

**A Proposal to Strengthen Family
and Community Engagement
within the
Elementary and Secondary
Education Act**

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Preamble

Parent, family, and community engagement increases academic achievement.

Children of all ages, races, and socio-economic status demonstrate higher levels of achievement when their parents are actively involved at school.¹ When parents are actively involved in their children's education, students are more positive about learning, graduate from high school and enroll in college at higher rates, and are less likely to use alcohol and drugs or get involved in gangs.² Parental engagement makes home-school communication easier and helps teachers understand their students and how to help them.³ Parental engagement also encourages parents to seek additional education for themselves,⁴ and community partnerships can provide a means to that end. When implemented effectively, family engagement programs can increase academic achievement by involving parents at school with learning-related activities and at home.⁵

Family and community engagement increase academic achievement by giving education context and creating continuity of purpose in a child's life: her family, her school, and her community are all aligned in a single vision for her future and how to achieve it. For some students, this might mean an intensive focus on literacy. For others, academic success means overcoming asthma, or enriching afterschool time, or focusing on college readiness. When schools enlist families as co-educators, students and families become more invested in what's going on at school.⁶ When families are actively involved in students' schools, they are more likely to emphasize its importance and prioritize finishing homework and getting to school on time every day. These partnerships reinforce the importance of education for both parents and their students and ensure that students come to school ready to learn.⁷

Community partnerships can help schools engage parents, leverage existing resources, and attract additional resources.

Ideally, parental engagement takes place in coordination with community partnerships and creates benefits and responsibilities for students, families, community members, and staff. The participation also invigorates the school culture. Community and family engagement is a commitment that is equally shared by all partners to support students' learning and development in school and at home. It begins at birth and continues through high school graduation. Community organizations, third parties who understand the interests of both the school and the families, can mediate the partnership and help eliminate the disconnect between home and school that results in blame and negative assumptions.

Community organizations do not have to worry about raising test scores as administrators and teachers in failing schools frequently do, which means they can expend their resources on essential learning activities that are not tested, such as college and career guidance, social development, and physical education and wellness. Community organizations and members can supply opportunities for weekend and after-school programs that provide students with enriched learning opportunities to help them explore outside interests, focus on subjects they are struggling with, or dive deeper into academic topics that spark their imagination. These programs can ameliorate the shortened school days and years many districts are resorting to as a cost-cutting measure. The inclusion of community partners in decision-making and

¹ Perkins et al. 2004; Anderson & Minke 2007.

² Perkins et al. 2004.

³ See Epstein 2001.

⁴ Pena 2000.

⁵ Caspe & Lopez 2006; Jeynes 2007.

⁶ Christenson, Godber, & Anderson 2003.

⁷ Warren 2005; Miller & Marschall 2007.

curricula can create a richer learning experience for students and provide opportunities for students to gain career skills through externships with local businesses.⁸ In addition, community partnerships can supplement the resources and social services available at the school.⁹ In some ways community organizations are the ideal vehicles for these efforts because they frequently maintain pre-existing networks with parents and pipelines to the services parents and students need access to.

Community partnerships can help in three concrete ways to address the opportunity gap that plagues many low-income, under-resourced schools. First, community organizations that are skilled at advocating can give parents and schools political clout to fight for more equitable distribution of resources.¹⁰ Parents have a strong interest in ensuring that their children have access to all the resources that will help students reach high achievement. Schools would benefit from tapping into that supportive sentiment. In times of limited resources, parents can be strong advocates for additional resources, whether from state funds or community partners, and for the appropriate use of current ones. For example, parents concerned about students' limited exposure to various career paths can advocate for an externship program with the local business community. Parents upset about outdated textbooks can organize to lobby the state or district for funds to buy new books, or to fundraise within the community to purchase new books on their own. Second, school-community partnerships can leverage the resources of each to spread them further.¹¹ For example, the school building could house a community center, and the community organization could use its coalition to bring health services or tutors into the school. Finally, the partnerships themselves can be resources. Parents who might be too intimidated to interact with their child's teacher as a peer can be more confident doing so with the support of a network of parents.¹² Community members and parents can serve as valuable mentors to students, and community organizations and schools can cooperate to create meaningful after-school programs that are tied to students' learning.

Community organizations improve their social capital and positively impact residents by engaging in partnerships with neighborhood schools.

Communities benefit from getting involved with schools as well. Pooling resources can help community organizations stretch their dollars, and centralizing services at a school enables organizations to reach more residents and perform more efficiently. The presence of community members in schools helps students learn more about their community and encourages them to participate in and support it. Community integration helps students develop citizenship and leadership skills that can translate into community leadership. Strong schools increase property values and draw fresh blood and business into communities. Community organizations gain social capital and expand their network by working with school leaders, increasing their chances of success at garnering the attention of public officials and being in a position to hold them accountable.¹³

Meaningful parental engagement is driven by parents, focused on students, and responsive to the needs of the school and the community.

Family engagement can be a huge step towards increasing academic achievement, particularly at low-performing schools, but it has to mean more than just chaperoning field trips and planning class parties. Larry Ferlazzo, an expert in parent engagement strategies, offers a helpful essay on the differences between parent involvement and parent

⁸ Public Education Network 2007.

