Chapter 8: Family and Community Engagement

8.1 Family-School-Community Partnerships

Over fifty-five years of research indicate the importance of Families, Schools, and Communities Partnering (FSCP) for student learning. National data shows that students gain academically, as well as behaviorally, when families and school staff work together to support student success. Current and notable research findings include that:

- Parent-Community Ties is one of five "essential elements" of school improvement.
- Students have better attendance and higher reading comprehension scores when districts, schools, and public charter schools conduct home visits.
- School-initiated, specific family participation programs - such as shared reading, homework checking, and teamed two-way communication -are significantly and positively related to academic achievement for students at all levels.

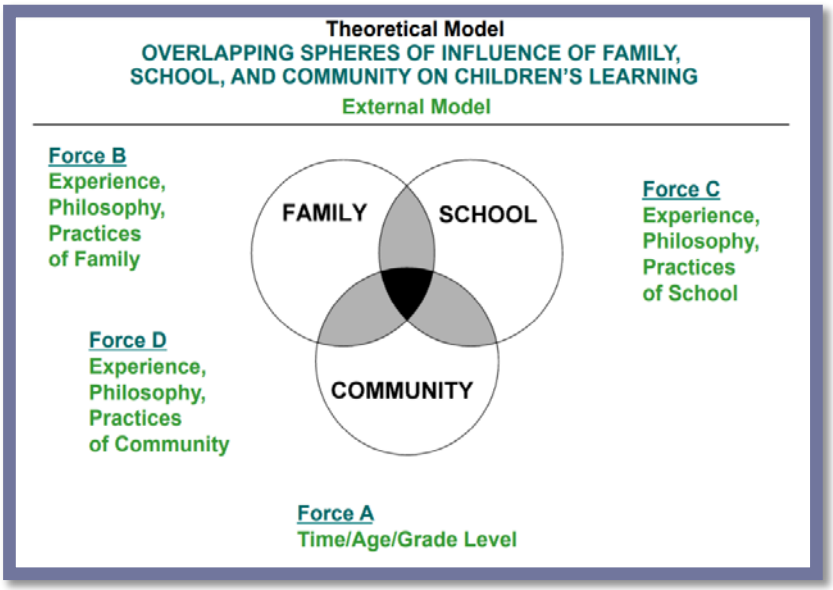
Initiated through HB08-1384, the Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado (TLCC) formerly known as TELL (Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning) Colorado, is a statewide, confidential survey intended to support district, and state improvement planning, as well as research and policy. Every year that teachers and administrators have completed the survey, participants indicate that one of the teaching conditions with the strongest connection to high student achievement and growth is *Community Support and Involvement*.

These data findings show that perhaps the greatest challenge surrounding FSCP is not *whether* they impact student achievement. Rather, the greater challenge is *what* is needed for high quality partnership structures and *how* to sustain and embed through structures in established organization. This chapter includes information about the components of a comprehensive partnership structure that can support student learning, as well as promising partnership practices for districts, schools, and public charter schools to reach out and involve *every* family to support *every* student.

Getting Started—A Research Base

Dr. Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher and advocate for family-school-community partnerships, developed the Overlapping Spheres of Influence as a theoretical model to better explain partnership structures in schools.

This model suggests that the experiences, philosophies, and practices of families, schools, and communities determine the extent to which the three groups collaborate to improve student outcomes.



As such, district, school, public charter school staff may choose to honestly and openly discuss the following four core beliefs to determine whether they are "ready for partnerships:"

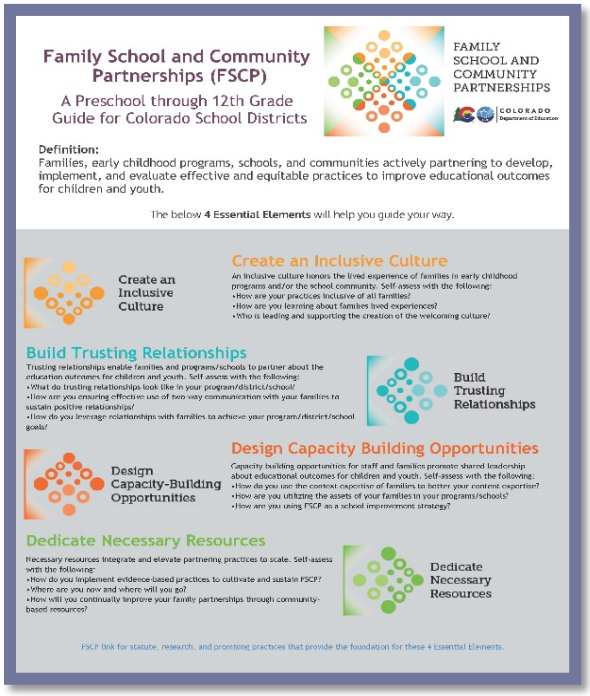
- All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning.
- Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
- The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

