



**Parent  
Organization  
Network**  

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**Leading School Change**

# PON Professional Learning Network Report I:

Strengthening District Staff Capacity on  
Family and Community Engagement

February 2020



# Special Thanks and Acknowledgements

## **Participating School Districts**

Azusa Unified School District

Lynwood Unified School District

Pasadena Unified School District

Whittier City School District

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# PON's Vision & Mission

PON envisions a public school system transformed by highly engaged parents actively working with school officials to provide a high-quality educational experience tailored to students' needs and community priorities; where public schools value parents as equal partners and instrumental collaborators in making decisions that affect positive change in schools.

We foresee achieving our vision by strengthening the abilities of culturally underserved parents to be trainers and leaders, supporting their local initiatives and advocacy efforts, and connecting them to a broader network of committed individuals and organizations so together they can effect long-term systemic changes resulting in high quality education for all.

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## Executive Summary

Over the past 30 years, research has demonstrated a connection between family engagement and improved education outcomes in terms of student attendance, academics, social emotional skills, graduation rate, college and career readiness, teacher satisfaction and school improvement. As a result, legislators, school officials and education researchers have tried to describe parent engagement. Initially referred to more broadly as parent programs in schools, references then evolved to embrace parent involvement and family engagement. Today, “family-school partnerships” is a common phrase used to describe how we might most effectively include the critical parent voice in school operations. Moreover, current research frameworks identify root causes that prevent family-school partnerships and the necessary conditions that will help achieve this goal.

This report highlights the themes and trends that emerged from the participation by 11 participants (4 Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) Directors and 7 Family Engagement Specialists) from four school districts in the Parent Organization Network’s (PON) Professional Learning Network (PLN) over the course of two years. Overall, the participants completed 500 hours of collective professional development. During this time, the participants reported the following:

- Increasing their knowledge and use of family and community engagement research and frameworks, specifically the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships and the California Department of Education’s Family Engagement Toolkit;
- Building a network of support by developing or strengthening relations with colleagues within their district and other districts;
- Increasing their knowledge and use of continuous improvement science;
- Improving communication between LCAP Administrators and Family Engagement staff by strengthening relationships, and between their respective school districts and families through the LCAP Stakeholder Engagement process.
- Increasing the level of parent engagement as evidenced by an increased number on decision-making committees, attending family events, and participating in parent workshops or conferences, at both the site and district levels.

Although the four school districts had great plans and the disposition to apply the knowledge gained during the first PLN year, changes in district leadership including one superintendent, budget instability, and shifting local strategic priorities impacted family engagement plans in two school districts. These fluctuations prevented family engagement staff from fully implementing new practices or learning. Also, although FE Specialists, benefitted the most from the PON PLN, they do not have authority to change priorities and

allocate budget at the district or school site level. Thus, for system change to take root in family engagement, school districts would benefit greatly from leaders (including teachers) receiving formal family engagement training, assigning an administrator to oversee (student, family, community) engagement, and having economic stability to provide the resources needed to achieve continuous improvement.

The PLN participants, like the family engagement field, continue to sort through how to best measure family engagement and how to build staff capacity on family engagement when current systems and practices are focused on parent training. Although the new knowledge and practices are not yet reflected in LCAPs, we are optimistic that we will see these changes in the years to come as family engagement gains momentum at the state and national level, better tools are developed, and the training and systems continue to align with the research.

After years of working with parent leaders, and/or community groups from most of the participating districts, the opportunity to work with district leaders and practitioners has been invaluable. The time spent together has provided PON and me with great insight into the challenges and opportunities available for school improvement, and great respect for the practitioners that, like families, work hard daily to give children the best they have to offer.

I look forward to our continued partnership to remove barriers and to the collaboration to develop effective systemic practices for family engagement that support student success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Simeón". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'F'.

PON Project Director & PLN Facilitator



# Description of PLN

In 2017, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), a statewide agency created to “advise and assist” school districts and the California Department of Education “to deliver on California’s promise of a quality, equitable education for every student,” sponsored 57 two-year Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) to promote innovative thinking.

While each PLN determined the specific areas they wanted to learn about based on local needs, all 57 PLNs aimed to “build a culture of continuous improvement, overcoming systemic issues, and improving student outcomes” and using “the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and the CA School Dashboard as tools for improvement”. In addition, some of the PLNs were designed to increase capacity on a specific LCFF priority or student population.

