



## Parent and Family Engagement Policy

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**School Year 2020-21**  
**Updated: April 17, 2020**

### PART I: Values and Purpose of this Policy

#### **Guiding Beliefs for Parent, Family and Community Engagement**

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) envisions a world where every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life. Our mission is to ensure that every school guarantees students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment. We are proud to serve more than 50,000 students in the District of Columbia as we strive to become a district of both excellence and equity—a place where every family feels welcome and every child is given the opportunities and support they need to thrive.

DCPS believes parents and families are our strongest partners. Family and community engagement is built into everything we do, at every level of our work. Engagement is a district-wide priority and intentionally built into the [Comprehensive School Plan](#), which serves as each Title I school's schoolwide program plan, and [IMPACT: The DCPS Evaluation and Feedback System for School-Based Personnel](#). DCPS is proud to prioritize building relationships with families, community members, and strategic partners to accelerate achievement for all DCPS students.

The below statements reflect the foundation of how DCPS as a district view families' and the larger public's role in DCPS. These beliefs are at the heart of this policy, which discusses how DCPS and our schools engage families, the expectations for how schools should partner with families, and the supports that DCPS offers to make this engagement happen.

- **The DCPS community extends beyond the school walls.** Students, teachers and staff, central office, families, partners, and the greater DC area make up the DCPS community.
- **Families are experts in their child and partners in their success.** All families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are capable of supporting their students' growth. Families are their child's first teachers and we value them as co-educators.
- **DCPS cannot do this work in isolation.** DCPS values the entire DC community as key contributors to student success. It is only through collaboration between DCPS and our families, communities and partners that we will be able to accelerate student outcomes.
- **DCPS values equity of voice:** DCPS genuinely listens to our community, respects their varying needs and opinions, and works hard to ensure equal access to decision makers when influencing policy and programming.

#### **Purpose of this Document**

This policy articulates DCPS' expectations, objectives, and plans for implementing meaningful parent and family involvement in the educational achievement of students attending our schools, in compliance with the requirements of Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). DCPS created this policy in partnership with parents and families of DCPS students, and will revise the plan annually based on the feedback of families.

## PART II: Agreement to Statutory Requirements of Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act

DCPS agrees to implement the following statutory requirements:

- DCPS will implement programs, activities and procedures for the engagement of parents and families in all of its schools, consistent with section 1116 of ESSA. These programs, activities and procedures will be planned and implemented in partnership and consultation with parents, families and students.
- DCPS will support schools to ensure that their school-level family engagement policies and practices meet the requirements outlined in section 1116 of ESSA, including the required School-level Parent and Family Engagement Policy and School-Parent Compact.
- In implementing the Title I, Part A parent and family engagement requirements, to the extent practicable, DCPS will provide opportunities for the participation of families with limited English proficiency and parents and family members with disabilities. This includes providing information and school reports required under section 1111 of ESSA in an understandable and uniform format, including alternative formats upon request, and to the extent practicable, in a language parents and families understand.
- DCPS will engage with the parents and families of students attending Title I schools in decisions about how the 1 percent of Title I, Part A funds reserved for parent and family engagement is spent. DCPS will ensure that not less than 90 percent of the 1 percent reserved goes directly to schools for parent and family engagement activities.
- DCPS will ensure that all Title I schools hold at least one meeting per year to engage parents in decisions about eligible parent and family engagement programs and activities funded with Title I, Part A funds.
- If DCPS' plan for Title I, Part A, developed under section 1112 of ESSA, is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, DCPS will submit any parent comments with the plan when DCPS submits the plan to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).
- DCPS will communicate to the schools that do not comply with the ESSA requirements, including those outlined in this policy, that they may be at risk of decreasing or losing their Title I funding.
- DCPS will be governed by the following statutory definition of parent involvement, and expects that its Title I schools will carry out programs, activities and procedures in accordance with this definition:

*Parental involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—*

- *That parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;*
- *That parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;*
- *That parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist (such as a Local School Advisory Team) in the education of their child; and*
- *The carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1116 of ESSA.*

