



Comments from the National Black Child Development Institute to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED) for consideration in the development of the policy statement on family engagement.

Over our 45 year history, the National Black Child Development Institute has made family engagement a cornerstone of our efforts, and we are thrilled to see this Administration elevate its importance and convey its centrality to the healthy growth and development of our children.

We hope that the federal policy statement will put to rest any lingering questions about the effectiveness of family engagement as a high-impact strategy for improving schools and increasing achievement. Research unequivocally demonstrates that high-performing schools maintain strong communication with families, while low-performing schools are characterized by weak family engagement – which means that the preparation of teachers for family engagement becomes not only an issue of good practice, but also one of equity.¹

As we look to implement policies that make real the oft-quoted maxim that “parents are their children’s first and most important teachers,” we encourage you to operationalize a definition of family engagement as a “systemic and sustained commitment that occurs across time, spans many settings, and requires shared responsibility from all parties.”²

Within this frame, we encourage you to support families’ access to and ability to inform state, district and school budgets, so that they are able to see and compare how much is being allocated to family engagement – and what kind of strategies and activities are being funded. Transparency should be required, so that families are equipped with the information they need to advocate on behalf of their children and their community.

We also encourage you to explicitly support the provision of and funding for two-generation strategies such as home visiting and comprehensive wrap-around services and supports for families and children, which are designed to ensure children are safe, healthy, happy and learning beginning at birth. As a part of this, we recommend establishing an evaluation “pipeline” that supports innovation at the community level, and helps new programs to earn the right to become “evidence-based.”

Equally importantly, we encourage you to focus on engaging higher education systems that prepare our teachers and school leaders. The strength of the evidence on the positive impact of family engagement almost mandates that standards and curricula be revised to substantively inform building a knowledge base of theory and best-practices for our future educators specifically related to family engagement. Even further, because of the critical nature of relationships to this work, and given what we know about the demographics of our children and our workforce, ongoing professional development, including

¹ Caspe, Margaret et al. (2011). *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement*. Retrieved online from: https://www.pta.org/files/Issue_Brief-Teacher_Prep_v2.pdf

² Weiss Heather, et al. (2009). *The Federal Role in Out of School Learning: After-School, Summer Learning, and Family Involvement as Critical Learning Supports*. Harvard Family Research Project, commissioned by the Center on Education Policy.

coaching and mentoring opportunities that help teachers and school leaders effectively apply family engagement strategies across race, class and culture is paramount.

A parent once memorably said, “Educators need to know that for parents of Black boys, resisting the relentless rumors of inferiority about our children and about ourselves as parents is exhausting.”³ We have the responsibility to respond to this reality by transforming our approach, moving away from so-called “random acts of family engagement.”⁴ We must focus our efforts on ensuring that family engagement is defined by significant investment, meaningful relationships and an ongoing series of aligned and comprehensive supports that help families and children build on strengths and create a deep foundation of connection in the early years.

³ Ward, Janie Victoria. (2008). “Helping Parents Fight Stereotypes about Their Children.” Everyday Anti Racism: Getting Real About Race in School. Ed. Mica Pollack. New Press: New York. p. 315

⁴ Caspe, Margaret et al. (2011). *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement*. Retrieved online from: https://www.pta.org/files/Issue_Brief-Teacher_Prep_v2.pdf