## Purpose

The PLN’s purpose was to strengthen the capacity of district staff to develop the organizational and procedural conditions needed to establish systematic family engagement across all schools in a district. Initially, the PON PLN proposed a dual capacity-building model for staff and parent leaders. However, the concept was modified at the first PLN meeting after acknowledging challenges to integrate parents that included schedule, transportation, and the process to appoint or elect parent representatives. Prioritizing the need to first establishing trust among school staff participants, the group and facilitator agreed to dedicate the PLN space for staff peer-learning and identified two goals for the two-year experience:

1. To review research on family engagement and engage in a reflection and analysis process to determine each school district’s current state of family engagement.
2. To improve staff training and practice of family engagement in schools, using research-based practices and continuous improvement cycles.

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<sup>1</sup> CCEE website (2019). About CCEE. <https://www.ccee-ca.org/about-ccee.asp>

<sup>2</sup> CCEE website (2019). Professional Learning Networks. <https://www.ccee-ca.org/professional-learning-networks.asp>

## Process

Four school districts participated in the PLN: Azusa Unified School District, Lynwood Unified School District, Pasadena Unified School District, and Whittier City School District. Prior to this effort, PON had supported parents and community leaders in Lynwood, Pasadena, and Whittier so they could participate in their respective school district's LCAP community engagement process.

The PLN was composed of LCAP Administrators and Family Engagement Specialists who are responsible for implementing family engagement services and activities to support parent or community liaisons at the school site level. The PLN members met in-person 11 times per year, mostly on a monthly basis, for two years. The PLN members also participated in a second meeting or activity per month to support their learning and skill building; these varied from additional in-person meetings, virtual meetings, webinars, conferences, and sites visits.

## Evaluation & Methodology

M&I Educational Consulting Network hired by PON documented the PLN's learning, progress, and impact through observations, surveys and interviews for 2017/18 and 2018/19. Overall nine participants from four participating school districts completed the surveys. Survey responses were submitted anonymously via digital survey; however, respondents did specify their area of specialization as either Family Engagement Specialist (n=5) or LCAP Administrator (n=4).

Seven Family Engagement (FE) Specialists participated in four interviews; three interviews included two FE Specialists per interview, and one interview included one FE Specialist. The interviews focused on garnering participants' perceptions on the use of the frameworks, tools, and strategies explored in the PLN in their family engagement work, and to assess the impact of these on improving school and/or district family engagement efforts. LCAP Administrators were unavailable to participate in interviews because these were conducted during the school districts' planning and budgeting season. Consequently, this report documents the progress and impact on FE Specialists more substantively than with the LCAP Administrators.





# Family and Community Engagement Timeline and Context in California

# Key Family Engagement Research, Policy, and Administrative Guidance

PLN participants identified reviewing family engagement research as the priority for their time in the PLN. Therefore the group reviewed several of the frameworks and laws in the timeline below, and then as the PLN began, focused on implementing “The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships” and the California Department of Education’s (CDE) Family Engagement Toolkit released in the summer of 2017. According to the CDE, the Family Engagement Toolkit aims to:

- Address the importance of integrating family engagement with each district’s learning goals;
- Include an explicit commitment to equity in every phase of family engagement
- Use the dual capacity-building framework in planning and implementing of family engagement; and
- Focus on the role of the district and the district coordinator in leading a process of continuous improvement at schools across the district.

Also, it is important to highlight that there were changes to state family engagement policies and administrative guidance during the time that PLN meetings took place (2017 – 2019). These changes increased the relevance and immediacy of the PLN discussions and allowed the members to influence initiatives the state was considering to increase parent engagement.

## Family and Community Engagement Timeline

Over the past 30 years, research has demonstrated a connection between family engagement and improved education outcomes in terms of student attendance, academics, social emotional skills, graduation rate, college and career readiness, teacher satisfaction and school improvement. Consequently, legislators, school officials and education researchers have tried to describe parent engagement. Initially referred to more broadly as parent programs in schools, references then evolved to embrace parent involvement and family engagement. Today, “family-school partnerships” is a common phrase used to describe how we might most effectively include the critical parent voice in school operations. Moreover, current research frameworks identify root causes that prevent family-school partnerships and the necessary conditions that will help achieve it.

