

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

SECTION: 900 COMMUNITY

TITLE: District-wide Parent and Family  
Engagement Policy

ADOPTED: August 24, 2011

REVISED: December 15, 2016

## 918. DISTRICT-WIDE PARENT & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

### **Purpose**

The School District of Philadelphia (the District) recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by parents, families, schools, and the community during the entire period the child is enrolled in school. Creating positive, home, school, and community partnerships is essential to carrying out the shared responsibility necessary to improve schools and reinforce the importance of academic achievement.

The Parent and Family Engagement Policy is being adopted in order to:

1. Support and secure strong effective partnerships among parents, families, schools and the community that serves to improve academic quality and student performance;
2. Provide the coordination, technical assistance and other support necessary to assist schools in planning and implementing effective family engagement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance; and
3. Comply with Title I, Part A requirements regarding the establishment of a parent and family engagement policy according to Section 1116 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

This policy shall serve as written documentation of the District's commitment to ensure parents and families are welcomed, engaged, and valued as stakeholders in the education of their children.

### **Definitions**

District– refers to the School District of Philadelphia.

Caregiver– these terms are used interchangeably and shall include parent, family, a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare, or a legally appointed Education Decision Maker).

Parent and Family Engagement- shall mean the participation of parents and families in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—

- a) *that caregivers play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;*
- b) *that caregivers are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;*
- c) *that caregivers are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and*
- d) *the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1116 of the ESSA.*

Title I- Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. This grant is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.

## Guidelines

### **PART I. GENERAL EXPECTATIONS**

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA is committed to fostering and promoting family engagement, and strives to maximize engagement by implementing programs, activities and procedures that emphasize effective family-school-community partnership and shared responsibility for high academic achievement and student success. To accomplish this goal, these initiatives will be planned and implemented by:

- Fostering a welcoming and responsive environment for all families regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic status, political beliefs, or any other protected affiliations;
- Promoting family and community engagement participation in school district, learning network and school level decisions;
- Increasing access to information to assist caregivers in navigating the school district so their children can obtain the resources required to help them achieve their maximum academic potential;
- Responding to caregiver concerns and/or complaints to ensure children's educational needs are met;
- Providing caregivers opportunities to acquire necessary information, knowledge, and skills to build capacity for leadership and advocacy to support their children's education at home and at school;

- Ensuring accountability of staff at all levels throughout the District in working with caregivers as partners; and
- Setting high expectations for excellent customer (caregiver/family) service.

District-wide programs and initiatives include:

- Offering multiple entry points that caregivers and community can use to access information and get support in resolving their concerns through:
  - The School District Call Center 215-400-4000, which provides front-end information about District services, initiatives and programs, facilitates links between customers and appropriate District offices and works directly with schools and learning networks to address parental questions and concerns through one-on-one case management support;
  - Parent and Family Resource Center which offers caregivers in person support in resolving concerns and exploring ways to better support their child's education, helps caregivers navigate the School District of Philadelphia, offers information about District's policies, procedures, programs and services, shares information about community based programs and resources and hosts a variety of caregiver workshops and events; and
  - Family and Community Engagement Coordinators and Family Engagement Liaisons, whose many functions include assisting schools in expanding family engagement opportunities and building stronger school-family partnerships, supporting caregivers in resolving their concerns through one-on-one case management support, acting as a liaison between central office/school staff and families, collecting and disseminating information about services and resources, organizing and facilitating caregiver workshops and information fairs, helping schools form a School Advisory Council, and providing other services and resources to meet the diverse needs of all families.
- Improving Access to Information
  - Making information about District programs, services, processes and procedures available on the School District of Philadelphia website [www.philasd.org](http://www.philasd.org);
  - Using Facebook and Twitter and working with traditional media partners to share information with families and community;
  - Implementing AskPhilaSD (<http://ask.philasd.org>) – a web-based knowledge management system which leverages technology to offer instant answers to most frequently asked questions; Launching Parent and Family Portal which offers caregivers a new way to stay abreast of everything happening at the District and their child's school through a web based account which allows them to update their contact information as it changes, select the means of communication that work best for them

(texting, phone calls or e-mails), sign up for specific types of updates they are interested in, as well as get online access to their child's attendance and grades.

