

# **The D.C. Family Engagement Partnership: Findings from a Descriptive Evaluation**

## **Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

In 2012, the Flamboyant Foundation contracted with the lead author at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships to conduct a formative and summative evaluation of the Family Engagement Partnership initiative (FEP) during the 2012-2014 school years. The evaluation examines the impact of this program on teachers, families, and students.

The FEP initiative is an intensive, school-wide intervention designed to support student success by transforming the ways in which teachers and families collaborate with one another. Flamboyant Foundation provides funding to cover stipends and materials, school leader coaching, teacher professional development, curriculum, and tools to support the implementation of two primary practices that are designed to strengthen the relationship between schools and students' families: relationship-building parent-teacher home visits and Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT). Through these practices, teachers build trusting relationships with families and support and provide families the information needed so that family members can become more engaged in their children's learning and academic development; in order to improve student outcomes such as their attendance, behavior, and achievement.

## Evaluation Approach

This first evaluation phase surveyed parents and teachers at 15 schools implementing FEP during the 2012-2013 school year. In spring 2013, 500 parent surveys and 213 teacher surveys were collected and returned for use in this evaluation. The report provides evidence toward the effect of FEP on parent and teacher outcomes. The following research questions guided this evaluation:

- To what extent was FEP implemented in schools, and how did teachers and parents feel about FEP implementation?
- To what extent is implementation of FEP related to parents' beliefs about themselves and their perceptions of the school?
- To what extent is implementation of FEP related to higher levels of family engagement?
- To what extent is implementation of FEP related to teachers' beliefs and perceptions of themselves and their students' families?
- To what extent is the school culture and support for FEP related to teacher participation with FEP, as well as their beliefs and perceptions?

To address these questions we analyzed survey data, allowing us to test the relationship between participation in FEP practices (home visits and APTTs) and target outcomes. For parents, this evaluation examined their sense of efficacy to impact their child's education; their perceptions of school and teacher outreach to engage them; their perceptions of school climate; and their involvement in their child's schooling. For teachers, this evaluation examined how participation in FEP activities was related to their sense of efficacy to teach all of their students; their perceptions of families; and their satisfaction with teaching at their school.

## Key Findings

### *To what extent was FEP implemented in schools, and how did teachers and parents feel about FEP implementation?*

**The FEP was widely implemented by teachers.** Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of the teachers reported that they conducted at least one APTT meeting with families, and more than 90% of the sample conducted at least one home visit. More than half of the teachers (54.5%) reported that they conducted at least 10 home visits with families at their school.

#### **Parents and teachers felt that the activities were helpful in improving student and school outcomes.**

Parents and families perceptions of the FEP activities were overwhelmingly positive. Nearly all families (96.3%) who received a home visit felt as though the experience was beneficial to their relationships with the school, and 91.1% said that it helped them feel more confident to help their child in school. Similarly, parents were near unanimous in their belief that APTT meetings improved how they helped their child with schoolwork (94.4%), encouraged them to be more involved (94.9%), and made them more confident in their ability to support their child's education (91.5%).

Teachers also felt that FEP activities were beneficial. They believed strongly that the home visits were helpful because they had a positive impact on families. Approximately 90% teachers believed that APTT meetings helped get families more engaged in their children's education and believed that APTTs helped build a relationship with students' families. A substantial percentage of teachers (69.2%) indicated they believe APTTs are better than the traditional approach to parent-teacher conferences.

### *To what extent is implementation of FEP related to parents' beliefs about themselves and their perceptions of the school?*

**Participation in FEP activities was positively associated with parents' confidence to help their children in school, as well as parents' perceptions of schools and teachers.** Parents who received a home visit, compared to those who did not experience one, reported a higher sense of efficacy a more positive view of the school climate, and a more positive view of teachers' efforts to communicate with them. And, parents who attended APTTs also tended to rate themselves higher on these outcomes compared to those who did not attend any APTT meetings. Parents who attended three APTT meetings, for example, had a more positive perception of the school climate than parents who did not attend any APTT meetings. These differences were statistically significant.

### *To what extent is implementation of FEP related to higher levels of parent engagement?*

**Participation in FEP activities was positively associated with parents' engagement at school and with their academic support at home.** Parents who had a home visit reported greater family engagement at school and more academic support at home than those who did not have a home visit. A similar pattern emerged on these outcomes for families that attended three APTT meetings compared to those who did not attend any. Those who attended three APTT meetings reported, on average, providing their

children academic support from home between once a week and once a month. These same parents also reported being involved at the school about once a month. Parents who did not attend any APTT meetings reported significantly less frequent involvement at school on these same measures.