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<sup>3</sup> California Department of Education (2017). Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement through an Equity Lens. Pages 3-4.

Since the 2000s, California has added a distinctive perspective to this dialogue, building upon the research and legal foundation that was laid since the 1990s. In many cases, state legislators have expanded laws further to better meet the needs of its diverse student population. Further, the California State Board of Education has implemented policies in support of family engagement, such as the English Learner Roadmap approved in 2017 (the first principle outlines the need for educators to value and build strong family, community and school partnerships) and the revised self-reflection tool for family engagement approved in 2019.

The following timeline highlights key research and legislative decisions shifting the work and illustrates where California is in the family and community engagement movement.

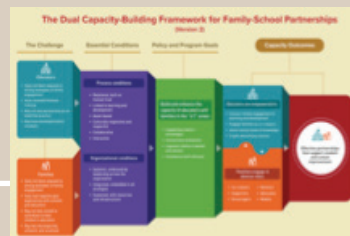
## Key Family and Community Engagement Research and Legislative Decisions



2020

**Focus on Family Engagement Pre-Service Requirements for Teachers and Administrators**

- The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) launches a family engagement consortium on pre-service educator preparation. The consortium will create a pre-service framework to inform policy and practice. California, represented by San Diego State University and PON, is selected to participate along with five other states. For more information visit: <https://nafsce.org/page/preserviceconsortium>
- PON and Public Advocates release a report on teacher and administrator credentialing requirements in California. For more information, visit our website: [www.parentnetwork-la.org](http://www.parentnetwork-la.org)



2019

**Relationship Building and Cultural Competence are Prioritized in the Framework's 2nd Version**

The new version of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships is unveiled along with a website with resources to support implementation. This version continues to affirm the need for dual capacity-building for school staff and parents and prioritizes relationship building and cultural competence as pre-requisites for the framework to work. For more information visit: <https://www.dualcapacity.org/>

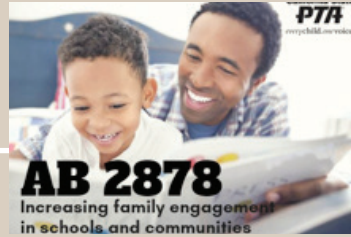




**2019**

**State Tool Assesses Dual Capacity-Building for Staff and Parents on Relationship Building, Partnerships, & When Seeking Input**

The self-reflection tool developed by the California Department of Education Ad Hoc Family Engagement Workgroup is presented to and approved by the State Board of Education in March 2019. By November 2019, all school districts are using the new tool to assess family engagement. To see the tool, visit: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/priority3tool.pdf>



**2018**

**CA Law Expands Family Engagement Description & Highlights Evidence-Based Practices**

AB 2878 –A bill sponsored by California State PTA expands the description of LCFF: Priority 3 (parent involvement) to family engagement. It adds research-based family engagement guidance to provide schools, districts, and parents access to best practices for family engagement. To learn more, click here: [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB2878](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2878)



**2013**

**Law Changes School Funding, Prioritizes Parent Involvement, and Requires Stakeholder Engagement**

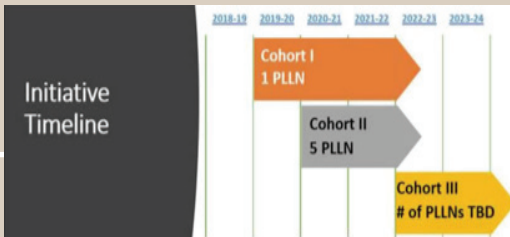
Governor Brown signs the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) into law, changing the way education is funded by providing additional funds based on the enrollment of low-income students, English learners and foster youth learners and prioritizing all high needs students. It also identifies parent involvement as one of eight LCFF priorities and requires stakeholder engagement in districts' planning and overall budgeting process. To learn more, visit: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp>



**2014**

**CDE Develops an Administrator-Friendly Framework to Assess Implementation and Progress on Family Engagement**

The California Department of Education's Family Engagement Framework compiles family engagement research-based practices and state and federal legal requirements. This framework addresses five domains: capacity building, leadership, resources, progress monitoring, and equity. To learn more visit: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/famengageframeenglish.pdf>



