



UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES: SERVICES THAT HELP POOR CHILDREN SUCCEED IN THE CLASSROOM

Part 2: Parent Engagement Services

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A child's family plays a significant role in their ability to succeed in school. A parent who is engaged in their child's education can reinforce what is learned in the classroom and track their child's progress. Students considered to be at greatest risk, including those from low-income families, have the most to gain from quality family engagement in their education.¹

However, a parent's ability to get involved in school activities can be affected by poverty.² Nationally, 27 percent of children living in poverty had a parent who volunteered at their child's school, compared with 45 percent of children above the poverty line.³ Low-income parents often work multiple jobs or have non-traditional work hours and have less free time and resources available to regularly participate in school activities.

For these reasons, an intentional strategy at the school level to engage parents can offer low-income families additional support they need to reinforce at home what is learned in the classroom.

The District is making notable progress in this regard, but more resources are likely to be needed to support parent engagement efforts at all schools.

- Next year, 30 DC schools will be part of the **Family Engagement Partnership** with the private Flamboyant Foundation.⁴ Teachers learn to build trusting relationships with families and to give them the information they need to monitor and support their children's learning at home through two strategies: Parent-Teacher Home Visits and Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.
- For teachers not already engaged with the Flamboyant model, DC Public Schools has started to offer the **Family Engagement Collaborative**, a year-long professional learning community. This year, 52 participating teachers met regularly to study high-quality parent engagement strategies and conduct home visits with families.
- The District should continue to **evaluate this work, share best practices** with policymakers to inform future funding decisions, and **help**

¹ Eric Dearing, Holly Kreider, Sandra Simpkins, and Heather Weiss, "Family Involvement in School and Low-Income Children's Literacy Performance," Harvard Family Research Project, January 2007. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/family-involvement-in-school-and-low-income-children-s-literacy-performance>.

² Gary W. Evans, "The Environment of Childhood Poverty," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 59, No. 2, February/March 2004, pp. 77-92.

³ Child Trends, "Parent Involvement in Schools: Indicators on Children and Youth," September 2013. <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-involvement-in-schools>.

⁴ For more information, see: http://flamboyantfoundation.org/resources_and_publications/family-engagement-matter/.

more high-poverty schools become ready to participate in effective parent engagement models.

information they need to monitor and support their children's learning at home. Two important strategies used by FEP schools are as follows:

Research on Parent Engagement.

Students do better in school when their families are engaged, including improved literacy and math skills in the early elementary school years.^{5,6} Family engagement also can lead to reduced truancy. Robust family engagement interventions also are associated with improved socio-emotional skills and reductions in behavioral problems.

WHAT DOES QUALITY PARENT ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Many DC schools have parent-teacher associations or offer school handbooks to parents, but it is difficult to properly gauge whether or not parents feel truly informed and are more likely to actively participate in their child's schooling after attending a "back-to-school" event. High-quality parent engagement strategies go beyond these activities to establish a partnership between families and schools that can ultimately impact student outcomes.

Effective parent engagement strategies involve ongoing communication with parents about what their children are working on during the school day, along with guided activities to be done at home with their child.⁷

One Promising Strategy in DC Schools - Family Engagement Partnership.

Several DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools are engaged in a Family Engagement Partnership (FEP) with the private Flamboyant Foundation. The FEP model supports and builds the capacity of teachers and school leaders to engage families as partners in their children's education. Teachers learn to build trusting relationships with families and to give them the

Parent-Teacher Home Visits: Following the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project model, teachers are trained on how to build positive relationships by visiting families in their homes. During home visits, teachers learn about parents' hopes and dreams for their child, about children's interests, and about parents' and children's past experiences in school. The goal of the visits is two-fold: 1) to build trust so that the parent and teacher can effectively work as partners throughout the year to help the child and 2) to help the

teacher tap the parent's expertise, so that they can be the best possible teacher for the child. The visits are conducted by staff in pairs, consisting of at least one teacher and one person who has or will have some relationship with the child at school. They are scheduled in advance, are voluntary for teachers and parents, and happen over the summer or at the beginning of school year. In the 2013-2014 school year, over 3,300 DCPS families in FEP schools received a home visit from their child's teacher.

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT): These teams hold APTT meetings where they give all parents in a class concrete information on academic skills their children need to know to

⁵ MDRC, "The Impact of Family Involvement on the Education of Children ages 3 to 8," October 2013. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/The_Impact_of_Family_Involvement_FR.pdf.

⁶ Flamboyant Foundation, "Research on Why Family Engagement Matters." <http://flamboyantfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Outcomes-research-11-12-10.pdf>.

⁷ Sam Redding, Marilyn Murphy, & Pamela Sheley, Editors, "Handbook on Family and Community Engagement," 2011. <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/grants/pdf/facehandbook.pdf>.

complete the grade, and share data about each student's progress on these skills. They model specific learning activities, provide materials for parents to do the activity at home with their child, and then help parents set a goal for each student's progress. For example, a first grade teacher can help parents understand that a student needs to recognize high frequency words to become a good reader. Parents can see how many high frequency words their student knows compared to others in the class and to the grade-level goal. Parents then learn a couple of games to teach high frequency words at home and set learning goals.

Some schools have replaced traditional school-based parent-teacher conferences with these classroom level Academic Parent-Teacher Team meetings plus one individual parent-teacher conference during the year. These individual conferences are also structured like the APTT meetings. Across participating DCPS and public charter schools, 3,222 parents attended an APTT conference in the 2013-2014 school year.