⁹ Henderson & Berla 2000; Jehl 2007.

¹⁰ Warren 2005; Gold, Simon, & Brown 2002.

¹¹ Gold, Simon, & Brown 2002.

¹² Warren 2005.

¹³ Gold, Simon, & Brown 2002.

engagement.¹⁴ He says that parent involvement, which might have positive short-term effects, is usually centered on activities that are controlled by the school and driven by the school's priorities. Parental engagement, on the other hand, might not be activity-focused at all. Engaging parents challenges them to drive change they see as important to their children's education, and supports them as they do so. It calls on schools to be responsive to the needs and ideas of the families, not prescriptive. *Engaging* parents to improve their schools and their communities will have the most long-term success at transforming schools and helping to eliminate the achievement gap.¹⁵ Studies show that the most successful parent involvement efforts are the ones that promote a sense of shared responsibility and power between families and schools and are clearly student-oriented and outcome-driven.¹⁶

Parents cannot be engaged unless they are informed.

The first step in effective family engagement is to make sure parents are fully informed. Only then can they make responsible decisions about how to support and improve their children's education.¹⁷ Keeping all parents informed can be a challenge, and many parents currently fail to receive appropriate and timely communication from their students' schools due to poverty, language barriers, and cultural misunderstandings about schools.¹⁸ Effective parent communication utilizes multiple methods to transmit messages and is delivered in languages parents can easily understand.¹⁹ This step might also involve training parents so they gain advocacy skills.

Once parents have meaningful information about the school and their children's performance, they can collaborate with school staff and community members to assess the needs of the students and the community and evaluate resources that can meet those needs.²⁰ In a partnership setting, schools and parents have honest dialogues about what is important and what is achievable. However, the school must not dictate its preferences but support the parent-led initiatives in order to maintain trust.

Successful community and family engagement requires schoolwide effort and structure.

Meaningful parental engagement can occur only if the school culture values parent engagement and has multiple structures in place to facilitate such involvement.²¹ Because teachers' time is limited, parental engagement programs are rarely successful without a school wide emphasis on their importance.²² Plans must include support for classroom teachers to make the additional effort required by active parent engagement programs, as well as training for parents to increase their understanding of the school system and build their capacity to advocate for their children.²³ Parent engagement programs must meet parents where they are, drawing upon the unique skills and cultural knowledge they possess while being sensitive to the obstacles presented by language and cultural barriers, poverty, and lack of formal education.²⁴ Two-way partnerships are important, and parents need to know what's going on in school in order to give home support context.²⁵

¹⁴ Ferlazzo 2009.

¹⁵ Id; Warren 2005; Decker & Decker 2000.

¹⁶ Henderson & Mapp 2002; Christenson, Godber, & Anderson 2003.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education 2007.

¹⁸ See Pena 2000; Appleseed.

¹⁹ Appleseed.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education 2007.

²¹ See Public Education Network 2007; Baker 2001.

²² See Pena 2000.

²³ See Id.

²⁴ Auerbach 2009; Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice 2007.

²⁵ Decker & Decker 2000.

Parents and teachers want parents to be more actively involved in schools, but neither is certain as to the ideal degree of parental involvement.²⁶ Parents often assume that they are not wanted at the school and that they would be more of a burden than a help. Schools may be reluctant to partner with community organizations and parents because they believe it to be a waste of time and resources, or because they believe that parents and community members have nothing of value to offer.²⁷ Sometimes schools fear that parents, once they have a foot in the door, will become overbearing and want to be involved in every decision. Often each party's inaction, because of their assumptions about the other, only reinforces these stereotypes and inhibits cooperation. Because today's accountability requires an emphasis on test scores, principals may feel inhibited from focusing energy on anything other than academic achievement, and may be too near-sighted to predict or prioritize the long-term benefits of partnerships.²⁸ Teachers sometimes perceive parents as part of the problem, especially in urban schools in low-income and minority communities, where many teachers do not live in the community in which they teach.²⁹ Community partnerships can help bring the culture of the community into the classroom. Working closely with parents will give teachers a clearer picture of their students' lives and dispel misconceptions about the parents' efforts and level of support.

Parents may resist engagement out of fear that they will not be listened to or taken seriously. Parents may lack the confidence and language skills to initiate dialogue with the school, and their work schedules or lack of childcare may prohibit them from becoming more actively involved. Additionally, parents of adolescents and teens are frequently unaware of the importance of their continued involvement in their students' education. Furthermore, many parents do not know how they can most effectively help their students in upper grades, especially if they had an abbreviated formal education themselves.³⁰ Studies show that to be engaged in a meaningful way, parents of teens need community support and structure as much as or more than parents of younger children.³¹ Teaching parents how they can get involved—empowering them to be supporters and teachers—is a crucial step to successful parental engagement.³² Parents need schools to take the lead in creating the structures conducive to meaningful family engagement.³³

Community and family engagement complements Race to the Top and promotes the Obama administration's goals for American education.