## 2018

### California Approves Funding for the Community Engagement Initiative

AB 2878 – A bill sponsored by California State PTA expands the description of LCFF: Priority 3 (parent involvement) to family engagement. It adds research-based family engagement guidance to provide schools, districts, and parents access to best practices for family engagement. To learn more, click here: [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB2878](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2878)



## 2015

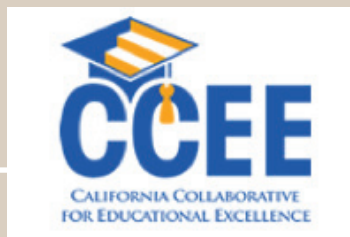
### ESSA Section 1116 Title Changed to Parent and Family Engagement; Funds to Be Used for Dual Capacity-Building

December 2015 – President Obama reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). “Parent involvement” is replaced by “parent and family engagement” to acknowledge that there may be other family members or adult figures caring for children at home. Also, ESSA continues to affirm the need for districts and schools to have a written parent and family engagement policies. This version explicitly describes using the funds (section D) to carry out activities on the policy, outlining five activities that include dual capacity-building on family engagement for school staff and parents. For more information, visit this link and review Section 1116: <https://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/Elementary%20And%20Secondary%20Education%20Act%20of%201965.pdf>

## 2017

### The Toolkit Prioritizes Relationships, Family Activities Linked to Learning, and Equity

California Department of Education’s Family Engagement Toolkit is informed by research and best practices and provides a step-by-step strategic planning process to assess family engagement practices and equity to then lead continuous improvement across a district. The toolkit advocates measuring success on two domains: 1) improving trust levels between families and educators; and 2) linking family engagement activities to student learning. To learn more, click here: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/family-engagement.pdf>



## 2017

### State Agency Sponsors Four Professional Learning Networks on Family and Community Engagement

The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) sponsors 57 two-year Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) to promote innovative thinking and use continuous improvement science to improve student outcomes. Four PLNs, facilitated by PON, Families In Schools, and Alameda County Office of Education are focused on family and community engagement. For learn more visit: <https://www.ccee-ca.org/professional-learning-networks.asp>



## 2010 to present

### County Offices of Education Create Family Engagement (or Involvement) Networks

County Departments of Education create Family Engagement (or Involvement) Networks. These networks involve site and district practitioners, and often community members and representatives of local government and community-based agencies. The networks meet monthly or quarterly to share promising practices and resources as well as engage in professional learning.

Alameda County Office of Education:  
<https://www.acoe.org/Page/833>

Orange County Department of Education:  
<https://ocde.us/EducationalServices/StudentAchievementAndWellness/FIN/Pages/default.aspx>

Riverside County Office of Education:  
<https://www.rcoe.us/leadership-innovation-outreach/family-engagement-network/>

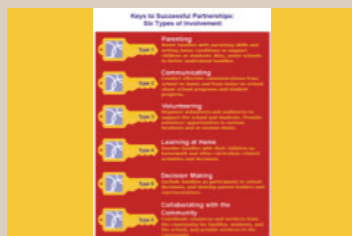
San Diego County Office of Education:  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/lls/MEGA/Pages/PFE/engagement.aspx#Family>

Ventura County Office of Education:  
<https://www.vcoe.org/Leadership-Support-Services/Family-Engagement/fins>

## 2013

### Framework Highlights the Need to Build a System to Foster Family-School Partnerships that Includes Building Capacity of both Parents and Staff

The U.S. Department of Education adopts a systemic approach to family engagement, publishing the “Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships”. The Framework acknowledges the lack of opportunities for school staff to learn how to partner with families emphasizes the importance and identifies organizational and process conditions to establish partnerships. This framework can be viewed as a root cause analysis for the field of family engagement. For more information visit: <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/framework/> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/famengageframeenglish.pdf>

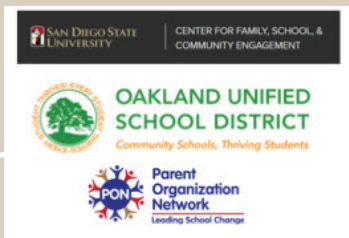


## Late 1990s and 2000s

### Framework Establishes Foundation for Parent Programs in Schools

Joyce Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) established a foundation for family engagement work that many schools still use today to plan activities for families and to lead the work through Action Teams.