## PART III: DC Public Schools' Plan for Implementing Title I, Part A Parent and Family Engagement Requirements

### Engaging with Families and the Community

#### **Beliefs:**

Effective family and community engagement should be grounded in a process that supports the ability to place the parent and community voice as paramount to improving schools and lifting academic achievement of all students. DCPS believes this process should include each of the following four elements encompassed in the Community Engagement feedback loop:

- **Build Relationships:** Build strategic relationships that are cultivated through a shared vision.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Seek out external viewpoints through meaningful stakeholder engagement opportunities.
- **Inform DCPS Goals and Operations:** Utilize the external viewpoints when planning DCPS policy and programming.
- **Share How Community Input Informed Goals:** Share how external viewpoints are taken into account.

#### **Expectations for Schools:**

##### **Annual Meetings**

- By September 30 each year, school leaders at all schools should conduct an annual "Back-to-School" night which includes an update on school status, performance, and priorities.
- Title I schools should also conduct a separate meeting covering Title I information and rights and responsibilities of parents at the school. The meeting should occur at a convenient time, to which all parents of participating children shall be invited and encouraged to attend. During this meeting, Title I schools should inform parents and family members about:
  - Programs operating under Title I funding at the school;
  - A description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school and the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress;
  - The achievement levels of students on the prior school year's state assessments (PARCC and DC Science, as applicable); and

- Their rights and responsibilities as families at a Title I school, including that they may request opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate appropriately in decisions relating to the education of their children.
- Schools should offer a flexible number of Title I meetings that are separate from Back-to-School Night, such as one meeting in the morning and one in the evening, that allow the school to communicate this information. Schools may also use other methods of outreach that are responsive to the needs of the school community, such as home visits, to reach as many families as possible.
- Schools should also conduct an annual “Where are We Going Next” meeting toward the end of the school year (April - May) that includes information about the academic progress of the school that year, related to the Comprehensive School Plan.

### **Other Optional Opportunities for Engagement and Communication**

- Schools may schedule monthly in-person opportunities for families to connect with school leadership (e.g., principal chats, office hours) that invite parents to offer suggestions and participate in decisions relating to the education of their children. The format should be in response to the needs of the individual school community.
- School staff may attend a minimum of two events within their surrounding community a year in order to positively promote the school and build relationships with key stakeholders (Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs), Civic Leaders, Block Party, Health or Back to School Fairs, or Summer Events such as Beat the Streets).
- Schools may invite the broader school community into their school building at least twice a year.

### **LEA Supports:**

#### **Annual Workshop on Parent and Family Engagement for School Leaders**

Each summer, DCPS principals attend the Summer Leadership Institute, a weeklong professional development opportunity that helps them prepare for the year ahead. Parent and family engagement is included as a component of the Institute and the training guides Title I school leaders through meaningful communication and engagement practices with families, as well as the requirements under section 1116 of ESSA.

As part of the supports provided to school leaders during the Summer Leadership Institute, principals will receive a parent and family engagement toolkit that includes:

- PowerPoint deck for Title I meetings;
- Facilitator’s guide for Title I meetings;
- Template School-Level Family Engagement Policy;
- Template School-Parent Compact;
- Templates for fliers and handouts to share with families at Title I schools; and
- Sample engagement calendar, including required and recommended activities.

#### **Ongoing Support from the Community Action Team**

DCPS Family and Community Engagement, Community Action Team (CAT) Specialists support schools with engaging their families and community by helping with ongoing community outreach and identifying

targeted stakeholders, events and meetings to attend. The CAT also supports schools with Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) elections, agenda setting for LSAT meetings, and resolving issues. The CAT consists of four individuals who represent communities based on DCPS School-based Clusters. Each CAT Specialist is responsible for building and sustaining strategic relationships with key community stakeholders, specifically those who have been historically underrepresented in our decision-making process. The CAT is also responsible for assisting DCPS stakeholders in support of their access to information and resources offered by DCPS and communicating emerging needs and trends back to DCPS.