### *To what extent is implementation of FEP related to teachers' beliefs and perceptions of themselves and their students' families?*

**Teachers' participation in FEP activities was positively related to their job satisfaction.** Teacher who conducted at least one home visit reported higher levels of job satisfaction than those who did not participate. Analyses controlling for the number of years having taught at the current school found that teachers who conducted zero APTT meetings were less satisfied in their job than those who hosted at least one APTT meeting. These differences were statistically significant.

### *To what extent is the school culture and support for FEP related to teacher involvement with FEP, as well as their beliefs and perceptions?*

**Schools' support of FEP implementation was associated with stronger reports of teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, and perceptions of families.** Teachers who reported stronger school-wide support for FEP activities were more confident in their ability to teach all of their students; they were more satisfied working at their school; and they tended to perceive their students' families as more supportive of the school. These analyses controlled for background factors (DCPS vs. Charter School and years teaching at the school), as well as measures of school climate.

When FEP support was measured using the school average rating of FEP support (from teachers across same school), this aggregate measure of program support was a statistically significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction. Moreover, support for the FEP initiative was the second strongest predictor of job satisfaction, after teachers' perceptions of staff morale. This suggests that the school-wide culture of supporting teacher outreach to families contributes to teachers' feelings of job satisfaction.

## **Implications**

The findings from this evaluation of the FEP initiative found that the program activities have consistent, positive relationships with parental beliefs, parental engagement, and teacher outcomes. The findings can inform policymakers, school leaders, and educators to help them strengthen relationships with families and improve family engagement.

First, parents and teachers expressed strong support for the use of home visits and APTT meetings as a strategy to improve teacher-family relationships and to get parents more engaged in their children's education. The additional work that might be required of teachers to conduct home visits was viewed as worthwhile as almost all of those who went on a home visit reported that they would be willing to continue the practice even if they did not receive additional compensation. Likewise, teachers who hosted APTT meetings indicated they felt this form of parent-teacher meeting (one that is data-driven

and based on how families can support student learning) is more valuable than traditional parent-teacher conferences.

In addition, the FEP intervention appeared to have significant benefits for families. Analyses found that parents who participated in home visits, and those who attended APTT meetings, tended to feel more confident in their ability to support their children's education, they had a more positive perception of their child's school, and they tended to have a more positive perception of teachers. At the same time, parents who participated in home visits and APTT meetings tended to be more engaged at school and reported more frequently providing their child academic support (i.e., helping study for tests, reading with their child, checking homework) than those families who did not participate in these school practices to engage families.

Finally, the FEP initiative demonstrated consistent and positive relationships to teacher attitudes. In particular, teachers were more satisfied in their job if they conducted home visits or APTT meetings. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that teacher satisfaction was associated with being in a school that is more committed and supportive of teacher outreach to strengthen relationships with families. These findings have implications for districts who may be interested in improving teacher retention and reducing teacher absenteeism, suggesting that school-community relationships may be one way to improve these outcomes.

More research is needed to confirm and extend the findings from this evaluation. The data collected for this evaluation, for example, is not representative of all families or teachers in the schools implementing FEP; some schools are better represented in this evaluation than others. Having more representative parent and teacher data will strengthen future studies of the FEP initiative. Also, future evaluations need to examine how FEP implementation and participation is related to student outcomes such as daily attendance, student behaviors, grades, and academic achievement. Evaluations of how schools can effectively improve student outcomes through efforts to increase family engagement are lacking in the field; though this study provides preliminary evidence, more investments in evaluating these capacity-building approaches to family engagement are needed. The present evaluation suggests that schools' efforts can promote greater family engagement. The next step is to examine, through more rigorous evaluation designs, how initiatives like the FEP impact students and teachers alike.

In light of the U.S. Department of Education's recent release of their Family Engagement Framework by the, this evaluation has meaningful implications for local and national education policymakers. Consistent with that framework, this evaluation shows that Flamboyan Foundation's FEP efforts to build the capacity of educators to implement home visits and APTT meetings was successfully related to parents' confidence to become engaged in their child's learning; to parents' engagement in their child's learning; to parents' relationship with their child's school and perceptions of the school climate; and to teachers' perceptions of families and their feelings about their own school. These finding suggest that schools' implementation of family engagement activities may have positive outcomes for families and teachers participating in these practices.