- Securing Input and Feedback
  - Provide updates on the latest happenings in the School District by inviting all stakeholder groups, including caregivers, students, staff and community members, to participate in the Superintendent's Listening Tours, meetings with Assistant Superintendents, and other school-based meetings to receive input, get new ideas and solicit feedback to inform District policies and priorities.
  - Strengthening family and community involvement in school-based decision making through the District-wide implementation of the School Advisory Councils (SAC) – an advisory body that ensures school-wide representation when discussing matters that affect the whole school. Bringing together peer-elected representatives from all stakeholder groups: caregivers (who have a majority voice on the SAC), school leadership and staff, community partners and students (in high schools). SACs provide a platform for discussion and collaboration to ensure success of all students.
  - To provide more opportunities for caregivers to participate in dialogue to inform and influence policy and decision-making related to district-wide issues, the District will initiate activities to establish a District-wide Family Advisory Council.
  - Working closely with interested caregivers and community stakeholders to raise awareness about the importance of their involvement at the school and district level and encourage them to invest in building relationships with teachers, principals and school-based staff, attend Back to School Nights and parent-teacher conferences, stay in constant communication with the schools, visit their child's classroom, come to school meetings and events, volunteer, join parent groups and assume leadership roles.
- Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Families—ensuring that multilingual families have access to information, support and family involvement opportunities through the:
  - School District Translation and Interpretation Center, which provides an array of services and tools to facilitate communication with multilingual families, including access to telephonic interpretation service in over 170 different languages and dialects, translation of district-wide and school-specific documents, maintaining an online database of translated documents and managing web pages for caregivers and community in eight most used District languages (Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, French, Khmer, Russian, and Albanian).
  - Multilingual Family Support Services, which helps multilingual families establish ongoing communication with the school and access District information and resources in their native language through the services of Bilingual Counseling Assistants,

provides access to live interpretation at meetings, conferences, district and school-wide events, builds partnerships with immigrant and refugee serving organizations and supports families through workshops and trainings for immigrant and refugee families called Welcome Wagons. Welcome wagons are delivered in the community at the times convenient for the caregivers and in their native language. They address a variety of topics of importance to immigrant community, including literacy, college application process and financial aid resources, employment safety, access to health benefits, asthma management, HIV prevention, transition to life in the United States, acculturation and parent/child conflicts, child rearing practices and discipline, recognizing and seeking treatment for depression, recognizing domestic violence, and child abuse prevention.

- Improving Customer Service
  - Through a partnership between the Office of Technology Services and the Office of Family and Community Engagement, the District will improve the call ticketing system and publicize and further develop [ask.philasd.org](http://ask.philasd.org), the one-stop-shop for District information, to better respond to caregivers and stakeholders.
  - Actively solicit and respond to feedback on the effectiveness of our schools and our key departments through surveys, focus groups, and town halls. The District will utilize and seek to increase participation in the Office of Research and Evaluation's annual student survey and parent and guardian survey; support the operations division's surveys and focus groups; invite students, caregivers, and community stakeholders to participate in focus groups to solicit ideas for improving the educational experiences of students; expand best practices for incorporating student voice; and schedule town hall meetings in all of the District's learning networks.
  - The School District will provide customer service training to administrators, teachers, secretaries, central office staff, and support staff designed to improve interactions between families and schools.
  - Implement a customer service approach that moves toward family-friendly schools and offices that focuses on the following principles when engaging with families:
    - Recognize. Accept caregivers as partners in children's care and education.
    - Respect. Value caregivers as people and actively listen to what they say.
    - Respond. Act promptly and sincerely to answer their questions and resolve problems.
    - Research. Study child and family issues in the community and support professional development.
    - Resolve. Work together with caregivers to resolve any concerns and problems.

- Re-establish trust. If trust falters, communicate often, keep promises, and demonstrate integrity.