## 2008-2010

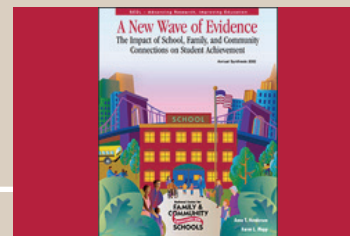
### Other Groups Develop Their Own Parent Engagement Standards. PON Finds that Low-Income Families of Color in LA Identify Health & Safety as a Standard.

Other organizations adapt or develop their own family engagement standards including, San Diego State University's Center for Family, School, Community Engagement; and Oakland USD's Standards for Meaningful Engagement. PON differs in that low-income parents of color in Los Angeles identified issues of health and safety as a standard. While families report feeling unwelcomed and/or unequipped to address academic issues, they are more ready to address school climate issues and prioritize doing so.

## 2007

### Standards are Developed to Assess Family-School Partnerships

- "Beyond the Bake Sale" offers a four-level rubric for schools to assess their family-school partnerships in five domains: building relationships, linking to learning, addressing differences, supporting advocacy, and sharing power. Each level describes a school's readiness to work with parents: 1) a fortress school, 2) come-if-we-call school, 3) open-door school, and 4) partnership school.
- PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Implementation Guide is a rubric that identifies six domains: welcoming all families, communicating effectively, supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with community; and three proficiency levels: emerging, progressing and excelling. Click here to learn more: <https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/National-Standards-for-Family-School-Partnerships>



## 2001

### NCLB Adds Mechanisms for Parents to Hold Schools Accountable

President Bush signed No Child Left Behind into law which continued parent involvement requirements from previous Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) versions (such as parent-school compacts, parent involvement policies and plans), defined parent involvement, and added new roles and opportunities to hold schools accountable. For more about the history of ESEA refer to: "The Handbook on Family and Community Engagement" published in 2011.

## 2002

### Connections Between Family Engagement and Student Achievement are Established

This book "is a synthesis of 51 studies about the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement and effective strategies to connect schools, families and community." The field often cites their key findings which include "families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning." For more information click: <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam33.html>

## **Shifts in the Family Engagement and Community Movement**

The research and legislation referenced above, have influenced these shifts in the movement:

- From parent involvement to family engagement;
- From what is family engagement to how to do it;
- From activity-driven to systemic engagement;
- From training for parents to dual capacity building for families and staff;
- From parenting and technical skills to relationship building, cultural competency, partnership for student outcomes, and providing input on decisions;
- From compliance-driven plans and actions to continuous improvement;
- From mandates to local control through community engagement;
- From schoolwide meetings and events to differentiating outreach, programming, and strategies to engage all families;
- From solely measuring parent participation at meetings to using more comprehensive metrics aligned to research and best practice; and
- From isolation to integration into district's structure, plan, budget to achieve student goals.


## **Implications**

Accomplishing these shifts in the family and community engagement require changing practice. For this reason, recent state and national initiatives aim to update and bridge the theory and practice of family engagement in education. However, policy initiatives cannot make these shifts alone. School districts and county offices of educations play a critical role in helping shift practice in schools. Some actions to be considered to effect change include:

1. Prioritizing, investing in, and providing family engagement training for all staff including administrators, counselors, family engagement staff, educators, and classified staff;
2. Designating an administrator to oversee the school district's engagement system.
3. Strengthening knowledge and practice of continuous improvement science to move toward systemic engagement; and
4. Evolving the role of family engagement staff from event coordinators and workshop facilitators to systems thinkers and process facilitators whom together with families and other staff, develop or update policies and structures for dual-capacity building, including building systems for data collection to ensure continuous improvement along the way.

## **Conclusion**

The family and community engagement movements are rooted in the belief that parents and students must be active participants and equal partners in the educational process for student success. To be sure, family engagement advocates for many years have stressed that we will be successful only if families are meaningfully engaged. But achieving and sustaining this type of engagement means that all involved in this process – legislators, educators and families – must be in it for the long run. This means investing adequate resources (e.g. staff, programs, systems) and maintaining a positive mind-set that success is possible and insisting on the resolve required to see it through to the end. Once we sustain this non-negotiable level of investment of resources, time, and individual and collective efforts, we will all win.