Community and family engagement is a crucial component of all four areas the Obama administration has prioritized in the Race to the Top initiative and in publications since the Recovery Act: strengthening standards and assessments, improving teacher and principal effectiveness, increasing the flow of information that can help parents and teachers best support students, and turning around America's lowest-performing schools.³⁴ The Department of Education's Blueprint for Reform calls for increased parent engagement and partnership among schools, families, and community-based organizations to create communitywide family support programs that promote academic and developmental outcomes, educate youths and their families about substance abuse and violence, improve

²⁶ See Baker 2001 (parent perceptions); Baker 2001 (teacher perceptions); MetLife 2010; Epstein 2001.

²⁷ Warren 2005; See, e.g., Quijoch & Daoud 2006, for an in-depth study on Latino parents.

²⁸ Decker & Decker 2000.

²⁹ Warren 2005.

³⁰ Beyer et al. 2003.

³¹ In addition, parents need to have access to health and social services for themselves to be effective parents. Simpson 2001. These types of resources could easily be provided by a community school model.

³² Quijoch & Daoud 2006; Decker & Decker 2000.

³³ Decker & Decker 2000; Christenson, Godber, & Anderson 2003.

³⁴ U.S. Department of Education 2010.

school safety and culture, and centralize resources.³⁵ In addition, the Blueprint encourages the community centers to be utilized to extend learning opportunities for youths and their families.

In Secretary Duncan's speech at the Annual Meeting of the NAACP, he spoke of a plan to modify the administration's proposal for the reauthorization of ESEA to include parent and community input in the School Improvement Grant program funded by Section 1003(g).³⁶ This is a positive step, but ESEA needs to go further in bringing parents and community members to the table. School Improvement Grants are only allotted to a small portion of Title I schools, the "persistently lowest-achieving." While those schools may need additional support, parent and community engagement should be a priority for all Title I schools. By embedding the community and family engagement requirements in Title I of ESEA, the funds and benefits will flow to the lowest-performing and most economically disadvantaged schools, schools that typically sustain lower levels of family engagement than schools in more affluent communities. Community partnerships and the types of community-based after-school programs that parents may instigate can be effective interventions in low-performing schools for states that receive Race to the Top funds. The community school model is the type of innovative school reform that could be integrated into school turnarounds, and *all* turnaround efforts will be more successful if the community is engaged and supportive.³⁷

As states implement common, higher standards and more rigorous assessments, families and communities should be engaged in this process to ensure that they understand the impact on their students and the local education system. In addition, many states have created or are creating benchmark indicators of kindergarten readiness to help students begin their education on target and ready to learn with their peers. Such standards will be impossible to implement without the support of families and communities, who are largely responsible for preparing young children for kindergarten.

Teachers are more effective when they understand the culture and lives of their students.³⁸ Opening two-way communication with families empowers parents to provide more focused support at home and enables teachers to respond to a child's specific needs. Increased family support decreases behavioral problems, so classroom cultures can be more conducive to learning. The flow of information between families and teachers can improve achievement if there are structural supports in place that encourage teachers to reach out to parents and utilize the information they receive to drive instruction.

One reason some teachers do not do more to engage parents is because they do not know how to do so effectively. States can improve the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs under Race to the Top grants by including training on parental engagement as a component of their preparation program. In addition, states that are redesigning their teacher and principal evaluations should include parental engagement as a measure of effectiveness. Teachers and principals are the primary initiators for drawing parents into the school, and states can strongly incentivize them to make efforts to engage parents by focusing on effective engagement as they create more robust, standardized evaluation frameworks.

³⁵ Id.

³⁶ Duncan 2010.

³⁷ Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss 2010.

³⁸ Warren 2005.

The current Elementary and Secondary Education Act does not do enough to encourage community and family engagement.

There is little uniformity across the field about the meaning of parental involvement.³⁹ Without clear guidance on what is expected or how to implement it, the default for many district and school leaders is to relegate parental involvement to traditional minor roles, such as chaperoning field trips and volunteering to make copies for teachers.⁴⁰ This means the onus is on individual teachers and parents to create positive home-school relationships, and not all are capable of doing so uniformly.⁴¹ However, *all* students deserve the many benefits created by meaningful parent and community engagement. While not all family involvement has direct, positive outcomes on students' achievement,⁴² *active* parental engagement has been strongly and positively linked to student achievement.⁴³ This level of engagement requires more interaction between parents and schools. ESEA has the ability to create the expectation that this high level of parent engagement is the norm in every school.

ESEA Section 9101(31) defines "parental involvement" as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring— (A) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; (B) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; (C) that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decisionmaking and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child." This definition is not concrete enough to be useful, and the guidelines in Section 1118 are too vague to be enforced. There is a real disconnect between the rhetoric of parental engagement and what actually happens in most schools.⁴⁴

While many districts and schools formally comply with the ESEA Title I requirements for creating policies to include parents in decision-making and increase home-school communication, many of the plans never leave the paper – nor will they unless ESEA includes language with specific expectations for meaningful parental engagement and has some teeth on the issue.⁴⁵ Many school and district leaders fail to value parents as assets and do not see the link between parental engagement and student achievement.⁴⁶ Their lack of enthusiasm leaves a void in the leadership necessary to create and implement successful parental engagement programs.⁴⁷ Since the Obama Administration has proposed defunding parental involvement resource centers by collapsing the PIRC program into larger competitive grant initiatives,⁴⁸ it is essential for ESEA to provide comprehensive guidelines to direct all schools as they grapple with family engagement.