## **PART II. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA agrees to implement the following statutory requirements:

- The School District will put into operation programs, activities, and procedures for the engagement of caregivers in all of its schools, consistent with section 1116 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title I, Part A programs. Those programs, activities and procedures will be planned and operated with meaningful consultation with caregivers of participating children.
- Consistent with section 1116, the School District will work with its schools to ensure that the required school-level family engagement policies meet the requirements of section 1116(b) of the ESSA, and each include, as a component, a school-parent compact consistent with section 1116(d) of the ESSA.
- In carrying out the Title I, Part A parent and family engagement requirements, to the extent practicable, the School District and its schools will provide full opportunities for the participation of caregivers with limited English proficiency, caregivers with disabilities, and caregivers of migratory children, including providing information and school reports required under section 1111 of the ESSA in an understandable and uniform format and, including alternative formats upon request, and, to the extent practicable, in a language caregivers understand.
- The School District will involve the caregivers of children served in Title I, Part A schools in decisions about how the 1 percent of Title I, Part A funds reserved for parent and family engagement is spent, and will ensure that not less than 95 percent of the one percent reserved goes directly to the schools for caregiver-related activities as agreed upon between the parents and the school administration with approval of the School Advisory Council (SAC) or similar organized parent/family groups and the school administration.
- The School District will ensure that all District schools host at least one parent meeting a year to involve all interested caregivers in the discussion of eligible family engagement programs and activities should be implemented at the school with the use of Title I funds set aside for family engagement, and reach an agreement with the caregivers on the expenditures and further collaboration in the implementation of these programs and activities.
- The School District will communicate to the schools that failure to comply with the requirements outlined in this section and in the rest of this policy may jeopardize their Title I funding.

- The School District central office will host a series of caregiver meetings prior to the start of the annual District-wide budget process to solicit input on the allocation of federal dollars as contained in the District's Consolidated Federal Application with the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

**PART III. DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE DISTRICT WILL IMPLEMENT REQUIRED DISTRICT-WIDE PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY COMPONENTS**

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will take the following actions to involve caregivers in the joint development of its district-wide parent and family engagement plan under section 1112 of the ESSA:

- Annually, the District will conduct an evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the district-wide parent and family engagement policy, activities and programs.
- In the spring, caregivers and community stakeholders are invited to participate in multiple focus groups to provide valuable feedback regarding the district-wide parent and family engagement policy. Caregivers are notified of the focus groups in multiple ways, email, flyers, robo calls, social media, and website announcements posted on the District's website. During the focus groups, participants hear the latest updates and provide input on the new/revised policy. Additions/deletions/revisions are discussed and agreed upon during the meetings. Formatting and revisions are made after the meeting and then sent back to participants for comment. Families and community stakeholders unable to attend the focus groups in person have an opportunity to participate via online format, allowing them time to review the document and submit input and feedback electronically.
- Caregivers will be welcomed to submit feedback at any time throughout the year via the District's website or by submitting comments to their child's school. All feedback and input received will be used in consideration when updating the proceeding year's policy.
- Once the district-wide parent and family engagement policy is finalized, the final document will be placed on the District's website, hard copies will be available at Annual Title I meetings held at each school, and will also be distributed and sent home with all students.
- The School District will send a directive (signed by the Superintendent) to Assistant Superintendents and Principals regarding the distribution of the District's policy to caregivers and staff.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will take the following actions to involve caregivers in the process of school review and improvement under section 1114 of the ESSA:

- All District schools shall have an active and engaged School Advisory Council (SAC) composed of majority family members, the school principal, teachers or other school based staff, students and community members, which champions the work for improved student achievement, effective teaching in the classroom, caregiver and community engagement in the educational process, and facilitates communication and support.
- Appropriate District representatives will be available to work collaboratively with caregiver leaders and the Office of Family and Community Engagement staff to provide District, learning network, and school level trainings on various aspects of Title I, including understanding school data, comprehensive school plans and budgeting process.
- Schools will develop means to obtain caregiver input and signatures of non-school district personnel on the Comprehensive Plan, Title I budget and School Improvement Plan (SIP).
- Provide adequate advance notice to caregivers of meetings and cancellation of meetings through newsletters, robo calls, bulletin boards, organized parent/family groups and notices sent home.
- Professional development will be provided to School Advisory Councils (school-based staff, students, families and community partners) or other organized parent/family groups to help understand the roles and responsibilities of all parties in this process.
- The District's Translation and Interpretation Center and Multilingual Family Support will provide caregivers with limited English proficiency with full access to translation and interpretation services.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will provide the following necessary coordination, technical assistance, and other support to assist Title I, Part A schools in planning and implementing effective family engagement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance:

- In collaboration with parent and family groups, provide workshops to schools on family engagement.
- Provide professional development facilitated by caregivers for new and existing principals and other administrators on how to involve and engage caregivers effectively.
- Train new and existing staff with family engagement job duties (e.g., School Advisory Councils, Family Engagement Liaisons, Community Relations Liaisons, School Improvement Support Liaisons, and Bilingual Counseling Assistants) to assist school sites in implementing family engagement best practices and programs.
- The Title I Office and the Office of Family and Community Engagement will provide workshops and technical assistance to schools and parent and community organizations.