### **Shared Decision Making**

#### **Beliefs:**

Our schools are the best because of their partnerships with and support from parents, families and the entire school community. DCPS values the input of parents and family members in improving student outcomes and creating a joyful learning community that is welcoming to all. In particular, DCPS believes that parents and families should serve as a partner in key decision-making about school improvement.

#### **Expectations for Schools:**

##### Parent and Family Engagement Policy and School-Parent Compact

In alignment with section 1116 of ESSA, each DCPS school must have developed in collaboration with parents and families:

- **School Parent and Family Engagement Policy**, which lays out how the school will meet the requirements under this policy and described in section 1116 c-f, including:
  - Involving parents and families in making decisions about the policies, programs and activities at the school;
  - Holding shared responsibility for high academic achievement (see School-Parent Compact below);
  - Building capacity for involvement at the school;
  - Communicating transparently with all families, including parents and family members who have limited English proficiency, parents and family members with disabilities, and parents and family members of migratory children; and
  - How the school will continue to update the policy, as needed, in response to families and the community.
- **School-Parent Compact**, which lays out the shared responsibilities between the school, parents and families, and students. The compact must:
  - Describe shared responsibilities of the school and the parent:
    - The school will provide high-quality curriculum and instruction and a conducive environment for students to meet state standards.
    - Address how parents will support their student's learning and participate, as appropriate, in decisions about the education of their students.
  - Describe parent-teacher communications, including:
    - For elementary schools, how the school shall facilitate parent-teacher conferences, at least annually, during which the compact must be discussed as it relates to strategies that families can use to support their student's individual learning.

- How the school shall provide frequent reports to parents on their student's progress.
- How the school shall facilitate reasonable parent access to staff and opportunities to participate or observe in their student's class.
- How the school shall ensure regular two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff, in a language that family members can understand.

#### Input on Plans for School Improvement

Each school in DCPS has a Comprehensive School Plan (CSP) that guides the actions the school will take to improve academic outcomes for all students. For Title I schools, the CSP acts as the school's schoolwide plan or targeted assistance plan, as appropriate, as it includes how Title I funds will benefit eligible students, teachers and parents and families.

The Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) is a group of elected and appointed members at every DCPS school. The team (formerly the Local School Restructuring Teams) consists of parents, teachers, non-instructional school staff, a community member, and in some cases students, to advise the principal on matters that promote high expectations and high achievement for all students. LSATs are a key lever to increasing transparency at DCPS and ensuring decisions affecting school communities are made collaboratively with the help of a diverse group of school stakeholders, especially parents.

All DCPS schools must have a functioning LSAT that is constituted, with at least four parent members, according to the LSAT Guidelines (updated annually and posted on the DCPS website), and that conducts the business outlined therein. Every school should have an LSAT with whom the school leader or designee engages via monthly meetings to discuss goals and data.

Among other roles, the LSATs at Title I schools work collaboratively with school leaders and educators to develop the school-level Parent and Family Engagement Policy and School-Parent Compact, provide input on the school's Comprehensive School Plan and Title I Schoolwide Plan, plans for targeted assistance for specific groups of students, activities and programs implemented using Title I, Part A set aside funding, and programs serving English learners. LSAT members also have the opportunity to provide input on the district-level Parent and Family Engagement Policy when the district reviews and updates it annually.

#### **LEA Supports:**

To support the development of strong School-level Parent and Family Engagement Policies and School-Parent Compacts, DCPS developed templates for each of these documents as a starting point for the collaborative work of schools and families, as well as guidance for school leaders in developing these plans alongside their communities, while meeting the requirements laid out in section 1116 of ESSA.

To support school leaders and LSATs, DCPS created an LSAT Toolkit that provides school leaders and LSAT members with guidance, information and resources to support their work. It is updated throughout the school year and includes LSAT Guidelines, FAQs, templates, and recorded webinars. The updated materials are shared proactively with school leaders to ensure that they are aware of the updates.