# Progress & Impact for Year 2: **2018/19**

This report highlights the themes and trends that emerged from the interviews of participants. The content of this report was triangulated from surveys, interviews, and class observations.



# Building Knowledge & Peer Learning

Collectively the PLN participants completed 500 hours of professional development. The FE Specialists report that the knowledge they gained as participants in the PON PLN, and which they integrated into their professional activities, impacted practice at both the district and school site levels. LCAP Administrators note that participation in the PLN afforded them the opportunity to reflect on current practices and learn from other districts, which led them to modify their parent engagement strategies “to provide higher impact activities for parents district-wide and at the school-site level.”

Specific efforts that PLN participants engaged in as a result of their expanded learning include:

- 1) Developing or continuing goals to integrate dual-capacity measures. Examples:
  - a. “Provide developmental professional development to both parents and staff using the Families in Schools program”
  - b. “Train staff with parents co-leading trainings on how to work with parents”
  - c. “Continue to provide opportunities for our families to grow while also exploring ways to build staff capacity so that we are more successful in partnering with the families we serve”
  - d. “Increase professional development opportunities for teachers and staff on family engagement methods”
- 2) Using the cycle of continuous improvement as part of their regular practice;
- 3) Developing, refining and/or implementing family engagement plans, vision statements, and surveys; and
- 4) Expanding support and capacity building for school site staff and instructional leads by making FE Specialists’ expertise available to them and giving time to FE Specialists to present FE trainings.

## Knowledge Gained

This section shares different tools, themes, and frameworks reviewed by participants. For example, the table below looks at knowledge growth over two years on the family engagement framework and toolkit we used regularly throughout the PLN experience.

Frameworks	Prior to PLN	Y1	Y2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20% had clear understanding of the framework.</li> <li>• 30% were completely unfamiliar with it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40% had clear understanding</li> <li>• 100% have basic understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67% had a clear understanding</li> <li>• 100% reported knowledge growth.</li> <li>• 67% report using it consistently.</li> <li>• 33% report using it sometimes.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>20% had clear understanding</b> of the toolkit.</li> <li>• 40% were completely unfamiliar with it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40% had clear understanding</li> <li>• 100% have basic understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67% had a clear understanding.</li> <li>• 100% reported knowledge growth.</li> <li>• 67% report using it consistently.</li> <li>• 33% report using it sometimes.</li> </ul>

## Other Themes Studied

This school year, the PLN participants learned the following strategies, which were introduced and explored deeply during the PLN meetings to enhance their practice. The table shows the strategies that were used the most and the least by PLN participants.

Strategy	Fully integrated	Used many aspects	Used some aspects	Not used
Creating welcoming environments	67%	33%	0	0
Assess activities linked to student learning	67%	22%	11%	0
Review the function and job descriptions of parent or community liaisons	67%	11%	0%	22%
Develop a family engagement vision statement	56%	33%	11%	0
Assess activities related to relationship building	56%	33%	11%	0
Assess family engagement activities	55%	22%	22%	0
Discuss core beliefs for family engagement	44%	44%	11%	0
Establish Family Engagement District Teams	44%	11%	0%	33%
Review parent-school compacts	44%	11%	22%	22%
Measure family engagement	33%	56%	11%	0%
Implement high impact family engagement programs or activities	33%	33%	0%	33%

## Helpful Tools Used or Shared with Others

- The CDE Toolkit - Family Engagement Specialists reported that “we use it like a bible.”
- Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher’s Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success – FE Specialists used it as part of internal professional development.
- Covey Handouts - The Family Engagement Specialists used this resource to guide their efforts related to trust building.
- Evaluation templates – Various examples of formats and tools to assess family engagement efforts.
- NAFSCE webinar on evaluation - This session on data collection in family engagement work was cited as a very valuable learning activity resource.

