

Chapter 2

Incorporating Family Engagement Into California School District Accountability Plans

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ABSTRACT

Under a new policy, California school districts are responsible for articulating their plans to address student needs in eight priority areas, including family engagement in support of student learning. This chapter reviews accountability plans for 15 culturally and regionally diverse California school districts by aligning their approaches to family engagement with key culturally responsive strategies identified in the literature. Districts report using multiple approaches to engage families, but there is not strong evidence of teacher professional development in support of culturally responsive practices. Metrics to track family engagement outcomes are limited. Most districts track family participation at school events or response rates to family surveys, neither of which allows for an analysis of opportunities for engagement. More sophisticated family engagement systems are needed to assess the success of engaging family members in culturally appropriate and effective ways that improve student educational outcomes.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- In what ways do California school districts plan to engage parents and families in support of students' academic success?
- How do district plans align with existing family engagement frameworks and culturally responsive family engagement practices?
- What data collections and metrics are school districts using to measure their progress in parent and family engagement and its effects on student outcomes? In what ways do these capture culturally responsive practices?

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We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own. -Cesar Chavez

INTRODUCTION

Involving parents and other family members in school experiences has been associated with improved academic outcomes for students. This is especially the case for students from diverse cultural backgrounds and low-income or otherwise disadvantaged students (see recent reviews conducted by EdSource (2014) and the California Department of Education (2014)). This link is enhanced when family engagement strategies are implemented alongside other school reforms. The relationship between engaging families and engaging students in school is so robust — and makes such intuitive sense — that the California State Board of Education included *parent involvement and participation* as one of eight priority areas in its recently established Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). The formal addition of family engagement to an accountability system is unprecedented and warrants an understanding of how school districts operationalize family engagement and plan to assess their approaches.

This chapter examines the focus of California school districts' family engagement approaches and strategies. It also looks at the ways they measure this engagement through the lens of culturally responsive family engagement practices. Because California communities and school children are highly diverse culturally and ethnically, an examination of how district practices align with family demographics and needs is an important part of the analysis.

In the 2013-14 school year, California enacted the local control funding formula (LCFF) to replace its K-12 finance system. It establishes base, supplemental, and concentration grants in place of the previously existing funding streams. As part of the LCFF, school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools are required to submit and update annually a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) using a template adopted by the California State Board of Education. The LCAP addresses each of eight priority areas, grouped into three main categories, as shown in Table 1. Also shown in the table is the alignment of each priority area with the state's 11 Quality Schooling Framework practices.

Parent involvement and participation (referred to as family engagement in this chapter) is shown under the category engagement and contains two separate components. The first includes involving family members in designing and vetting the LCAP itself. Researchers primarily have focused on this aspect in considering LCAP family engagement (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014; Humphrey, Koppich & Marsh, 2015; Warren & Carrillo, 2015). A recent poll of California residents indicates that 51% of public school parents report having received information from their school about the LCAP and 16% of public school parents report being involved in the development of the LCAP (Baldassare, Bonner, Kordus & Lopes, 2016).

The second component, which is the focus of this chapter, is family engagement in support of student learning. Far less prescribed than stakeholder engagement in the LCAP process, this involves a variety of volunteering, capacity-building, and community-building activities that schools and family members engage in together. A recent report focusing on this aspect of family engagement describes the on-the-ground challenges California districts face in implementing their family engagement plans (Families in Schools, 2016). One key challenge noted in the report is that parents become disillusioned, and stop engaging, when they feel their voices are not being heard by school administrators. Capitalizing on this

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