

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Family and Community Engagement Working Group

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Arlington School Board
FROM: The Family and Community Engagement Working Group
RE: The Family Community Engagement Working Group Report

CHARGE

The School Board FY 2014 Communication Priority recognizes that effective communication with staff, students, families, the Arlington community and Arlington County Board are essential to the success of our students. The School Board will receive input from citizens regarding a framework for family engagement and consider changes to the School Board’s community engagement policy, with a goal of building the capacity of schools and families to partner to support student learning.

To pursue this priority, Board member Dr. Emma Violand-Sanchez convened and facilitated a Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Working Group of parents/community members with the charge of reviewing and revising the Arlington School Board Community Engagement policy and identifying a Framework for family and community engagement (see Appendix).

METHOD AND RESOURCES

The Working Group brought together a diverse group of 17 parents and community members, serving in school PTAs, various advisory committees, and community organizations, who contributed their diverse knowledge and experiences to the task at hand. The group held 10 working sessions, from November 2013 to May 2014. It produced a draft Family and Community Engagement Policy (Attachment 1) as well as a set of recommendations, listed in this report, for APS to make progress in this area and strengthen its Family and Community Engagement work.

To accomplish these tasks, the Working Group reviewed policies from other school districts, including Montgomery County Public Schools, and was informed by the work described in the following section, including the latest research on family engagement impact and best practice, the Harvard Family Research Project definition, the National PTA Standards for family-school-community partnerships, the current Department of Education Dual Capacity Building

Framework, as well as APS Strategic Plan and the Arlington Partnership for Youth and Families developmental assets framework.

BACKGROUND

A Genuine Family and Community Engagement. The Working Group began by envisioning, based on their collective knowledge and experience, what schools that have a genuine family and community engagement look like. Among the common themes emerging from small and large group discussions of this question were:

- A sense of belonging; a sense of community; welcoming atmosphere; people feel valued and respected.
- Relationships built; people feeling connected to the school and each other; linkages made between adults and students; families helping other families.
- Cultural sensitivity; understanding of cultural and economic differences; compassion; respect and openness to diversity; recognition of diversity in the halls and curriculum.
- Good communication; a home/school communication plan in place with multiple formats to respond to different needs.
- Parent-friendly information and family activities that connect families to student learning.
- Parents feeling comfortable asking questions and knowing who to go to with questions and concerns; parents supported to be advocates and students taught to advocate for themselves.
- Parents as resources; school using parent gifts, talents and abilities to support learning; different ways to engage; multiple points of entry for parent engagement.
- Teachers having positive relationships with students and parents; teachers conducting home visits; teachers knowing the community and community resources available.
- School connected to other organizations and resources in the community to support students and their families; school serving as community assets.
- School dedicated resources, time and staff to strengthening family and community connections and involvement.

FACE Standards. The Face Working Group then conducted a crosswalk of these themes and the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships,ⁱ which also come with a practical rubric that PTAs and schools can use to strengthen their FACE workⁱⁱ. The Working Group concluded that the National PTA Standards provide a useful framework to inform APS future work on FACE. However, in looking at these Standards in light of Goal 5 of the APS Strategic Plan focusing on the whole child and building Developmental Assets,ⁱⁱⁱ the FACE Working Group

recommends emphasizing the social and emotional development of students as well as development of their self-advocacy skills.

Definition of Family Engagement. In arriving at the definition of family and community engagement included in the APS policy, the Working Group drew from its own collective experience and the working definition put forth by the Harvard Family Research Project (Jan, 2014).^{iv} The definition proposed here recognizes that family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities, as well as a process that changes as children grow and therefore calls for a variety of pathways for engaging families.

Why it Matters. The FACE Working Group reviewed research on the impact of family and community engagement on student achievement. Anne Henderson, an expert and author of many publications in the family engagement field, presented key research findings and powerful strategies during one of the Working Group sessions.

