ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

2015-2020 Action Plan

HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

960 Main Street, 8th Floor, Hartford CT
www.hartfordschools.org
Introduction

As part of Hartford Public Schools strategic planning process in 2015, over 200 stakeholders engaged in in-depth discussions about Family and Community Engagement (FCE). Their input, along with a review of the district’s 2013 Family and Community Engagement Plan, new research and evolving practices related to family and community engagement around the country and Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez’s call to action to focus on developing learning-focused family and community partnerships as expressed in the district’s new Strategic Plan 2015-2020 provide the foundation for the next phase of our family and community engagement work in Hartford Public Schools. As we embrace Family and Community Engagement as a core value and embedded strategy of the district, we recognize as a basic premise that parents, families and guardians are children’s first teachers and are essential partners in the education process.

With gratitude to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for supporting the Family and Community Engagement Planning Process.
The Family and Community Engagement Action Plan: An Outcome of the Hartford Public Schools Strategic Plan

**VISION**
HPS students will transform their world.

**MISSION**
Inspire and prepare ALL students to create their own success in and beyond school.

**FIVE BOLD NEW CHANGES IN MINDSET**
- Personalized learning centered around each and every student
- Focus on leadership
- Collaboration among leaders and schools, not competition
- Commitment to equity
- Meaningful family and community partnership

**FIVE E’s THEORY OF ACTION**
If we set and hold all students to high EXPECTATIONS

If we ENGAGE all students in meaningful, differentiated ways that match their needs and meet their interests

If we focus on the growth of EACH AND EVERY student and school

If we EXPAND the capacity of our leaders, staff, and schools

Then, we will achieve EQUITABLE outcomes in which every student thrives and every school is high performing

**2020 HPS STRATEGIC PLAN EQUITY INDICATORS (GOALS)**
- 100% college acceptance
- 90% graduation rate
- 100% access to college and career readiness opportunities
- 90% reduction in suspensions
- 80% of students pass Algebra 1 with a ‘C’ or better by the end of 9th grade
- 100% of students have a Success Plan and a connection to a caring adult
- 75% reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade
- 10% chronic absenteeism
HPS Definition of Family and Community Engagement (adapted from 2013 FCE Plan):
Family and Community Engagement is anything and everything that a parent, caregiver, or other caring adults do in a child’s life to support learning and healthy development in and out of school.

Our Family and Community Engagement Theory of Action

- IF family and community engagement is a shared responsibility between all adults in and beyond school, and...
- IF those adults are committed to building and enhancing their skills, knowledge, and mindsets related to engagement, and...
- IF schools, families, and communities engage in productive, mutually respectful partnerships, and...
- IF those partnerships focus on achieving the district’s equity indicators...

THEN, family and community engagement will be a meaningful contributor to increased student performance, greater overall social emotional wellness, improved schools, and students who are prepared for post-secondary education and participation in a global economy.

Our Three Priority Actions

- Positively impact achievement, attendance, and behavior.
- Strengthen and contribute to stronger schools and communities.

1. Develop Learning-Focused Family & Community Partnerships
2. Address Community Challenges That Impact Students
3. Strengthen School Governance Councils

- Embed family and community engagement into the core processes and day to day work of the district and schools.
- Collectively identify and promote practices that connect families and partners to learning outcomes and goals of students.
- Build the capacity, trust and engagement of all participants in the school-family-community arena.
- Seek the shared commitment and investment of the entire community.
Priority Action #1–Develop Learning-Focused Family & Community Partnerships

1. Make Hartford Public Schools more welcoming and family-friendly, based on our community’s standards, and guided by national family-friendly school standards.
2. Establish a Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Group to offer a direct relationship with the Superintendent, to share experiences, to provide input on district initiatives, and to bring information back to parents at each school.
3. Build the capacity of parents, families and educators (teachers, principals, other school staff, central office staff) together to ensure productive and meaningful engagement of families in our schools (Dual Capacity-Building).
4. Collaborate with community-based organizations on the development, implementation and monitoring of programs, initiatives and supports that align directly to district and school goals and Equity Indicators (e.g., Third Grade reading proficiency, decrease chronic absenteeism).
5. Implement Community Schools to integrate operations across departments, share best practices, align funding and to focus on continuous improvement strategies.
6. Deepen support for student achievement and growth through major community-wide initiatives (e.g., College and Career Readiness Framework Partnership, Hartford Public Library, Hartford Performs, Hartford Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Hartford Promise, Hartford Partnership for Student Success, Hartford Student Internship Plan).
7. Develop a more effective system for evaluating family and community partner engagement.