These four core beliefs allow staff, as well and families, to identify starting points for partnerships. For some districts, schools, and public charter schools, a starting point may be to gain principal buy-in. For others, a starting point may be to create a more welcoming climate of partnerships. Regardless of the identified starting points, FSCP structures are most effective when they are genuine, meaningful, and relevant for all stakeholders involved.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework

In 2014, U.S. Department of Education worked with researchers and practitioners to identify what is needed to move from "ineffective" to "effective" partnerships. Researchers at Harvard University recently updated the Dual Capacity-Building Framework to reflect the most current trends in FSCP. This framework outlines the opportunity conditions, as well as program and policy goals to help build the capacity of both school staff and families to have productive partnerships. A more detailed explanation of the framework and examples of how districts, schools, and public charter schools are putting it in practice can be found at Dual Capacity.

Colorado's P-12 Family-School-Community Partnership Framework


Family School and Community Partnerships (FSCP)
A Preschool through 12th Grade Guide for Colorado School Districts

FAMILY SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

COLORADO Department of Education

Definition:
Families, early childhood programs, schools, and communities actively partnering to develop, implement, and evaluate effective and equitable practices to improve educational outcomes for children and youth.

The below **4 Essential Elements** will help you guide your way.

Create an Inclusive Culture

Create an Inclusive Culture
An inclusive culture honors the lived experience of families in early childhood programs and/or the school community. Self-assess with the following:
•How are your practices inclusive of all families?
•How are you learning about families lived experiences?
•Who is leading and supporting the creation of the welcoming culture?

Build Trusting Relationships
Trusting relationships enable families and programs/schools to partner about the education outcomes for children and youth. Self-assess with the following:
•What do trusting relationships look like in your program/district/school?
•How are you ensuring effective use of two-way communication with your families to sustain positive relationships?
•How do you leverage relationships with families to achieve your program/district/school goals?

Build Trusting Relationships

Design Capacity-Building Opportunities

Design Capacity Building Opportunities
Capacity building opportunities for staff and families promote shared leadership about educational outcomes for children and youth. Self-assess with the following:
•How do you use the context expertise of families to better your content expertise?
•How are you utilizing the assets of your families in your programs/schools?
•How are you using FSCP as a school improvement strategy?

Dedicate Necessary Resources
Necessary resources integrate and elevate partnering practices to scale. Self-assess with the following:
•How do you implement evidence-based practices to cultivate and sustain FSCP?
•Where are you now and where will you go?
•How will you continually improve your family partnerships through community-based resources?

Dedicate Necessary Resources

FSCP link for statute, research, and promising practices that provide the foundation for these 4 Essential Elements.

In January 2020, after 18-months of gathering feedback from stakeholders across the state, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) published a new definition and framework for districts, schools, and public charter schools and early childhood programs. CDE defines FSCP as *families, early childhood programs, schools, and communities actively partnering to develop, implement, and evaluate effective and equitable practices to improve educational outcomes for children and youth.*

The accompanying Framework outlines four Essential Elements that systems and sites should have in place in order to implement, sustain, and cultivate equitable partnerships. The Essential Elements are:

1. Create an Inclusive Culture
2. Build Trusting Relationships
3. Design Capacity-Building Opportunities
4. Dedicate Necessary Resources

For more information and resources, view P-12 FSCP Framework

Components of a Comprehensive Partnership Structure

As more research and examples of promising practices emerge, districts, schools, and public charter schools are beginning to move away from "random acts of partnership" to instead have a comprehensive, sustainable partnership structure that aligns with school improvement goals and student outcomes. CDE recommends that districts, schools, and public charter schools implement the following four components of comprehensive FSCP, adapted from Dr. Joyce Epstein's research:

1. Framework of the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
2. Shared Leadership
3. Action Planning
4. Evaluation