In the latest publication, “A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement” (Henderson and Mapp, 2002)^v the authors state the following overarching conclusion:

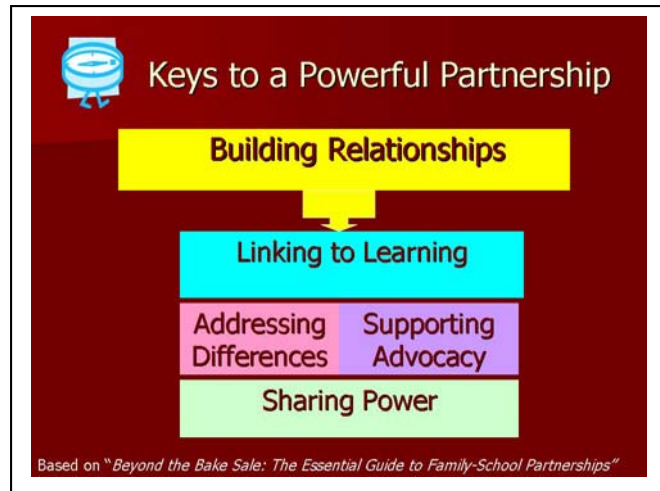
“Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. The relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages. Although there is less research in the effect of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families and students, including improved achievement and behavior.” (Henderson and Mapp, p.24, 2002)

Based on her extensive research, Henderson found that family engagement has a powerful impact on student achievement. If parents are engaged, students from all backgrounds tend to: earn higher grades and test scores; enroll in high-level programs; be promoted and earn credits; adapt well to school and attend regularly; have better social skills and behavior; graduate and go on to higher education.

School practices are key. The strongest, most consistent predictors of whether parents are involved at home and school are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parents to become involved. Studies found that high-performing schools tend to have a combination of characteristics, one of which is high levels of parent and community involvement.

Keys to Powerful Partnerships. The figure below shows the keys to powerful family and community partnerships highlighted in *Beyond the Bake Sale* (Henderson et al., 2007)^{vi}. For

each of these keys, the authors offer examples of powerful practices, checklists and descriptors that can be used for school systems to assess and strengthen their work in each of these areas.



A theme repeated again and again in the studies is that relationships are key. Building relationships of respect and trust lays the foundation for staff and families to work together. The studies also suggest that family engagement programs that create linkages to learning and help families get a clear idea of what their children are learning and doing in class have the most impact on student achievement. To be effective, differences of culture, race, language, and income must be bridged, and programs and staff must build their capacity to enhance the curriculum and communicate effectively with families from diverse backgrounds.

Supporting advocacy is another key to powerful partnerships with families. It is in the school's interest to set up a process for collaborating with families to monitor student progress, address difficulties, and plan for the future. Schools need to take steps to help parents navigate the school system and become effective advocates for their children. Finally, sharing power refers to the need for families to have a voice in school governance. Schools that have built powerful partnerships provide workable mechanisms for teachers, parents and students from diverse backgrounds to voice their ideas and concerns, and to take part in decision-making.

A Dual Capacity Building Framework. The FACE Working Group also reviewed the draft of the US Department of Education's Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (attached). The framework, officially released in April, 2014, is designed to address the challenge of limited capacity by providing a direction and focus for policy, programming and practice in the area of family engagement.



A Dual Capacity Framework

Released by US Dept. of Education in April 2014.

- The Focus -- Building the capacity of families **AND** school & program staff to partner in ways that support student learning and healthy development, as well as school improvement.

- The "4 C's" of capacity among staff and families:
 - capabilities (knowledge & skills)
 - connections (relationships & networks)
 - cognition (beliefs and worldview)
 - confidence (sense of self-efficacy)

4 C's

Author Dr. Karen Mapp described the framework as *a compass* at its official release during the 2014 National Family Engagement Conference.

The dual capacity building framework highlights some conditions suggested by research that need to be met, including organizational conditions that are key to sustain and scale efforts across programs and schools. Initiatives must be systemic, integrated into structures and processes, and sustained with adequate resources and infrastructure support. Family and Community Engagement efforts also must be aligned with educational improvement goals.