- Provide trainings for caregivers to include, but not be limited to, reading, math, sciences, PSSA and Keystone testing preparation.
- Provide workshops to caregivers on school safety, cultural diversity, conflict resolution, how to engage in schools, improve family involvement, and other topics, as requested.
- Train caregivers to serve as liaisons to principals and SACs on District and Network level initiatives.
- In compliance with the District's Action Plan 3.0, encourage caregiver access to teachers and principals.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will coordinate and integrate family engagement strategies in Title I, Part A with family engagement strategies under the following other programs: Head Start, Bright Futures, and Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT), by:

- Holding quarterly meetings between Pre-K and ELECT program staff responsible for family engagement and the Office of Family and Community Engagement. Minutes from these meetings will be available upon request.
- Inviting caregivers of Pre-K students and teen parent students to participate in District meetings, events, and activities.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will conduct an annual District-wide Parent/Guardian survey to collect data on school level and District-wide family engagement outcomes, and will reach out to caregivers to get their input and feedback during the survey design and review process.

Survey results will be used to identify barriers to greater participation by caregivers in family engagement activities (with particular attention to caregivers who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background). The School District will use the findings of the evaluation to design strategies for more effective family engagement, and to revise, if necessary (and with the involvement of caregivers) its family engagement policies.

The primary goal of the Parent and Family Engagement Policy is to increase family engagement within The School District of Philadelphia. Within this primary goal, three subgoals have been identified:

- a) inviting caregivers' input into District policies and procedures;
- b) making the schools and its educational and physical resources more accessible for caregivers and;
- c) providing opportunities for caregivers to gain as much information as possible about their children's academic achievement and how to access resources to support their children's education.

Depending upon available resources, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) or an external evaluator, functioning under the direction of ORE, will employ the following methods to evaluate the status of the goal and subgoal attainment: electronic and paper (including the District Wide Survey of administrators, teachers, caregivers, and students), caregiver focus groups, record analysis, as well as observation of meetings and training workshops.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA will implement the following activities to build the schools' and caregivers' capacity for strong family engagement in order to ensure effective involvement of caregivers and to support a partnership among the school involved, caregivers, and the community to improve student academic achievement:

- A. The School District, with the assistance of its administrative offices (Family and Community Engagement, Grant Compliance and Fiscal Services, Management and Budget, Specialized Instructional Services, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment), will undertake the following actions to provide assistance to caregivers of children served by the School District or school in understanding topics such as the following:
- the State's academic content standards;
  - the State's student academic achievement standards;
  - the State and local academic assessments including alternate assessments;
  - the requirements of Title I, Part A;
  - how to monitor their child's progress; and
  - how to work with educators.
- The Office of Grant Compliance and Fiscal Services will be available to collaborate with various offices and parent groups to provide presentations and workshops about Title I requirements and parents' right-to-know under the Every Student Succeeds Act.
  - Recommend that principals include caregivers during staff development days at school sites when appropriate.
  - Recommend that principals add a caregiver's component to staff development days at school sites.
  - Sponsor and encourage schools to support caregiver attendance at conferences and workshops such as the annual State Parent Advisory Council conference, Annual Family Involvement Conference (PA Coalition for Parent Involvement), and others.
    - Require caregivers who wish to attend conferences to verify that turnaround trainings are completed either at the school and/or District level. Verification will be: 1) sign-in sheet(s); 2) agenda; and 3) copies of documents distributed.