Framework of the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

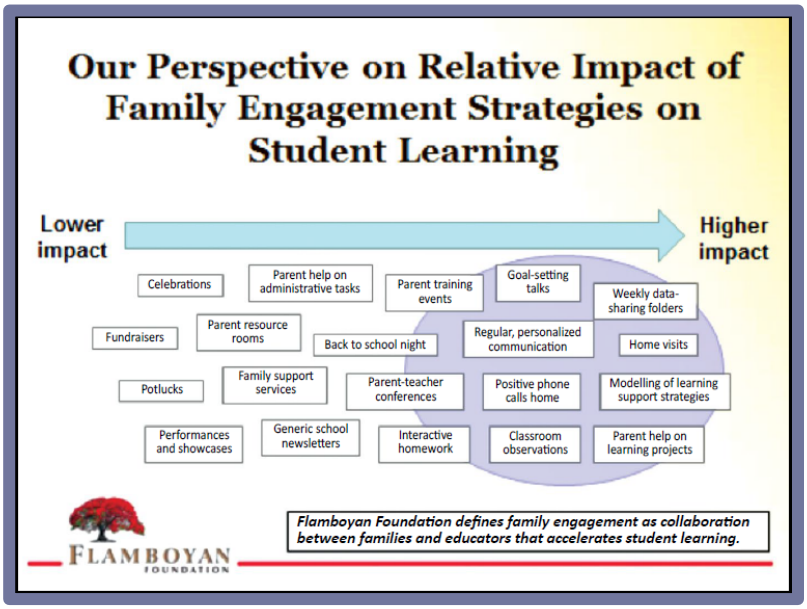
In 2009, state legislation mandated that Colorado align its FSCP work with the National Standards. These Standards help schools to organize FSCP outreach to partner with every family to support their children's learning both inside and outside of school. The National Standards are:

CDE has several resources available to guide and support districts, schools, and public charter schools in implementing and customizing the National Standards to best meet the needs of their local populations. The National Standards goals and indicators are outlined at National Standards.

There is also a Starting Points Inventory for district, school, and public charter school staff to complete, ideally with advice from families, to determine whether the site is emerging, progressing, or excelling in each of the National Standards.

Finally, CDE annually collects Promising Partnership Practices from districts, schools, and public charter schools across the state, aligned with the National Standards.

The Flamboyan Foundation, located in Washington, D.C. conducted a summary of current FSCP research to determine which partnership initiatives have the highest impact on student achievement. This graphic shows the summary of their findings. When viewing this graphic, it is important to note that while the initiatives on the right side have a higher, direct impact on student achievement, the lower impact strategies are still good things to do. Celebrations, potlucks, and fundraisers may not directly lead to better student grades and test scores. However, many of the lower impact strategies indirectly impact achievement by creating a welcoming climate of partnerships.



Shared Leadership

District, school, and public charter school staff, particularly principals, have many opportunities to share leadership with families, community members, classroom teachers, and support staff. These teams include the School Accountability Committee (SAC), PTAs or PTOs, culture clubs, etc. Effective FSCP teams include families that mirror "significantly represented populations of students" in the school. Teams are most likely to be sustainable when the leaders:

- Help members communicate with each other.
- Plan goal-oriented partnerships.
- Conduct useful meetings with a good agenda.
- Make decisions collegially and share leadership for planned activities.
- Continue to write and implement plans to improve partnerships.

Action Planning

Schools in Colorado write a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) to identify and prioritize major improvement strategies. Schools should reach out to families on the SAC and beyond to gather input on include FSCP initiatives in the plan. Additionally, districts, schools, and public charter schools identify as Priority Improvement or Turnaround must include on their UIP how they work with families to improve student outcomes. View a sample action plan template to help FSCP teams plan and evaluate their work.

Evaluating

Evaluating FSCP work is no easy task, many initiatives indirectly, rather than directly, impact achievement. FSCP teams should think through how to measure impact of both individual initiatives and the partnership structure as a whole. Counting heads in a room is only one, rather superficial, way to measure the success of a school's FSCP. Other methods of evaluation include:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Anecdotal observations

The Colorado Department of Education developed a survey for both school staff and families to complete in order to measure *outreach*. The survey is intended as a resource for districts, schools, and public charter schools to use to compare differences in staff and family perceptions of outreach, as well as where a school may prioritize its FSCP efforts. The Staff-Family-Community Partnership Survey and more research and evaluation resources are available on the CDE website here at FSCP Research and Evaluation

In addition to requirements to notify parents of placement decisions, Title III districts, schools, and public charter schools must implement effective outreach to parents of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. This outreach must inform parents how they can become involved in their children's education and be active participants in helping them learn English and achieve academically. Outreach shall include holding, and sending notices of opportunities for, regularly scheduled meetings with parents of Multilingual Learners (MLs) to formulate and respond to their recommendations.