Studies have shown that having a dedicated team working over the long term is essential for doing this work. Dr. Joyce Epstein, director of the National Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University, developed the Action Team concept based on studies of successful practice in the field, and developed a set of resources to guide the work of action teams for partnerships.^{vii}

DRAFT POLICY

The Policy outlines an APS vision for effective Family and Community Engagement and provides a definition, standards and responsibilities. (Attachment 1)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The FACE Working Group proposes the following recommendations:

- 1) APS adopt the new Family Engagement Policy (attached), which affirms the commitment of our leadership to partner with families to achieve APS desired outcomes for students, set standards for what FACE should include, and provide the resources and supports needed for its implementation.

- 2) For Fall 2014 APS staff and FACE Working Group members collaborate to share the Family and Community Engagement framework, standards and the recommended policy with key stakeholders such as APS staff, CCPTA, advisory committees, families and the wider community.
- 3) APS appoint a FACE Action Team composed of citizens and staff from different division-wide departments and co-chaired by a citizen representative and APS senior staff, who will work together to develop a FACE implementation plan that is well designed, integrated and owned by all partners. It is also recommended that schools establish school level action teams of staff and families who are representative of the school diversity to coordinate FACE implementation.

Within 6 months of FACE policy adoption, the action team will create a three-year implementation plan that will include:

- 1) Priority goals and related elements to be implemented throughout the three-year plan with a timeline and specific milestones for schools and the school division as a whole.
 - 2) Supports required for the implementation, including organizational structure, resources, and professional development.
 - 3) A system of accountability that includes metrics and tools that capture what happens at both the school level and the system as a whole, incorporating the goals of the APS Strategic Plan and FACE Standards.
- 4) Create an APS Family and Community Engagement specialist position to facilitate systemic coordination and technical assistance with capacity building and collaboration between APS departments (such as Instruction, ESOL-HILT Title I, Minority Achievement, Student Services, Counseling and Special Education, School and Community Relations) and community organizations (such as Arlington Partnership for Children Youth and Families, Edu-Futuro, AHC Inc. Greenbrier Learning Center or other organizations that connect families and learning). The FACE staff person shall report directly to the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction because of its importance in supporting student achievement.

MEMBERSHIP/AFFILIATION

Kelly Alexis – Tuckahoe Elementary School

Tyra Baker – Nauck Revitalization Organization; Drew Model School, Gunston Middle School

Dr. Rosa Briceño – Edu-Futuro

Moley Evans – Campbell Elementary School

Alicia Guajardo – ACI Pupil Services Committee, Wakefield High School
Ted Hayes - CCPTA
Rich Jordan – Education Pioneers, Barcroft, Arlington Traditional School
Melissa Perry – Civic Coalition of Minority Affairs, Washington-Lee High School
Terron Sims – Co-Chair, Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on the Achievement Gap
Joey Skoloda – CARE for Change, AFCYF
Dr. Samuel Stebbins – School Health Physician, APCYF
Michael Swisher – Asset Liaison-AFCYF
Gabriela Uro – Arlington Latino Network
Nancy Van Doren – Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Washington-Lee High School
Jennifer Vogel – ACI, Arlington Science Focus School, Williamsburg Middle School
Kristine Wood – Key Elementary School, Gunston Middle School

APPENDIX

Attachment 1 - Draft Family and Community Engagement Policy

Attachment 2 - Family Engagement Capacity Building Framework

ⁱ National PTA. *National Standards, Goals and Indicators for Family-School Partnerships*, 2008.

ⁱⁱ National PTA. *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide*, 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families. *Arlington Developmental Assets Youth Survey, 2012*

^{iv} Harvard Family Research Project. *A Working Definition of Family Engagement*, Jan. 2014

^v Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp. *A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, 2002.

^{vi} Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson and Don Davies. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, 2007.

^{vii} Epstein, Joyce et al, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, 2002.