addition to state models on a Birth to Grade 12 family engagement framework (e.g., Maryland, North Carolina, California)<sup>2</sup>, the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has published *Parent Matters: Supporting Parents of Children 0 to 8*,<sup>3</sup> which includes recommendations for a national framework.

Within the context of ESSA and the desire among some SEAs to offer a systemic and strategic approach to family engagement, CCSSO has received funds to work with six (6) states on establishing a coalition on family engagement. Its goal is to develop a statewide Family Engagement Framework, Birth to Grade 12, to enable SEAs to guide and work with early childhood providers and local districts in a coordinated and seamless outreach to families.

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<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2016). Toolkit to a guide to effective [parent, family, and community involvement in North Carolina Schools. Retrieved from

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/parents/toolkit/>

Maryland State Department of Education. (2015). Maryland Early Childhood Engagement Framework. Retrieved from <http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-framework>

California Department of Education. (2014). Family engagement framework: A tool for California school districts. Retrieved from <http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/family-engagement-framework>

<sup>3</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, Medicine. (2016). Parenting matters: Supporting parents and children 0 to 8. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

## **Organizational Background**

CCSSO is the only organization in the country that is led by education chiefs and represents top officials and staff within every state education agency (SEA). CCSSO has an impressive depth of experience with providing high-quality technical assistance to SEAs through its member chief state school officers, deputy chiefs, and leading SEA staff. In collaboration with many philanthropic partners and by using its power and authority to convene and broker cross-collaboration among states and leading partners, CCSSO has successfully moved states to collaborate and co-develop reform policies and actions/practices, adopt them, and implement them through their education systems. Moreover, through various consortia, networks and collaborative groups, CCSSO has been able to disseminate new information and enhance skills in individuals and groups working in SEAs and those serving them directly in order to improve their performance in solving problems and meeting objectives.

## **Specific Objectives**

CCSSO will establish *State Consortium on Family Engagement* with six (6) state teams comprised of SEA staff from early child education, school improvement/Title 1, or other units charged with impacting family engagement policies and practices. The Consortium will focus on:

- Developing a Community of Practitioners (CoP) among state teams to examine updated research and exemplary models of family engagement;
- Establishing a coalition of stakeholders within each state with a vested interest in family engagement;
- Developing a Birth to Grade 12 Family Engagement Framework, customized to the needs of each state and informed by state models, including Maryland, and other resources;
- Creating a technical assistance forum of experts in family engagement for the purpose of exploring technical as well as policy-related perspectives in alignment with the participating states' ESSA plans or the SEA's strategic plans; and
- Establishing a repository on family engagement research and implementation tools developed by states and national organizations.

## **The Outcomes of the State Consortium**

The outcomes of the State Consortium, contingent upon the particular needs of the participating states, include the following:

- Increased awareness of research and evidence-based practices in family engagement;
- Establishment of a Coalition on Family Engagement of family engagement stakeholders in each state to initiate and sustain the development and implementation of the Framework;

- Creation of a repository of research on family engagement, including evidence-based models.

### Key Strategies to Meeting the Outcomes

The strategies will be implemented as follows:

- Four (4) two-day in-person CoP meetings by the six (6) state teams;
- Four webinars with topics, including specific research on family engagement , stakeholder engagement, family engagement with families of high needs students, expanding outreach to families through digital media, and integrating family engagement strategies in school improvement efforts;
- Monthly consultative conference calls with state teams on developing family engagement frameworks that are aligned with the state’s ESSA plans and/or strategic plans;
- Developing a communication plan on the dissemination and implementation of the family engagement framework with early childhood education providers and school districts.

### Proposed Program Partners

The State Consortium’s key partners are the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) by funding the Consortium activities. In addition, the Center on Enhancing of Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) and the Policy Equity Group, LLC are supporting the Consortium activities.

In addition, the Consortium has access to national experts in family engagement, stakeholder engagement, digital media in family engagement, and state specialists in family engagement and school improvement. State teams may schedule consultation calls with the experts upon request.

### Criteria for State Selection

The Coalition is looking for states that:

- Have the commitment and capacity to establish a coalition of stakeholders to develop a Family Engagement Framework, Birth to Grade 12;
- Have a track record of strong SEA support for parent and family engagement ;
- Show willingness to work with other agencies, e.g., departments of early childhood education, to collaborate on this project.

### Commitment by States

Selected states will form teams of 2 individuals. It is recommended to have representation from early learning and school improvement/Title 1 on the team. (A third individual could be added upon request if states’ governance for early childhood education includes two agencies such as

an agency for early childhood education and the state education agency.) The state teams will be asked to complete a brief self-assessment on policies and practices regarding family engagement in the state.

The state teams participate in four (4) in-person meetings (2 days each). All costs for travel, lodging, and meals are covered.

State team members participate in monthly conference calls on topics specifically tailored to the development of the Framework and other needs of the states.

For evaluation purposes, state team members will be available for structured interviews at the end of the Consortium activities.

### Project Timelines

By April 1, 2017, identify six (6) states (and team members) to participate in the consortium.

By April 1, 2017, complete drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with each state.

By April 15, 2017, identify family engagement strategies embedded in the states' ESSA plans or the SEA's strategic plans.

By April 15, 2017, update national and state resources on family engagement.

By June 1, 2017, feature first webinar on the scope of the state consortium and research on family engagement.

By July 1, 2017, complete the first convening of state consortium members.

By August 1, 2017, conduct first monthly conference call with state teams with the topic on coalition building and stakeholder engagement (and from hereon each month to topics relevant for state teams).

By November 1, 2017, complete second convening.

By December 1, 2017, webinar on family engagement with families of high-need students.

By March 1, 2018, completion of the first draft of the Family Engagement Framework.

By March 1, 2018, webinar on the use of digital media as outreach strategy to families.

By April 1, 2018, completion of third convening (will include work on communication plan.)

By July 1, 2018, identification of resources related to family engagement tools.

By October 1, 2018, finalization of Framework.

By October 1, 2018, webinar on family engagement and school improvement.

By November 1, 2018, completion of final convening.

By December 1, 2018, completion of stat teams' communication and implementation plans.

By December 31, completion of structured interviews with state team members for evaluation purposes and a final report.

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