8.2 Title I and Title III Requirements for Multilingual Learners

Notification and communication of placement in language program

- Information required to be provided to parents shall be in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parent can understand.
- Districts, schools, and public charter schools must notify parents no later than 30 days after the beginning of school.
- If a student enrolls after the first 30 days of school, parents must be notified within two weeks. Written notification **must** include the following information:
    - Reason for identification and need for the program
    - Level of English proficiency, and how it was determined, and academic achievement
    - Method of instruction in language program and how program will meet student's needs
    - Exit requirements and mainstreaming timeline
    - How program meets requirements of Individualized Education Program (IEP) (if applicable)
    - Information about parental rights and right to decline Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP)
    - Option to remove child from program at any time
    - Assistance to parents in choosing among various programs

Parent and Family Engagement

Districts, schools, and public charter schools must implement an effective means of outreach to parents of MLs to inform them how to:

- Become involved in the education of their children, and
- Actively participate in helping their children learn English, achieve at high academic levels, and meet the same challenging State academic and achievement standards all children are expected to meet.

8.3 A Parent's Right to Opt Out/Decline LIEP

When parents and families respond *No* to HLS questions and educators notice evidence of a primary or home language other than English, the student should be tested using WIDA Screener and Screener for Kindergarten. A parent may decline LIEPs but cannot decline the multilingual learner designation if the district has made that decision based on state guidelines. If a student is not identified as multilingual learner, they are not eligible for LIEPs.

Continue to monitor English Language Proficiency (ELP) and academic progress of students who opt out/decline LIEPs

Parents and families of identified multilingual learners have the right to opt out/decline LIEPs for their child with a full understanding of the ML child's rights, the range of instructional programs available to the child, and the benefits of such instruction. Districts, schools, and public charter schools must formally document all parent refusals but continue to provide student's access to grade level content and standards. A meaningful and equitable education may include, but is not limited to, further assessing the student's English Language Proficiency (ELP); notifying the student's parent about his or her child's lack of progress and encouraging him or her to opt the child into ML programs and instruction; and providing supports for the student's language acquisition, such as offering professional development in second language acquisition to the student's core curriculum teachers. Annual ELP assessments, ACCESS/Alternative ACCESS, must be administered to all identified Non-English Proficient (NEP) and Limited English Proficient (LEP), including those students whose family has declined LIEPs.

For more tools and resources, visit Serving ELs Who Opt Out of EL programs in the OELA Toolkit, Chapter 7

8.4 Putting it All Together

Family-school-community partnerships are an essential component of district, school, and public charter school improvement and, more important, student success. Moving from ineffective to effective partnerships is a team effort. As the old Chinese proverb states, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Change does not happen overnight, yet the impact of FSCP is strong indisputable when implemented intentionally. In sum, remember the following ingredients are helpful for school based FSCP:

- **Create an action team**. Similar to district, school, and public charter school leadership team or accountability committee, an action team assists in developing and implementing family and community partnerships. The action team may assess current practices, organize new options, implement activities, engage in a continuous improvement process, and maintain ongoing communication with the staff.
- **Establish firm foundations for actions.** Parent and family involvement practices should be based on widely accepted good practices or recommendations/requirements in Colorado State law and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- **Provide Professional Development (PD) for district, school, and public charter school staff**. Several regulations require PD for staff working with parents concerning communication with families, working effectively with families, planning and implementing a volunteer program, increasing family support for leaning, and strategies for increasing family involvement. In addition, the action team members may need training in the areas of collaborative teaming and decision-making.
- **Develop a framework that includes the six types of parent involvement and look for models that exemplify these types.** There should be activities that represent all types of parent involvement, in a comprehensive program of involvement inclusive of the six types rather than an isolated series of events and activities.
- **Examine current practices.** Conduct a needs assessment to determine where practices are strong, where improvement is needed, and where additional practices should be incorporated.
- **Develop a three-year action outline for partnership development.** This allows districts, schools, and public charter schools to focus on the big picture. Many activities may require multiple years for full actualization. The three-year outline has the benefit of indicating how all family and community connections are integrated into a coherent program.