Next year, these programs will be in 21 DCPS schools and 9 public charter schools. A complete list of DC schools participating in the FEP for the 2014-2015 school year is below.

DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN FEP IN 2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR

- Bridges PCS
- Center City Capitol Hill
- Center City Shaw
- Center City Brightwood
- Center City Petworth*
- DC Bilingual PCS
- Excel Academy
- Mundo Verde PCS
- Stokes PCS

*New partner for SY14-15.

Source: Flamboyant Foundation.

DCPS SCHOOLS IN FEP IN 2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR

- Bancroft Elementary School
- Beers Elementary School
- Burrville Elementary School*
- Columbia Heights Education Campus
- C.W. Harris Elementary School
- Garrison Elementary School
- Hearst Elementary School
- Jefferson Academy Middle School
- J.O. Wilson Elementary School*
- Kelly Miller Middle School
- Ketcham Elementary School*
- Kimball Elementary School*
- Langley Elementary School*
- Maury Elementary School*
- Powell Elementary School
- Seaton Elementary School
- Stanton Elementary School
- Thomas Elementary School
- Truesdell Education Campus
- Tubman Elementary School
- Wheatley Education Campus

*New partner for SY14-15.

Source: DCPS [website](#).

Schools must demonstrate an interest and commitment among the principal and teachers to parent-teacher teams and home visiting to be selected by Flamboyant to participate in the FEP. This selection process is viewed as a critical element in the success of the FEP model, which emphasizes training and support for DC educators, including 20 hours of teacher professional development. Teachers are compensated for the additional work they take on outside of their school contract hours to conduct home visits.

The program is presently funded by Flamboyant with private resources. The FEP model costs an estimated \$58,000 per school in the first year, or \$178 per student on average. This cost includes stipends for teachers to work extra non-contract hours, staff who train and coach principals and

teachers, funds for child care, interpretation, snacks, and materials. Costs decline in subsequent years as schools build the capacity to lead the work on their own. Flamboyant Foundation and its funding partners support most of the costs while schools use other resources, including Title I dollars to contribute between 5 percent and 20 percent of the total.

So far, nearly 4,800 DC children in both DCPS and public charter schools have received home visits and the following results were reported in Flamboyant Foundation's interim data evaluation in 2013-14:

- 369 teachers from 15 DCPS schools conducted at least one home visit.
- 176 classrooms in 15 DCPS schools are participating in Academic Parent-Teacher Team meetings.
- 3,304 DCPS families have received a home visit from their child's teacher.
- Average parent attendance at DCPS Academic Parent-Teacher Team meetings is 63 percent, with a range from 53 percent to 89 percent in each participating DCPS school.
- Parent feedback from Academic Parent-Teacher Team exit slips has been overwhelmingly positive, with comments such as:
 - *I felt good to be a part of my child's learning.*
 - *I am able to know where my child is.*
 - *It gave me a chance to see what I can do to help my child do better.*
- In 2011-2012, average daily attendance increased at all DCPS partner schools compared to the previous year.
- In 2011-2012, short-term suspensions in the first 25 weeks of school decreased in three out of four DCPS partner schools compared to the previous year.

The FEP has seen positive early outcomes, and DCPS will continue to evaluate the work through a new five-year randomized control trial of the program to be conducted by Mathematica Policy Research.

DC Public School Efforts to Expand Home Visiting to More Schools.

This year, the DCPS Office of Family Engagement launched the Family Engagement Collaborative (FEC), a year-long professional learning community for any DCPS teacher not already in a Flamboyant Family Engagement Partnership school. Teachers apply in pairs and are admitted to FEC on a rolling basis; there is no cap on the number of teachers that can participate across the city. The FEC focuses on providing teachers with the strong family engagement skills they need for their classrooms. Participating teachers meet regularly during the school year to study high-quality parent engagement strategies and discuss their experiences in a peer learning environment. At the same time, the teachers conduct a number of home visits with families. In the 2013-2014 school year, 52 teachers from 28 schools participated in the FEC and completed over 520 family home visits to date. DCPS plans to expand the FEC each year, with the goal of adding 60 or more new participants next year.

Looking Forward: Steps to Promote Parent Engagement Strategies in All DC Schools. Parent engagement strategies are considered most effective when interventions are

well targeted and maintained over time.⁸ Studies also show that regardless of education level or socioeconomic class, parents of all backgrounds become more engaged in their child's learning and see positive educational outcomes when they receive guidance on learning activities to use at home.

Robust parent engagement services require adequate staff capacity and leadership to make it a success. DCFPI recommends that the District take steps to expand parent engagement efforts in a variety of ways.

- The District should continue to evaluate the outcomes of the Flamboyant Family Engagement Partnership model. If successful, the model should be expanded to all DCPS schools and public charter schools that have the interest and capacity, including using public funds if needed to supplement the private foundation funds.
- DCPS should expand its Family Engagement Collaborative to train more teachers in schools that do not adopt the full Flamboyant model. The District should work to spread these best practices to as many schools as possible, starting with high-poverty schools.
- DCPS, the Public Charter School Board, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education should work to communicate the importance of intensive parent engagement techniques and their potential impact on student outcomes with school leaders, so that more schools will be willing to cultivate these partnerships.

Quality parent engagement strategies should be a key component of improving academic outcomes across the District. The early results of these programs show promise, and we look forward to seeing more families benefit from these types of non-instructional services in the future.

⁸ Sam Redding, Marilyn Murphy, & Pamela Sheley, Editors, "Handbook on Family and Community Engagement," 2011. <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/grants/pdf/facehandbook.pdf>.