#### **Communication and Transparency**

## **Beliefs:**

Parents are DCPS' number one partner in supporting students' academic success. If we share information and listen in languages familiar to our students, families, community and staff, we will show that we value, respect and can learn from our stakeholders. This will lead to increased trust, stronger relationships, parents being greater advocates for their students, and improved overall success.

Ongoing communication between educators and families should be:

- Positive: Families shouldn't only hear from us when something has gone wrong.
- Frequent and consistent.
- Two-way: Parents should have the opportunity to respond – even if they don't or choose not to.
- Differentiated: Communicate with families in their language and using the mode that is most accessible for them.
- Student centered/academically focused: Communication should be about the student and as often as possible, academically focused. Celebrating small academic wins gives parents a clearer picture of their students' strengths and areas for growth, as well as what they can do to help.

## **Expectations for Schools:**

### Frequent and Consistent Communications

DCPS expects schools to provide weekly communication to parents. Communication can come in the form of an email, text message updates, take-home folder or other. To the extent practicable, communications are translated for families who have limited English proficiency.

In addition, schools should have a system for updating parents about individual student academic and social emotional progress. For students in grades PK-5 this update can come via a variety of modes, for example; regular email, progress report or weekly take home folder. For students in grades 6-12 this update should come every 10 days via the Aspen Parent Portal.

In alignment with section 1112(e) of ESSA, Title I schools must, at the beginning of the school year, notify the family of each student attending that they may request information on the professional qualifications of the student's teachers and paraprofessionals. Schools must inform parents of their right to know the level of achievement their student attained on PARCC. Schools must also provide parents timely notice if their student has been assigned to, or taught for four or more consecutive weeks by, a teacher who does not meet applicable state certification or licensure requirements.

Each spring, as part of the enrollment process for families, all schools administer the Home Language Survey to assess the language(s) spoken at home by the family. DCPS uses this information to ensure the district is communicating with families in the language most comfortable for them. DCPS' Language Acquisition Division (LAD) has the Welcome Center where students are assessed for English Language Proficiency. Based on assessment results, students receive grade and program placement recommendations. Parents and students receive an orientation on DCPS programs, services and activities, as well as information on their rights, roles and responsibilities. The Welcome Center provides guidance to secondary students regarding graduation requirements and transcript evaluations of high school courses taken abroad. Additionally, referrals are provided for community-based resources when needed. The

Family and Community Engagement Division works closely with LAD to ensure district-level engagement is inclusive and welcome to all families and translation and interpretation is provided.

#### **LEA Supports:**

DCPS provides resources to support communication between educators and families as part of the DCPS Way Engagement Toolkit. Resources include; phone call scripts, parent contact logs, sample newsletters, best practices for text communication, and others. For Title I schools, DCPS provides a template for the development, in collaboration with parents, of the School-level Parent and Family Engagement Policy and the School-Parent Compact.

DCPS supports the maintenance, training and upkeep of the Aspen Parent Portal for all families of students in grades 6-12. The goal of DCPS' Parent Portal is to create an open portal of communication between teachers and families to more easily work as a team in supporting each student's learning. The portal provides families more insight into what occurs in the classroom, helping them become better equipped to support their child's strengths and areas of growth. The Parent Portal is available in English and Spanish. DCPS provides video tutorials and user guides in English and Spanish to help families access and utilize the Parent Portal, and DCPS's Language Access Division supports families who need translation assistance in accessing district tools and resources.

DCPS makes available key information about programs, services, academic offerings, and priorities of the district on the DCPS website, [dcps.dc.gov](http://dcps.dc.gov). The website includes a dedicated section for Family & Community. The district also shares key information impacting families on DCPS' social media accounts, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Further, DCPS shares information proactively with families via a monthly email from the Chancellor, the Communications and Engagement Office (CEO) News to Know Newsletter and an LSAT Newsletter.

