



## *The Federal Government's Role in Student, Family, and Community Engagement*

While federal, state, district, school, and classroom policies all impact student, family, and community engagement, the federal government plays a key role in supporting the social, emotional, and academic needs of our nation's students. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and other federal entities can help state and district leaders to meaningfully and equitably engage students, families, and communities in a variety of ways:

- 1.** Support and expand programs that equip and train educators with the tools necessary to build upon student and family strengths and address communication barriers between educators, students, and families.
  - Programs, such as those under Title II Part A (II-A) of the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA), provide important professional development and training opportunities for educators to address implicit biases, increase cultural competency, overcome language barriers, and enhance educator capacity to effectively engage with students and their families.
  - ESSA can further fund efforts to help train educators on how to implement evidence-based practices to address student mental health challenges and support relationship-building, such as culturally responsive teaching, restorative justice interventions, and more.
- 2.** Prioritize and invest in programs, like those below, that are designed to help create a racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce, which would be a powerful tool to strengthen student, family, and community engagement within schools and help students of color perform better academically and feel more connected.
  - The Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence were established under the Higher Education Act (HEA) to improve educator preparation and diversity, specifically by strengthening programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges and universities, and other minority-serving institutions.
  - Grow Your Own (GYO) programs and Registered Teacher Apprenticeship (RTAP) programs, both community-based efforts to recruit and train teachers within communities, can be effective ways to increase the racial and cultural diversity of the teacher workforce. GYOs and RTAPs can be eligible for federal funding, including through programs authorized by ESSA and HEA, in addition to workforce initiatives administered by the Department of Labor.
- 3.** Expand the reach and scope of the funding streams and programs below, which are designed to support family and community engagement.
  - Under Title I of ESSA, school districts must include in their education plan a written parent and family engagement policy designed to strengthen partnerships between families, schools, and the community to improve student outcomes; schools must meet annually with parents to evaluate and, if necessary, revise the content and effectiveness of these policies. Furthermore, under Title I of ESSA, local education agencies (LEAs) whose total Title I allocation exceeds \$500,000 are required to reserve at least 1% of their allocation for school activities designed to engage parents and families. Not only should Congress significantly [increase](#) Title I funding overall, but it should also increase this specific percentage during the

next reauthorization of ESSA, as well as look to include important oversight protections to ensure that these funds are spent on activities that have proven to be effective at increasing and enhancing authentic family engagement.

- Statewide Family Engagement Centers offer training and technical assistance to districts and organizations to promote family engagement initiatives and assist parents in participating effectively in their children's education. Despite the importance of these centers, they are active in less than a quarter of states across the country.
- Create a permanent Office of Family Engagement within the Department of Education with established authority, purpose, and reach across the department to provide guidance and support to states and districts on using the funds available to them for effective family engagement strategies.

#### 4. Support, grow, and increase funding for evidence-based structures that support student, family, and community engagement.

- The Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) [program](#) provides important support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools. FSCS integrate a wide range of academic, social, and health services for students and families, including high-quality early learning programs, mentoring and youth development, job training and career counseling, nutrition services, and much more. The FSCS model can be a powerful way to promote student, family, and community engagement and improve education outcomes for students by supporting programs focused on parental involvement, parent leadership, family literacy, and parent education programs. Recognizing the importance of this program, the federal government increased its funding in the FY23 omnibus spending package by \$75 million, bringing the total funding to \$150 million.
- Parent Training and Information Centers via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) award grants to parent organizations to provide training and information to parents of children with disabilities. These centers can help ensure that parents of students with disabilities have the capacity and support to engage with school and district staff as strong advocates and education partners for their children.
- Incorporate family engagement into nearly all federal grants that fund K-12 education, with special attention paid to integrating family engagement in areas where it is still highly relevant but less often considered (e.g., programs for older students like dual enrollment or college advising), where understanding and mitigating family barriers to program uptake would be extremely beneficial.
- Incentivize family engagement strategies that evidence has shown to be most effective by incorporating only evidence-based programs in allowable uses and grant activities or giving priority or points to grant applicants that demonstrate the research basis behind their proposed activities.