Priority Action #2–Address Community Challenges That Impact Students

1. Develop Community Learning and Engagement Opportunities to capitalize on community opportunities and support student growth (e.g., effective family and community engagement, student centered learning, literacy, college planning) and address community challenges that directly or indirectly impact students (e.g., critical race theory/cultural responsiveness, violence/restorative justice, the digital divide, mental health).
2. Provide services to homeless children, youth, and families consistent with federal and state laws and district guidelines that facilitate student success in school, including tutoring in shelters, providing uniforms and school supplies, and offering training and programs for families and school staff.
3. Communicate the goals, benefits, progress, and impact of the district’s family and community engagement initiatives to the community.

Priority Action #3–Strengthen School Governance Councils

1. Increase the capacity and effectiveness of School Governance Councils at the school level and at the district level through parent and staff training, planning and operational support, and communications and outreach guidance.
2. Provide multi-level training and support on developing and regularly updating school family compacts, based on identified interests and needs and using best practices to develop compacts as an engagement strategy.
3. Develop a multiple-measures evaluation tool to assess SGC effectiveness and for continuous improvement.

A Note About Implementation

Sequencing and prioritization of the initiatives identified in this action plan will be established in implementation plans. Those implementation plans will balance the need for family and community engagement to happen at the school level and connected to student learning, a focus on central office supporting school leaders and staff, and a commitment to dual capacity building with schools, families and community partners – learning and growing together.
Dual Capacity-Building Framework Embedded in Implementation of All Three Actions

THE CHALLENGE

Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

Ineffective Family-School Partnerships

Lack of opportunities for Families to build the capacity for partnerships

OPPORTUNITY CONDITIONS

Process Conditions:
• Linked to learning
• Relational
• Development vs. service orientation
• Collaborative
• Interactive

Organizational Conditions:
• Systemic: across the organization
• Integrated: embedded in all programs
• Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

POLICY AND PROGRAM GOALS

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “4 C” areas:

Capabilities (skills and knowledge)
Connections (networks)
Cognition (beliefs, values)
Confidence (self-efficacy)

FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES

School and Program Staff who can
• Honor and recognize families’ funds of knowledge
• Connect family engagement to student learning
• Create welcoming, inviting cultures

Effective Family-School Partnerships
Supporting Student Achievement & School Improvement

Families who can negotiate multiple roles
• Supporters
• Encouragers
• Monitors
• Advocates
• Decision Makers
• Collaborators

Source: SEDL – Karen Mapp and Paul Kuttner, 2013
Supporting Information: Pathway for Developing Family and Community Engagement Action Plan

The Family and Community Engagement Action Plan was built on the input of many stakeholders, a review of where we are as a district, what we learned from new research and best practices, and the directions of the 2015-2020 HPS Strategic Plan that calls for a collaborative approach aligned to student outcomes. The following provides an overview of the process and pathways we engaged in resulting in the Family and Community Engagement Action Plan.

Factors That Shaped The Family and Community Engagement Action Plan:

- Hartford Parent University
- June 2013 Family and Community Engagement Task Force
- Input from 200+ Stakeholders (2015)
- BOE Family & Community Engagement Committee
- HPS Strategic Plan
- Secondary Research to Identify Successful FCE Practices

2015 Stakeholder Input Process (conducted in partnership with Hartford Parent University)

- 52 Parents / PTO leaders / SGC leaders
- 11 Students
- 6 Teachers
- 6 Principals
- 6 Associate Superintendents
- 4 Academic leadership staff
- 7 ELL staff
- 10 Special education leaders
- 18 FRA / FRC / outreach staff
- 13 Central office engagement staff
- 48 Community providers
- 22 Faith leaders
- 4 BOE members, advocates, others

Total of 200+ participants in the input process!
Summary of Input From Stakeholders

1. All partners must operate under a common definition of Family and Community Engagement.
2. The goals of all of the family and community engagement partners must be aligned with the expectations and desired outcomes of Hartford Public Schools.
3. It is critical that the needs of HPS students and student learning be at the center of the design and delivery of programs, services, activities, and advocacy.
4. Both HPS and its partners must be flexible and embrace change to meet student needs.
5. HPS and its partners must accept individual and shared accountability for service, performance, and meeting family and community engagement goals.
6. Principals and partners should be committed to the same goals.
7. Mutual trust and effective communication between HPS and its partners is a prerequisite for success.
8. There should be a clear definition of partnership roles and responsibilities.
9. Schools need to be more family-friendly.
10. HPS and its partners should identify metrics for measuring the impact of services and commit the resources to gather and analyze the impact data.
11. District and school staff can only be effective partners if they possess the understanding, capacity, and knowledge required to be effective partners. Specifically, educators need (and indeed seek) more training in how to achieve more meaningful and productive engagement with families and community providers.
12. Effective and sustainable delivery of support and services requires strategic collaboration around planning and funding among partners, schools and the district as equally valued partners.
13. True partners grow and succeed together.
14. Family and community engagement will succeed when it is rooted in sustained engagement and a continuum of roles, not one-off events.
15. The entire community must embrace a shared commitment to and a shared investment in the success of school-family-community partnerships.
Where We Are: Hartford Public Schools Experience with Family and Community Engagement