#### **Building Capacity for Schools and Families**

##### **Beliefs:**

Communication, engagement and trust with parents and families is central to DC Public School's mission. As a district, we believe it's our responsibility to support and grow the knowledge, skills and capacities for strong engagement and relationship building with families, school leaders and educators. When we invest in parent and family engagement, we develop stronger relationships with the families we serve and with our broader community, and better outcomes for students.

##### **Expectations for Schools:**

###### **Capacity Building around Family Engagement Practices**

Alongside parent and family members, each school should educate teachers, specialized instructional support personnel and other staff in the value of contributions of parents and family members. All staff at the school should understand how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners and build ties between parents and the school. Schools may train and develop the capacity of a group of parents in the school, in order to train other parents and family members in effective family engagement practices.



DCPS is a multilingual school district, and we know that parents and family members have a variety of communication needs. Schools must ensure that information related to school 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 at that school can understand.

#### Capacity Building to Improve Student Outcomes

As mentioned above, each DCPS school receiving Title I funding should hold at least one opportunity at the beginning of the school year annually for parents and families to learn about the school's plan for the year and the rights and responsibilities of families under Title I, Part A. Schools should also provide opportunities throughout the year for teachers and school leaders to connect with families.

These touchpoints should serve as opportunities for the school to provide assistance in understanding DC's academic standards and DCPS grade-level learning expectations and their student's result and progress on state assessments, including the annual Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in English language arts and mathematics. These opportunities should also provide tools and strategies for parents and families to monitor the academic progress of each student in their care, and how to work with educators to improve the achievement of their student.

Throughout the year, schools should provide materials and training to help families support their students' learning, including literacy training for parents, using technology, or other strategies.

#### **LEA Supports:**

##### Annual Parent and Family Engagement Workshop for School Leaders

DCPS supports the education and capacity building of teachers, school leaders, and other staff about the importance of meaningful parent and family engagement. As mentioned above, annually, principals of Title I schools attend a workshop on effective parent and family engagement at the Summer Leadership Institute. This workshop covers the approach that DCPS takes to parent and family engagement, and provides school leaders with a toolkit of materials to support their school in engaging with families as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and their school. This toolkit includes a calendar of recommended and required activities for schools throughout the year, templates for communicating with families in person, in writing, and via other methods, and templates for the School-Level Parent and Family Engagement Policy and School-Parent Compact.

##### Family Engagement Partnership

Supported by the Flamboyan Foundation, the Family Engagement Partnership helps school leaders and teachers engage families in ways that benefit student learning. Schools participating in the Partnership have seen significant academic growth, along with more active and engaged school communities.

Teachers receive ongoing training and support to help them establish regular and positive communications with the families of students in their class. School staff learn how to build relationships with families and work with them to set high academic expectations, monitor their child's progress, and encourage and support learning at home.

Through this partnership, DCPS trains teachers to conduct Relationship-Building Home Visits with families at the start of the school year. In teams of two, teachers visit families in a location of their choosing and focus on getting to know the family and child. Teachers and families both share their hopes, dreams, and expectations for the student. Last year, DCPS teachers conducted the most home visits of any school district in the country.

#### Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT)

The APTT is a style of parent-teacher conferences with an emphasis on how families can support their child's academics at home. At participating schools, these meetings take place two times throughout the school year in place of traditional Parent-Teacher Conferences.

#### The Family Engagement Collaborative

The Family Engagement Collaborative (FEC) is a yearlong fellowship and professional learning community for teachers. The FEC gives educators in schools not currently partnering with Flamboyan Foundation an opportunity to bring strong family engagement skills to their classrooms. Teachers come together six times throughout the school year to learn and share about a variety of family engagement topics while working to complete a designated number of Relationship-Building Home Visits.

#### Parent University

DCPS Parent University is a workshop series for families facilitated by the Communications and Engagement Office. Each session is designed to help families play their important role in supporting student learning and growth. The workshops are an opportunity for families to share strategies and learn new ones from each other and DCPS Central Office teams.