³⁹ See Boethel 2004.

⁴⁰ Pena 2000.

⁴¹ Sheldon 2007.

⁴² See Epstein 2001 (citing short-term positive benefits of parental involvement but calling for research to examine the long-term effects); Boethel 2004 (calling for more research on the benefit of parent involvement in preschool because current studies are inconclusive).

⁴³ Houtenville & Conway 2008; Cotton 2000; Read 2008; Henderson & Mapp 2002; D'Agostino et al. 2001; Henderson & Berla 1994; Yap & Enoki 2001; Fan & Chen 2001; Decker & Decker 2000; Crozier et al. 2010.

⁴³ Jeynes 2007; Auerbach 2009; Pena 2000.

⁴⁴ This is not limited to federal policy. For example, the PTA's national policy calls for action teams and family-school-community partnerships, but local PTA chapters still largely focus on fundraising.

⁴⁵ Public Education Network 2007.

⁴⁶ Decker & Decker 2000; Chicago Appleseed 2007; See Pena 2000.

⁴⁷ Chicago Appleseed 2007.

⁴⁸ FY 2011 ED Budget Summary: Section IV, Programs Proposed for Consolidation or Elimination, *available at* <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget11/summary/edlite-section4.html>.

In addition, the current ESEA overlooks the important contribution community organizations can make. Community organizations can be a powerful addition to school reform movements, as they have the ability to rally residents and utilize their skills and knowledge efficiently.⁴⁹ Community organizations have an understanding of the needs and dispositions of local families. Community members are invested in seeing schools succeed, and have the long-term commitment necessary to produce meaningful change. Involving communities in school reform will ensure that the improvements are long-lasting and keep the leaders accountable to the public.

Current Law

Section 1118 of ESEA promotes parental involvement as a necessary component of students' education. However, the language of the law does not offer guidance as to what activities are considered meaningful parental involvement or what the appropriate levels of parental involvement are. The language does not supply specific expectations for how schools should engage parents. In addition, ESEA fails to recognize or address the beneficial results of community partnerships with K-12 schools. We offer this language for Section 1118 to provide specific guidelines for family and community engagement, so that schools and local educational agencies will have a concrete sense of what is expected of them and so that state educational agencies will have greater capabilities to enforce family engagement plans.

Proposal

Reauthorize ESEA replacing Section 1118 with the language below, which provides schools with specific guidelines as to how they can support parental engagement and clearly lays the groundwork for the formation of parent-school-community partnerships.

SEC. 1118. PARENTAL ~~INVOLVEMENT~~, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

(a) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY POLICY.—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—A local educational agency may receive funds under this part only if such agency implements programs, activities, and procedures for the ***involvement engagement*** of parents in programs assisted under this part consistent with this section. Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children.

(2) **WRITTEN POLICY.**—Each local educational agency that receives funds under this part shall develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy. The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's plan developed under section 1112, establish the agency's expectations for parent ***involvement engagement***, and describe how the agency will—

(A) establish an advisory council, whose membership is comprised of parents and family members of students, high school students, and engaged community members and is representative of the students and families served by the agency, and will to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in programs supported under this section;

(B) ~~(A) involve parents~~ engage the advisory council and other parents who wish to participate in the joint development of the plan under section 1112, and the process of school review and improvement under section 1116, and the decision-making process as to the allotment of funds under subparagraph (3)(B) of this subsection;

(C) ~~(B)~~ provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing effective parent ~~involvement~~ engagement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;

⁴⁹ Gold, Simon, & Brown 2002.

(D) ~~(C)~~ build the schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental **involvement engagement** as described in subsection (e);

(E) ~~(D)~~ coordinate and integrate parental **involvement engagement** strategies under this part with parental **involvement engagement** strategies under other programs, such as the Head Start program, Reading First program, Early Reading First program, Even Start program, Parents as Teachers program, and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, and State-run preschool programs;

(F) ~~(E)~~ conduct, with the involvement of *the advisory council described in subparagraph (A) and other parents who wish to participate parents*, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental **involvement engagement** policy in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, ~~including~~ *entailing analyzing the results of the standard statewide survey described in subparagraph (h)(2) and* identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), *and notify the parents served of the findings of the evaluation in more than one method that is active and direct,*⁵⁰ and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental **involvement engagement**, and to revise, if necessary, the parental **involvement engagement** policies described in this section; and

(G) ~~(F)~~ **involve engage** parents in the activities of the schools served under this part.

(3) RESERVATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Each local educational agency shall reserve not less than ~~1~~ **2** percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part to carry out this section, including promoting family literacy and parenting skills, ~~except that this paragraph shall not apply if 1 percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part for the fiscal year for which the determination is made is \$5,000 or less.~~

(B) PARENTAL INPUT.—Parents of children receiving services under this part shall be involved in the decisions regarding how funds reserved under subparagraph (A) are allotted for **parental involvement family engagement** activities.

(C) DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS.—Not less than 95 percent of the funds reserved under subparagraph (A) shall be distributed to schools served under this part.

(D) **PRIORITIES**.---*In the case that there are not enough funds for all submitted plans, local educational agencies shall give priority to---*

(i) schools identified as being in need of improvement under section 1116(b);

(ii) schools serving communities with a statistically significant immigrant population;⁵¹ and

(iii) schools whose plans include community partnerships as described in subparagraph (E).