- Ensure that any caregiver who is selected to participate on a state or national level regularly attends the District's family engagement meetings and submits a report (verbal or written).
  - Provide information to caregivers in clear and simple language.
  - To the extent practicable, provide workshops in the native language to families whose first language is not English.
  - Disseminate to caregivers materials from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction and other offices that will be useful references at home, including, to the extent feasible, translations.
- B. The School District, with the assistance of its schools, will provide materials and training to help caregivers work with their children to improve their children's academic achievement, such as literacy and technology workshops, as appropriate, to foster family engagement by:
- Implementing caregiver workshops throughout the city to provide a range of educational offerings by School District personnel and other providers, including on how to support one's child in school and computer literacy.
  - Providing computer literacy training and other trainings for caregivers, including on how to use Parent and Family portal as a tool to monitor their children's achievement.
  - Supporting schools in planning and implementing school based activities such as family literacy and family math nights and other workshops to help caregivers understand how to support their child's academic achievement with the assistance of appropriate District offices.
  - Making available District personnel to do trainings and presentations for caregiver and community organizations.
  - Providing the above workshops at community locations besides schools, such as libraries, community organizations, and faith-based organizations, where families may feel more comfortable.
  - Providing the above workshops and materials, where appropriate, in languages other than English.
- C. The Office of Family and Community Engagement with the assistance of caregivers will be available to conduct professional development sessions at schools to educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff, in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with caregivers as equal partners, in the value and utility of contributions of caregivers, and in how to implement and coordinate programs and build ties between caregivers and schools, by:
- With the help of caregiver facilitators providing professional development opportunities for principals and other administrators on how to develop promising partnerships with caregivers.
  - Plan regular meetings between the Office of Family and Community Engagement SAC representatives or other caregivers to participate in a review

of the schools' Title I Parent and Family Engagement Policy and Parent-School Compact (as needed).

- D. The School District will, to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate family engagement programs and activities with Head Start, Bright Futures, ELECT and other programs, and conduct other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support caregivers in more fully participating in the education of their children by:
- Increasing collaboration between Pre-K and ELECT program staff responsible for family engagement and Office of Family and Community Engagement.
  - Recruiting caregivers of Pre-K students to participate in District-based meetings, events and activities.
- E. The School District will take the following actions to ensure that information related to the school and caregiver-programs, meetings, and other activities, is sent to the caregivers of participating children in an understandable and uniform format, including alternative formats upon request, and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the caregivers can understand:
- To the extent practicable, provide communications in clear and simple language.
  - Post caregiver communications on the District's website and Facebook page.
  - Ensure that the District's communications include a telephone number that caregivers can call for clarification.
  - Share important information with the School District of Philadelphia's Call Center and Main Information Center 215-400-4000, Family and Community Engagement Coordinators, Family Engagement Liaisons and Bilingual Counseling Assistants, so they can share information with families and provide clarifications of important District communications.
  - Host caregiver and community meetings and workshops to address the most important topics.
  - Ask community partners, including libraries, recreation centers, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations, to assist in disseminating information.
  - Provide language access services to families whose first language is other than English through on-site or telephonic interpretation services, as appropriate.

**PART IV. OTHER DISTRICT WIDE PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY COMPONENTS**

- Involving caregivers in the development of training for teachers, principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of that training;

- Paying reasonable and necessary expenses associated with family engagement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable caregivers to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions, as budgets allow;
- Training caregivers to enhance the involvement of other caregivers;
- Arranging school meetings at a variety of times, or conducting in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with caregivers who are unable to attend those conferences at school; in order to maximize family engagement and participation in their children's education;
- Researching, adopting and implementing model approaches to improving family engagement;
- Establishing a representative and inclusive district-wide parent advisory council to provide input on all matters related to family engagement in Title I, Part A programs;
- Developing appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses, including faith-based organizations, in family engagement activities; and
- Providing other reasonable support for family engagement activities under section 1116 as caregivers may request.

**PART V. ADOPTION**

This District-wide Parent and Family Engagement Policy has been developed jointly with, and agreed on with caregivers of children participating in Title I, Part A programs, as evidenced by agendas, sign-in sheets, and feedback provided online and during meetings.

This policy was adopted by THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA on November 17, 2016 and will be in effect until further revision. The School District will distribute information about this policy to all caregivers on or before November 30, 2016.

This policy supercedes Policy 918.1.

**Legal References:**

ESSA: 20 U.S.C. §§ 6316(b)(7), (8)  
C.F.R. 34 C.F.R. § 200.36  
State School Code: 24 P.S. § 1-101 *et seq.*, including 24 P.S. §§ 6-693, 6-696