#### Parent and Community Advisory Boards

In order to build the capacity of senior DCPS leadership in parent, family and community needs and priorities and develop meaningful relationships, DCPS leadership meet monthly with four distinct [Parent and Community Advisory Boards](#), made up primarily of current DC Public Schools families from all sections of the District of Columbia:

- Chancellor's Advisory Board: serves as a mechanism for parent leaders to directly inform the Chancellor about their perspective on the vision and direction of DCPS, with a focus on equity, race and diversity in DCPS, and the role of parents in schools.
- Special Education Advisory Board: listens to parents' insights and recommendations for how DCPS can better communicate with families and inform strategic work that is centered on the successful inclusion of students with disabilities.
- Communications and Community Engagement Advisory Board: Assists DCPS in identifying improvements to equitably communicate with families and community members about DCPS policies and initiatives and building strategies to better engage with families in all 8 wards.
- Systems Operations Advisory Board: Assists DCPS in identifying improvements to equitably align systems and resources as well as provide feedback on program creation and expansion to best meet the needs of our schools.

Collectively, these councils advise the Chancellor and DCPS leaders on key policy decisions impacting parents and students and help develop parent and family engagement programs and policies.

### **Alignment with Other Programs**

DCPS believes that meaningful parent and family communication and engagement should exist across all of our programs and initiatives, no matter the age of the student or what they participate in at the school. To the extent feasible and appropriate, DCPS will coordinate and integrate our parent and family engagement approach and strategies with other federally-funded programs including activities under IDEA, activities that fund Career and Technical Education programs funded by Perkins V, DCPS's Full Service Community Schools grant, and other applicable federally-funded programs.

## **PART V: Developing and Updating the DC Public Schools Parent and Family Engagement Policy in Collaboration with Parents and Families**

### **Developing the LEA Policy in Spring and Summer 2020**

This policy was created in collaboration with parents and families, including the following methods in spring and summer 2020:

- Sharing the Policy for feedback with the Chancellor's Parent and Community Advisory Boards
- Sharing the Policy for feedback with the Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs)
- Sharing the Policy for feedback with Parent Leader Organizations (PTAs, PTOs)
- Direct Emails and Surveys to Families in Title I Schools
- Posting the Policy for Public Comment on DCPS' Public Input Engagement Site

### **Updating the Policy Annually**

DC Public Schools will take the following actions annually to involve parents and families in the joint development of this district-wide parent and family engagement plan under section 1116 of ESSA:

- Annually, DCPS will conduct an evaluation of Title I schools covering:
  - The parent and family engagement policy and parent and family engagement activities and programs;
  - Barriers experienced by families, with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are people of color;
  - The needs of parents and family members to assist with the learning of their children, including engaging with school personnel and teachers; and
  - Strategies to support successful school and family interactions.
- A survey inviting feedback on the above will be placed on DCPS' Public Input site, and the link shared broadly with district families via email, social media posts, the DCPS website, and announcements via school-based communications. DCPS will also include questions inviting input on family engagement in the district's annual Panorama survey.
- To the extent practicable, the survey and communications will be available in the languages parents and families understand, in alignment with ESSA and the DC Language Access Act of 2004.
- DCPS will gather input on the content of the policy, barriers, needs, and strategies during focus groups held with members of the Parent and Community Advisory Boards and other parent, family and community groups.
- The final plan will be placed on the DCPS website and printed copies will be available at annual Title I meetings at schools. DCPS will also share the results via email newsletters that go directly to families.

- In response to feedback from the annual evaluation, DCPS will identify and implement evidence-based strategies that further its values and goals around strong, collaborative parent and family engagement.

#### **PART VI: Adoption**

This LEA Parent and Family Engagement Policy has been developed jointly and agreed on with parents and family members of students participating in Title I, Part A programs, as evidenced by [public survey results, email feedback, or written or verbal comments on draft policies, etc.]

This policy was adopted by DC Public Schools on [Insert final date] and will be in effect for school year 2020-21, and will remain in effect until revised. DCPS will distribute this policy to all parents of participating Title I, Part A children on or before the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

[Signatures]