(E) **PARTNERSHIPS**.---*Extra funds shall be made available to schools or consortia of schools that form partnerships with community organizations and submit plans that involve collaborative efforts to engage parents and community members in schools.⁵² These plans must include collaboration, cooperation, and*

⁵⁰ Examples of active direct communication include phone calls, emails, text messages, and mailings to a parent's home or business address, as opposed to passive communication such as sending flyers home with students or publishing notices in a newspaper.

⁵¹ When parents speak a language other than English or have cultural expectations about schools that don't match the American model, it is especially important for schools to make an effort to engage parents.

⁵² Community organizations, which frequently have pre-existing networks with social services in the community and the trust and involvement of parents, can be valuable assets to schools. They can bring in resources schools would not have otherwise had access to and help rally parents, as well as create a richer and culturally relevant learning environment. Community organizations can also ameliorate the effects of short school days and years by providing after-school, weekend, and summer programs and learning opportunities for students. *See, e.g., Harlem Children's Zone or the FAST program (described in Crozier et al. 2010).*

clear boundaries to insure the success of the partnership.⁵³ To be eligible for additional funds, these joint plans must--

- (i) create literacy centers that will support family literacy instruction, plan family reading events, provide parents access to books to read to their children, and support other literacy endeavors for students and their families;*
- (ii) extend the school day and/or year with after-school, weekend, or summer programs that are closely linked to classroom curriculum, supplement or enrich current science, technology and math instruction or health and physical education, or provide students with enriched learning opportunities such as experiential learning, service-learning, and internships or externships;*
- (iii) enable families to increase their levels of engagement at schools by providing childcare for and transportation to events at the school, subsidizing the additional time needed for teachers to meet with parents after school and on weekends, or creating home visitation programs to keep parents informed about and accountable for their child's attendance, behavior, and performance; and*
- (iv) provide missing resources to students, families, and community members, such as early childhood programs that will focus on kindergarten readiness and family engagement throughout the child's entire education, English classes for those with limited English proficiency, technology literacy training, centralized health services within the school-community center, or drug and alcohol abuse education, prevention, and support.*

(b) SCHOOL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each school served under this part shall jointly develop with *the advisory council described in subparagraph (c)(1) and other parents who wish to participate*, and distribute to *all* parents of participating children, a written ~~parental involvement family engagement~~ policy, agreed on by such parents, that shall describe the means for carrying out the requirements of subsections (c) through (f). Parents shall be notified of the policy in an understandable and uniform format ~~and, to the extent practicable, provided in a language the parents can understand~~. Such policy shall be made available to the local community and updated periodically to meet the changing needs of parents and the school.

(2) COMMUNICATION.—~~Each time parents are notified of the original policy, any updates to the policy, or any programs or activities created under the policy, such communication must be--~~

- (A) delivered in any language that is the home language of at least 10 percent of the students;*
- (B) delivered in more than one method that is active and directed at parents;⁵⁴ and*
- (C) explained in plain terms that will enable parents to understand the meaning of the communication.*

(3) ~~(2)~~ SPECIAL RULE.—If the school has a parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such school may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

⁵³ Community organizations that partner with schools reveal that a positive relationship between the organization and the school administration is absolutely critical. Each party must truly be an equal partner and trust the other to work united for the students' best interest. Frequently, parents have negative feelings about school due to cultural differences or their own experiences. Schools must work to overcome those barriers, in part by trusting parents and treating them as equal partners.

⁵⁴ Examples of active direct communication include phone calls, emails, text messages, and mailings to a parent's home or business address, as opposed to passive communication such as sending flyers home with students or publishing notices in a newspaper.

~~(4)~~ ~~(3)~~ AMENDMENT.—If the local educational agency involved has a school district-level parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such agency may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

(5) ~~(4)~~ PARENTAL COMMENTS.—If the plan under section 1112 is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, the local educational agency shall submit any parent comments with such plan when such local educational agency submits the plan to the State.

(c) POLICY INVOLVEMENT.—Each school served under this part shall—

~~(1)~~ ~~(3)~~ *create a council comprised of teachers, administrators, students (high school), family members, and community members which will be responsible for the democratic and ongoing involve parents, in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of programs under this part, including the* planning, reviewing, and improving ~~menting of~~ the school parental ~~involvement~~ **engagement** policy and the joint development of the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2), except that if a school has in place a process for involving parents in the joint planning and design of the school's programs, the school may use that process, if such process includes an adequate representation of parents of participating children. **Planning of programs must---**

*(A) critically assess the needs of the students and parents and include measures to address such needs;*⁵⁵

*(B) explicitly detail a variety of strategies to be put into effect which are intended to draw parents into the school building to engage in substantive ways, including engaging in joint problem-solving with their children's teachers, participating in school activities, tutoring or reading to students, participating in continuing parent education, or collaborating with school and community partners on school improvement plans or student enrichment strategies;*⁵⁶ and

*(C) include methods to regularly measure family attendance and satisfaction at school events and meetings, as well as a plan to include both of these data in the planning of future programs;*⁵⁷