- **Write a one-year plan.** Focus on the first year of work; delineate specific activities that will be started, improved, or maintained and indicate who is responsible, timelines, costs, and evaluation measures.
- **Obtain funds and other support.** Consider using federal, state or local funds support parent involvement activities, such as Title I, Title III, ELPA funding. In addition, consider the use of time as a resource for teams to meet and for teachers to communicate or conference with parents.
- **Enlist staff, parents, students, and communities to help program implementation.** Do not overburden existing personnel with the demands of parent involvement; one person cannot effectively mount a comprehensive program. Consider the untapped resources that may be available in the community or outside agencies.
- **Evaluate implementation and results.** Find appropriate ways to evaluate parent involvement effectiveness may be challenging, but it is necessary.
- **Conduct annual celebrations and report progress to participants.** Acknowledge the work of all of those involved in the parent involvement program. Year-end celebrations are helpful, but more frequent ones maintain enthusiasm and encourage people to continue the work. Regardless of their frequency, celebrations provide opportunities to communicate progress, solve problems and do additional planning.
- **Continue working toward comprehensive and positive partnerships.** Partnerships mature over time, so consider their development a process. Despite the proverbial challenges inherent in sustaining any relationship long term, the benefits are well worth it!

Additional References and Resources can be found at:

Title I Parent and Family Engagement Purpose and Policy

Title III Purpose and Program Requirements

Colorado Parent and Family Engagement

Factsheet for LEP Parents and Families

(See Appendix G)

Appendix G
Social and Academic Language

	SOCIAL LANGUANGE (SL)	ACADEMIC LANGUAGE (AL)	
		SCHOOL NAVIGATIONAL LANGUAGE (SNL)	CURRICULUM CONTENT LANGUAGE (CCL)
PURPOSE	To communicate with family, friends and others in everyday, social situations.	To communicate to teachers and peers in a broad school setting (incl. classroom management).	To communicate to teachers and peers about the content of instruction (incl. lesson materials, textbooks, test, etc.).
FORMALITY	Informal. Hallmarks: incomplete sentences, contractions, restricted vocabulary, contextualized language, restricted variety of genre (mainly narrative).	Informal and formal. Hall-marks: combination of contextualized and decontextualized language.	Formal. Hallmarks: precise use of language/terminology, complete and complex sentences, lexical diversity, decontextualized referents, variety of genres (narrative and expository).
CONTECT OF USE (SETTING)	Home. Peer group. Out-of-school activities.	School non-instructional time (homeroom, lunchroom, and playground). School instruction time (focused on classroom management; personal relationships).	School instructional time (focused on concept learning). Note: some out-of-school activities at home or with peers may focus on concept learning and thus may include hallmarks of CCL (incl. pre-school level).
EXAMPLES	I took it [= the trash] out before [= before dinner]; Where's the shop?	I need you all to be facing this way before we begin; Where is your 3rd period English class located?	First, the stamen forms at the center of the flower; Describe the traits of the main characters.
CONTECT OF ACQUISITION	Acquired without explicit instruction.	Largely acquired without explicit instruction, unless student is ML.	Acquired with and without explicit instruction. ML students especially, may need explicit instruction.
MODALITY	Predominantly oral language.	Predominantly oral language.	Both oral and written language.

	SOCIAL LANGUANGE (SL)	ACADEMIC LANGUAGE (AL)	
		SCHOOL NAVIGATIONAL LANGUAGE (SNL)	CURRICULUM CONTENT LANGUAGE (CCL)
TEACHER EXPECTATIONS	Students will come to school already proficient unless the student is ML.	Students will readily learn these language skills unless the student is an ML student.	All students will need to acquire linguistic and pragmatic skills for both general use (cutting across disciplines) and specialized within a discipline. Some teachers will hold students accountable for use of "precise" CCL, others and even the same teachers at other times will allow informal/ imprecise uses.
GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS	More sophisticated uses of language to solve disputes and participate as good citizens. For ML students ELP should be considered (e.g., new to the U.S. and at the beginning level will differ from a student who is younger but at a higher ELP).	More sophisticated uses of language. Teachers assume prior grades have prepared student to acquire the language (incl. reading and writing) necessary to take notes, read directions, etc. Redesignated ML students are expected to be able to cope with language demands of the classroom interaction.	More sophisticated uses of language. Higher grades rely on students having learned CCL of prior grades and rely on their reading ability to access and engage with the curriculum and on their writing ability to display or assess their learning. Redesignated ML students are expected to be able to cope with language demands of instruction.

Source: Academic English: Interactions Between Student and Language.
Alison L. Bailey (CRESST/UCLA)
Presented at the 2007 CREATE conference.
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