A Study of Best Practices in Parent Engagement
and Leadership Development

Executive Summary

The New Hampshire Endowment for Health and the New Hampshire Office of Student Wellness, within the New Hampshire Department of Education, have partnered to support a project to assist New Hampshire public system stakeholders to expand and improve parent, family, and youth engagement in community and state activities that promote the social-emotional development and behavioral health of New Hampshire's children. One product of this project is a Study of Best Practices in Parent Engagement and Leadership Development, detailing best practices currently in use across the country.

This Study describes Foundational Components for an integrated, comprehensive approach to effective parent engagement (PE) strategies that can work in concert across all community organizations that impact the well-being and education of young persons. The Study explores multiple definitions of PE, in use across multiple disciplines, concluding with a presentation of key common elements across those definitions. The Study discusses a set of operational principles for PE contained in a draft Policy Statement jointly released in 2015 by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education. These principles emphasize the commonalities of PE policies and practices across all education and service organizations, agencies, and systems. The third foundational component explored in the Study is the conceptual model that provides a framework for all PE strategies. Four models, taken from the fields of behavioral health, child welfare, early childhood, education, and health, are described, and a set of common elements across those models is articulated to guide New Hampshire stakeholders in creating a model best suited for New Hampshire children, families, and organizations.

These common model elements shape the presentation of current best practices in PE and can be used by New Hampshire leaders to shape policies and practices.
1. PE is framed strongly within the context of system missions and goals.
2. PE approaches are built upon multidisciplinary partnerships and shared responsibilities.
3. The creation and support of effective PE programming is developmental.
4. Implementation of effective PE strategies evolves through comprehensive planning and implementation processes.
5. Collaborative partnerships stand at the heart of planning, implementation, and monitoring.
6. Public systems, including education and service sectors, hold a responsibility to lead the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes.
7. PE strategies are driven by the ultimate outcomes to be attained, with a primary focus on child learning and well-being, and by addressing challenges that interfere with child learning and well-being.
8. All planning and implementation activities will define expectations and, where possible, indicators/standards for the outcomes sought by those activities.
9. Two-way communication between systems and parents/families is an essential tool in effective implementation of PE systems.

10. Effective PE strategies will focus equally on the development of competencies on both sides of the partnership (system staff competencies and family competencies).
11. PE partnerships are, at the core, deeply personal and unique, individual relationships.

The Study presents dozens of best practice approaches and strategies, organized to address both sides of the partnership at four levels: 1) individual child/family practices; 2) individual agency, school, and system practices; 3) community system (whole school districts and cross-system partnerships); and 4) regional- and state level whole system best practices. The discussion of best practices begins with a brief presentation of the National CLAS Standards which are designed to address cultural and linguistic competency issues within the service realm.

On the parent/family side of the partnership, best practices are described that:
- Support parent/family involvement in their children's day-to-day activities;
- Connect parent/family involvement to the outcomes obtained by their children;
- View parents/families as important and equal partners in their children's well-being;
- Recognize the importance of parents/families in identifying and addressing children's needs;
- Directly include parents/families in all phases of decision-making about their children;
- Offer parents/families peer and professional supports when those are needed;
- Regularly link parents/families to other parents/families for mutual support and learning;
- Promote and develop leadership competencies among parents/families with that interest;
- Prepare and support parents/families for involvement in advocacy and training roles;
- Create opportunities for parents/families to organize and impact system and resource allocation decision-making at the State and Federal levels for the benefit of all children.

On the school/agency/system side of the partnership, best practices are described that:
- Validate parent involvement in planning and making decisions for their children;
- Provide information, resources, and responses that are timely and relevant to the family;
- Encourage constant, two-way communication between parents and schools/agencies;
- Support parents to help them feel valued and connected to system activities;
- Operate flexibly and are responsive to each family's perspective (culture, preferences, etc.);
- Create and promote multiple opportunities for parents to participate in school/agency activities;
- Address real-world barriers to parent engagement, such as transportation or childcare issues;
- Strengthen parenting skills and create opportunities for parent leadership development;
- Provide tools to help schools/agencies self-assess their readiness to engage with parents;
- Develop multi-year plans to deliberately build engagement policies, practices, and strategies;
- Build staff self-awareness and develop partnership competencies;
- Develop a school/agency culture that encourages staff to build relationship competencies;
- Set standards for what communities can do together to support student (child/youth) success;
- Offer models and practices to share power more equitably between parents and organizations;
- Bring parents into governance roles for schools/agencies through participation and membership on boards, task forces, work groups, and event/project implementation teams; and
- Ensure system responsiveness to parent advocacy at the highest levels.