~~(2)~~ ~~(1)~~ convene an annual meeting, at a convenient time, to which all parents of participating children shall be invited and encouraged to attend, to inform parents of their school's participation under this part and to explain the requirements of this part **in ways that are meaningful to parents**, and the right of the parents to be involved;

~~(3)~~ ~~(2)~~ offer a flexible number of meetings, such as meetings in the morning or evening, and may provide, with funds provided under this part, transportation, child care, or home visits, as such services relate to parental involvement;

~~(4)~~ *establish a protocol for evaluating the school's parental involvement policy annually, which shall include---*

*(A) a comprehensive assessment to be completed by parents, principals, teachers, students, and engaged community members;*⁵⁸

(B) proposed benchmarks for success supported by data from prior years and research;

(C) a committee including parents, principals, teachers, students, and engaged community members to interpret the results of such assessment and inform the community of such results; and

(D) a protocol for identifying barriers to parental and community involvement and modifying the involvement policy to address such issues and failure to meet any benchmarks;

⁵⁵ Examples include: reading groups, physical exercise, after school arts programs, self-defense classes, etc.

⁵⁶ Meaningful parental involvement includes interaction with teachers and students, as well as active enthusiasm about school in the home. These types of involvement, as opposed to more passive and traditional parental roles such as attending meetings and volunteering to make copies for teachers, have a greater impact on student achievement.

⁵⁷ See Caspe & Lopez 2006.

⁵⁸ See sample assessments at <http://www.adi.org/PIA/>.

- (5) ~~(4)~~ provide parents of participating children—
- (A) timely information about programs under this Part;
 - (B) a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet; and
 - (C) if requested by parents, opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children, and respond to any such suggestions as soon as practicably possible; and
- (6) ~~(5)~~ if the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2) is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, submit any parent comments on the plan when the school makes the plan available to the local educational agency.

(d) SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HIGH STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.—As a component of the school-level ~~parental involvement~~ **family engagement** policy developed under subsection (b), each school served under this part shall jointly develop with **the advisory council described in subparagraph (c)(1) and other** parents ~~for of all~~ children served under this part **who wish to participate** a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards. Such compact shall—

- (1) describe the school's responsibility to—
- (A) provide high quality curriculum and instruction;
 - (B) ~~maintain in~~ a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the children served under this part to meet the State's student academic achievement standards;
 - (C) **follow a disciplinary policy developed in consultation with parents; and**
 - (D) **treat family members as coeducators by keeping them informed about developments at the school and their child's performance, and by valuing and encouraging their contributions; and**
- (2) **describe and** the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, ~~such as including---~~
- (A) monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching;
 - (B) volunteering in their child's classroom;
 - (C) **helping their children establish stable and healthy routines;**⁵⁹
 - (D) **modeling reading, learning and study habits;**⁶⁰
 - (E) **providing specific academic assistance or helping their children find necessary academic supports;**
 - (F) **developing kindergarten readiness;**
 - (G) **participating and encouraging their children to participate in after-school, summer, and community activities linked to the school or extended learning opportunities; and**
 - (H) participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and positive use of extracurricular time; and
- (3) ~~(2)~~ address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum—
- (A) parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, at least annually, during which the compact shall be discussed as the compact relates to the individual child's achievement;
 - (B) ~~frequent~~ **monthly** reports to parents on their children's progress; and
 - (C) reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class, and observation of classroom activities.

⁵⁹ See Finn 1998.

⁶⁰ See Ferguson 2008.

(e) BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INVOLVEMENT.—To ensure effective *involvement engagement* of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement, each school and local educational agency assisted under this part—

(1) *shall promote parents' capabilities to understand how the law effects their children's education and schools and to act as advocates for their children, which shall include---*

(A) ~~shall~~ *providing* assistance to parents of children served by the school or local educational agency, as appropriate, in understanding such topics as the State's academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, State and local academic assessments, the requirements of this part, and how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children;

(B) ~~(12) may~~ *establishing* a districtwide parent advisory council, *as described in subparagraph (a)(2)(A) of this section*, to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in programs supported under this section;

(C) *initiating or promoting the initiation of a parent organization such as a PTA or a PTO, if one does not already exist, or encouraging parents to participate in such parent groups that are already established;*⁶¹ *and*

(D) *providing families, format they can understand and in compliance with subparagraph (b)(2), with an explanation of the grievance policy under Section 9304(a)(3)(c) and any additional grievance policy that may apply to the school or the local educational agency; and may include---*

(E) ~~(9) may~~ *training* parents to enhance the *involvement engagement* of other parents; and

(2) shall provide materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their children's achievement, *which may include*

(A) *training to help parents recognize the value of their involvement at home*⁶² *and at school and develop academically-supportive environments for and relationships with their children;*⁶³

(B) ~~literacy training and~~ *using* technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement;

(C) ~~(7) may provide~~ *necessary literacy training, which may be funded* from funds received under this part if the local educational agency has exhausted all other reasonably available sources of funding for such training; *and*

(D) *any materials and workshops necessary to help parents learn the skills required for any of the responsibilities enumerated in subsection (d)(1);*⁶⁴ *and*

(3) shall ~~educate~~ *ensure that* teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff, *and the school building encourage parental engagement, which shall include---*

(A) *requiring teachers and staff to attend training sessions, which may include parent and community participation, on ~~in~~ the value and utility of contributions of parents, and ~~in~~ on how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school, and ongoing professional development delivered by teachers*

⁶¹ Organizations such as a Parent Teacher Association chapter or a Local School Council (see Chicago Public Schools) are desirable because they give rise to open dialogue among parents and school staff and provide a productive forum for parent voice. However, if these organizations are impotent, it can create more distrust between parents and schools. Instead, it is essential that schools view these organizations as a wealth of knowledge about students and seek their input on issues effecting students.

