

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Building Partnerships and Capacity for Systemic Family Engagement in Washington State

Partner Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Community Center for Education Results, National Center for Families Learning, Right Standing Solutions, Roots of Inclusion, Washington Family Engagement

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Toward a consistent approach to family engagement

Across Washington state, school districts and communities have varied levels of training, practice, and experience with family engagement. Multiple factors play a role in the inconsistency: siloed communication and work practices, competing priorities, lack of infrastructure, and unclear expectations and understandings of effective and equitable family engagement.

In 2020, the Washington State Legislature established a workgroup to create a statewide family engagement framework: one that could establish a consistent understanding and approach from early learning through high school. In addition to suggesting a framework, the workgroup recommended that the state education agency, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), create a toolkit to support schools and districts in building meaningful partnerships among educators, families, and communities.

OSPI partnered with Education Northwest and several community-based organizations to establish the Washington Statewide Family Engagement Center, funded by a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Together, we took up the workgroup's recommendations and began building systems and capacity for family engagement statewide.

Collaborating to map assets and develop resources

Before we began the work, we wanted to build a collaborative team that broadly represented different communities across Washington. Our initial partnership included OSPI, Education Northwest research and practice experts, and community organizations with on-the-ground expertise engaging multicultural, multilingual families; families of color; and families of children with disabilities. We also engaged an advisory board to provide feedback on tools and resources and identify opportunities to support systemic family engagement. The board included parents, leaders of community-based organizations, and staff members at agencies with statewide reach.

With our team in place, we began to assess the Washington family engagement landscape. We conducted a district survey to understand current strengths and gaps in the field. We also conducted interviews and focus groups with families, professional service organizations, community-based organizations, and educators as a part of our [asset-mapping process](#).

Through this work we discovered the ways that siloed communication and practices, competing priorities, and a lack of shared understanding of effective family engagement act as barriers to implementing sustainable change. From the state level down to districts and schools, we witnessed strong interest in and commitment to family engagement—but also uncertainty about how to partner with families effectively.

Based on what we learned, we collaborated with our partners and advisory board to create assessment tools and capacity-building experiences for district and school teams. Our resources incorporated evidence-based practices and aligned to the framework developed by the state workgroup. We prioritized family feedback to ensure the resources would support authentic, meaningful family engagement. Our partners also offered parent leadership trainings, webinars, and communities of practice and created tools to help communities understand systems, identify opportunities for improvement, and engage stakeholders in meaningful ways to drive systems change.

A library of free tools for family engagement

Several of our tools and resources remain available for free:

[A district self-assessment tool](#)

[A school-based self-assessment tool](#)

A self-paced course for educators ([“Building Systemic Family Engagement Practice”](#))

For years to come, OSPI and our other partners can leverage these tools to build capacity for authentic, equitable, and systemic family engagement. In addition, we hope to offer the learning modules through the state’s professional development system so that educators who take the course can receive clock hours toward recertification. With increased awareness and use, we expect to see improved implementation of family engagement practices, more positive experiences for families and educators, and ultimately better outcomes for students.