- Hartford Public Schools (HPS) has a strong foundation of family and community engagement including:
  - Board of Education Policies and Regulations on Community Relations (series 1000), including Parent and Community Involvement, School Governance Councils, and Constituent Services.
  - Pockets of deep community and family engagement throughout the district.
  - Philanthropic support for engagement.
  - Commitment of many HPS educators and families to engagement as a tool for increasing attendance and advancing student achievement.
  - Implementation of many of the 2013 Family and Community Engagement Plan’s recommendations (e.g., Parent Portal, web site).
  - An engagement structure within the district offering multiple entry points for engagement, including:
    * The conveniently located Welcome Center
    * Family Resource Aides (FRA’s)
    * Family Resource Centers (FRC’s)
    * School partner staff
    * School Governance Councils (SGC’s)
  - Resources throughout the community such as:
    * The Community School model with lead agencies as partners
    * Hartford Parent University’s (HPU) parent training modules
    * Leadership Greater Hartford’s (LGH) resources
    * Community-based organizations and funders who support family and community engagement

What We Heard: Challenges Identified in Dr. Narvaez’s 2013 Transition Report and in 2015 Stakeholder Input Process:

- Link Family and Community Engagement directly to student achievement and school improvement.
- Move from a mindset of creating programs to changing practice and leveraging successful practices across the district.
- Develop standards / expectations to guide and inform practice for effective engagement.
- Grow the number and build the (dual) capacity of staff and families to co-create strategies, share power, and embrace responsibility for student success.
- Create friendly and welcoming school environments.
- Strengthen communication and collaboration among the district, families, and community providers.
- Align family and community engagement with the district’s 2015 – 2020 strategic plan.
- Establish a framework for measuring and assessing progress and impact.

What We Learned: New Research / Evolving Practices:

- Over thirty years of research show that when families are engaged in their children’s educational lives, achievement increases, attendance improves, dropout rates decrease, behavior both at home and school improve, and, in fact, communities at large improve.¹
- Anthony Bryk² cites the importance of leadership as a driver of change, the vital role of strong parent-family-community partnerships, and a commitment to student centered learning environments as key conditions to organize schools for improvement.

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² Anthony S. Bryk, et. al., Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago.
• The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships speaks to the importance of building and enhancing the capacity of both staff and families to support student achievement and school improvement. The Dual Capacity approach is embedded in the HPS Family and Community Engagement Action Plan.
• The PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships updated its standards shifting focus from what schools need to do to involve parents to what families, schools and community can do together to advance student success.

Where we are going: Creating a More Collaborative Approach

Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez asked that the 2013 Family and Community Engagement plan be updated to reflect new thinking and practices, a strong commitment and alignment to student outcomes, and a more collaborative and trusting approach to family and community engagement, as expressed in the district’s new Strategic Plan 2015-2020. Specifically, Superintendent Narvaez has asked everyone involved in family and community engagement to:

• Think about family and community engagement more broadly, as a belief system and practices, not just a collection of programs.
• Embrace families and community providers as co-producers/co-creators (not customers/clients) of an outstanding education system.
• Encourage a more decentralized approach where the central office supports and empowers schools, parents, and community providers reflecting the belief that engagement happens at the school level.
• Consider a “dual capacity-building framework” that recognizes the need for professional development for HPS teachers and administrators, as well as for families and community providers.
• Engage more families and more community providers in the work of the schools, connected directly to advancing student outcomes.
• Have the hard and courageous conversations among families and staff related to race, class, cultural diversity, and fears.
• Increase access to and improve communication with families and community providers.
• Develop tools and metrics for measuring the impact and effectiveness of family and community engagement.

Aligning the HPS Strategic Plan and the Updated Family and Community Engagement Action Plan

1. The Hartford Public Schools strategic plan has two overall strategies.
2. Each strategy has three key recommendations, for a total of six key recommendations.
3. One of those six recommendations is “Engage Families and Community in Meaningful Partnership.”
4. This Family and Community Engagement Plan (FCE Plan) is the multi-year action plan for the “Engage Families and Community in Meaningful Partnership” recommendation.
5. The FCE Plan contains three Priority Actions.
6. Detailed implementation plans will be developed for the FCE Plan’s recommended Priority Actions.

4 National PTA, National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, www.pta.org/nationalstandards
Desired Outcomes of Family and Community Engagement Action Plan

Desired Outcomes of Family and Community Engagement Action Plan = Desired Outcomes of HPS Strategic Plan (Equity Indicators)