⁶² Not every parent will be able to engage by being physically present at the school due to work schedules, having young children at home, transportation challenges, language barriers, and a plethora of other reasons. See, e.g., Pena 2000. However, studies have indicated that empowering parents to use supportive parenting strategies and to act as teachers at home yields significant benefits for students' academic achievement. See, e.g., Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman 2007.

⁶³ Parents' expectations and aspirations for their students' academic performance can have a significant impact. Fan & Chen 2001.

⁶⁴ Ferguson 2008.

who successfully foster school-family partnerships⁶⁵ which provides opportunities for staff to reflect on their beliefs and misconceptions about working with families;⁶⁶

(B) considering effective parent engagement as a component of all performance reviews of teachers, principals, and pupil services personnel; and

(C) making schools and school personnel welcoming and inviting;⁶⁷ and may include---

(D) providing pre-service training for all incoming teachers presenting family engagement as an ongoing process and providing content on the complexity of partnerships and the specific cultural context of the school community;⁶⁸

(E)~~(6)~~ may involve involving parents in the development of training for teachers, principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of such training; *and*

(F) ~~(11)~~ may adopting and implementing model approaches to improving parental involvement; *and*

(4) shall *integrate and engage the community, including*

(A) to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinating and integrating ~~parental involvement~~ family engagement programs and activities with Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, the Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, the Parents as Teachers Program, and public preschool and other programs; *and*

(B) conducting other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support parents in more fully participating in the education of their children;

(C) inviting community organizations and businesses to centralize resources and community programs within the school or at a resource center within a quarter mile of the school, and may include working with these outside organizations to facilitate resource centralization;⁶⁹

(D) fostering out-of-school learning opportunities by providing families with information about area libraries, museums, zoos, and other cultural centers, and may partner with these institutions to create school-community events to which parents and families are encouraged to attend;⁷⁰ and

(E) providing families, to the extent feasible, with information about local health and social services; and

(5) shall *maximize parents' access to and participation in the school, which shall include*

(A) ensuring that information related to school and parent programs, meetings, and other activities is sent to the parents of participating children in a format *and, to the extent practicable, in a language* the parents can understand *and in compliance with subparagraph (b)(2); and*

(B) ~~(10)~~ may arranging school meetings at a variety of times, or conducting in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation; *and may include---*

(C) ~~(8)~~ may paying reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions; *and*

~~(13)~~ may develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities;

⁶⁵ Patrikakou et al. 2003.

⁶⁶ See Caspe & Lopez 2006; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman 2007.

⁶⁷ This can include such simple measures as hanging "welcome" signs at main entrances, keeping the facade and interior of the school visible appealing, and instructing security guards and receptionists to greet parents warmly and ask if they need directions.

⁶⁸ Patrikakou et al. 2003.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Kentucky School Law KY 156.496.

⁷⁰ Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman 2007.

(6) ~~(14)~~ shall provide such other reasonable support for **parental involvement family engagement** activities under this section as parents may request.

(f) ACCESSIBILITY.—In carrying out the **parental involvement family engagement** requirements of this part, local educational agencies and schools, to the extent practicable, shall provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children, including providing information and school reports required under section 1111 in a format ~~and, to the extent practicable, in a language~~ such parents understand **and in compliance with subparagraph (b)(2)**.

(g) INFORMATION FROM PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS.—In a State where a parental information and resource center is established to provide training, information, and support to parents and individuals who work with local parents, local educational agencies, and schools receiving assistance under this part, each local educational agency or school that receives assistance under this part and is located in the State shall assist parents and parental organizations by informing such parents and organizations of the existence and purpose of such centers **in a manner compliant with subparagraph (b)(2)**.

(h) REVIEW.—*To ensure that all parents have adequate opportunities to participate in their child's school*, the State educational agency shall---

(1) review the local educational agency's **parental involvement family engagement** policies and practices to determine if the policies and practices meet the requirements of this section;
(2) **issue a standard, comprehensive parent survey and require local educational agencies to---**

(A) **distribute the survey annually to all parents; and**

(B) **inform all parents of the results each year in more than one method that is active and directed at parents;**

(3) **conduct audits of implemented programs as under Section 1116(c). Programs which are found to be non-compliant with their written policy for two consecutive years shall be notified and placed on a one-year probationary period. Probationary programs which are found to be non-compliant at the end of the probationary period will be have their funding under this section deferred until their policies are compliant with this section and fully implemented; and**

(4) **select schools that perform exceptionally well on the audit and/or survey as exemplars and make their parental involvement plans available to other schools in the state as models. If possible, states should make funding available for these schools to host training sessions for teams of administrators and educators from other schools.**⁷¹

Rationale

Parental engagement has a strong positive impact on students' academic achievement,⁷² as well as many positive impacts for communities.

This benefit is especially strong for communities heavily populated by low-income and immigrant families, particularly those for whom English is a second language.⁷³ Children from these communities are more likely than their wealthier peers to fall behind in school due to chronic absences.⁷⁴

⁷¹ See Public Education Network 2007.

⁷² Houtenville & Conway 2008; Cotton 2000; Read 2008; Henderson & Mapp 2002; D'Agostino et al. 2001; Henderson & Berla 1994; Yap & Enoki 2001; Fan & Chen 2001; Decker & Decker 2000; Crozier et al. 2010.

⁷³ Jeynes 2007; Auerbach 2009; Pena 2000.

⁷⁴ Chang & Romero 2008.

- Schools that create strong partnerships with parents and communities have higher attendance rates than traditional neighborhood schools.⁷⁵ Engaging parents in meaningful ways (more than the occasional activity-centered involvement, such as chaperoning a field trip) reinforces the importance of consistent attendance and helps parents understand how their students are adversely affected by absences.⁷⁶
- Community partnerships that include bringing health services into the school can significantly decrease absenteeism due to health issues. By creating a structure through which schools and community organizations can interact to increase parental engagement, ESEA could also increase the likelihood that low-income students will receive health and social services they are entitled to.
- The sense of “welcome” families feel has a direct impact on their level of engagement.⁷⁷ To successfully create a sense of welcome, school staff needs to be prepared for parents who speak different languages, are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the American school system, and have varying home cultures.⁷⁸ Research indicates that measures as simple as invitations from the school significantly impacts parental engagement.⁷⁹

While many parental involvement plans include training sessions for parents, successful parental engagement programs involve more than just parenting classes.⁸⁰

- Rather than viewing parental involvement as an attempt to solve deficits, schools need to provide positive channels for support such as peer networks, activities that promote positive family interaction, and access to social services.⁸¹
- Family-strengthening programs that have been effective (some of which included instruction of “parenting skills” as part of a larger program) created a peer support network for families confronting similar issues and increased cohesion and communication within families.⁸² These programs drew communities closer and had positive outcomes for students emotionally and academically.
- Educators and administrators can also benefit from professional development to help them fully appreciate the positive effect of family engagement on student performance and learn strategies to build supportive relationships with students’ families (ones that build on the families’ values and beliefs about their children) despite cultural or language differences.⁸³

While family and community partnerships can take many forms, depending on the needs of the school, the resources of the community, and the capabilities of the parents, they rely on

⁷⁵ Sheldon 2007.

⁷⁶ Chang & Romero 2008.

⁷⁷ Auerbach 2007.

⁷⁸ Ferguson 2008.

⁷⁹ Anderson & Minke 2007.

⁸⁰ Debord et al. 1996. Parents frequently perceive programs focusing only on parenting classes as condescending, proof that the school does not value the parents’ own knowledge and skills.

⁸¹ Weiss 1993.

⁸² Caspe & Lopez 2006; Crozier et al. 2010.

⁸³ Ferguson 2008.

trust, transparency, a shared vision of student achievement, and clear guidelines indicating what is expected from all parties involved.⁸⁴

Schools and communities are diverse, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work for engaging parents.⁸⁵ However, with stronger language and more concrete guidelines, Section 1118 of ESEA can create a framework for schools to incorporate meaningful family engagement in a way that meets the community's needs and increases student achievement.

Implementation

The ideal implementation of family and community partnerships is the community school model, which is supported by this legislative proposal. Community schools typically offer wraparound social services for students, families, and community members alike, and engage the community by making the school the center of community activities.⁸⁶ Community schools are successful models for how family and community engagement can improve student achievement, and for how resources can be stretched by centralizing them within the school/community center.⁸⁷ However, though community schools are a cost-effective way of pooling resources,⁸⁸ not all schools or school districts can afford to fully fund the community school model. Because of this economic reality, the proposed legislative framework includes support and structure for schools to implement community partnerships on smaller scales. Benefits can still accrue when community partnerships are implemented on a less extensive, more economically feasible scale. Schools and communities can form partnerships around one common cause, such as literacy, or around one specific program, such as a community-based service learning initiative.⁸⁹ Small-scale or one-off community partnerships can effectively engage parents, improve the school culture, and increase academic achievement as long as the school, community organization, and parents create a true partnership built on trust and working for the students.

⁸⁴ Quioco & Daoud 2006; Crozier et al. 2010.

⁸⁵ See Epstein 1995.

⁸⁶ Dryfoos 2003.

⁸⁷ Id.

⁸⁸ Federation for Community Schools 2009.

⁸⁹ For additional models and ideas for creating community and family partnerships in varying extents and tips for implementation, see Anderson, Howser, & Howland 2010; Beyer, Patrikakou, & Weissberg 2003; Chicago Appleseed 2007; Crozier et al. 2010; Decker & Decker 2000; Epstein 1995; Epstein 2001; Federation for Community Schools 2009; Gold, Simon, & Brown 2002; Jehl 2007; Manz et al. 2010; Melaville, Berg, & Blank 2006; National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group 2010; Perkins et al. 2004; Read 2008; U.S. Department of Education 2007; Warren 2005.

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