## Other Support Beyond the PLN

PON PLN participants received capacity building support related to the LCAP development and planning process, continuous improvement, and family engagement from a variety of sources. In addition to the PLN meetings they also received support from

- Their district offices (44%)
- LACOE (44%)
- Other non-profits (44%)
- CDE (33%)
- WestEd (22%)
- CCEE (11%)

**The PON PLN was the only source of capacity building for 40% of the FE Specialists.**

The FE Specialists and LCAP Administrators report that employing the research-based practices they studied as participants in the PON PLN contributed to improved relationships between parents and school staff; parents and teachers; parents and parents; and parents and the district. The greatest improvement was realized in the relationship between parents and the district, with - 78% of the PLN participants reporting that as a result of implementing practices that they learned through their participation in the PLN: 1) many positive changes have occurred; 2) the relationship between parents and the district is strong and positive as reported in surveys and due to increase in participation in district's LCAP stakeholder engagement process and parent committees and events; and 3) their districts continually develop and implement strategies to nurture and strengthen the relationship between the district and parents.

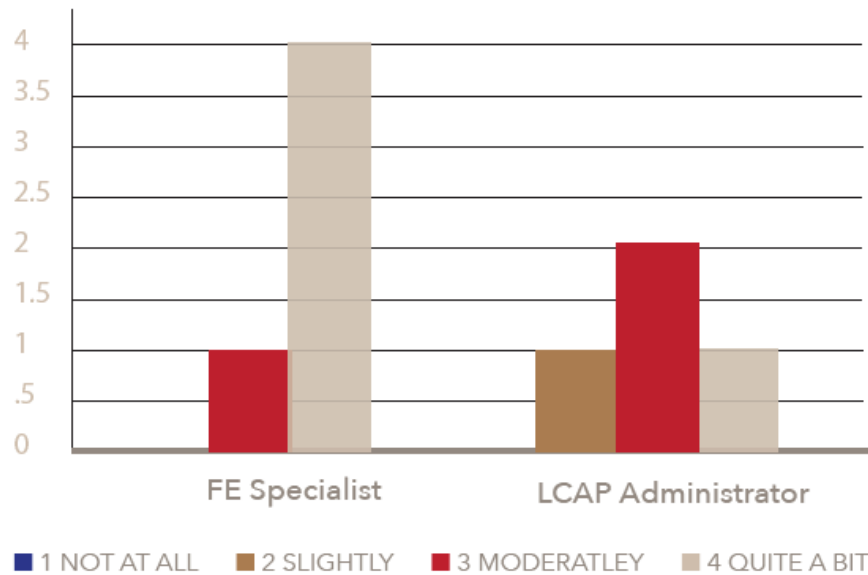
## Continuous Improvement (CI)

When asked broadly, "how much has your depth of understanding of the LCAP continuous improvement cycle grown over this academic year, as a result of your participation in the PLN this academic year?" All the participants reported that their depth of understanding of the LCAP continuous improvement cycle increased. However, the results varied slightly between FE Specialists and LCAP Administrators.

LCAP Process: All the participating districts used a continuous improvement cycle when engaging stakeholders in the development of the 2019-20 LCAP and in the overall LCFF/LCAP process.



**GRAPH 1: Growth on Understanding the LCAP Continuous Improvement Process**



First, we see in Graph 1 that 80% of the Family Engagement Specialists (FE Specialists) reported that their knowledge deepened quite a bit, while 75% of the LCAP Administrators reported that their knowledge deepened moderately to quite a bit (see Graph 1).

Family Engagement Plans: All the FE Specialists shared that their districts used a continuous improvement cycle when implementing their family engagement plan. However, only 50% of the LCAP Administrators reported that their districts did so; 25% reported that they were unsure if a continuous improvement cycle was used as part of the implementation process and 25% reported that their district did not use a continuous improvement cycle.

Interview participants (FE Specialists) consistently cited the value and importance of learning more about the cycle of continuous improvement as part of planning and implementation of family engagement activities. Interviewees acknowledged that the exposure to and their increased understanding of CI enabled them to apply the improvement practice.

# Examples of Continuous Improvement Activities

## 1 Using Rubrics & Surveys:

Some participants credited the learning and practice of CI, which included sample rubrics and surveys made available through the PLN, as foundational to their efforts to work collaboratively with colleagues to create vision and mission statements, set family engagement goals, focus on relationship building, and data gathering to get input. For example, one participant recognized the value of gathering information or “data” and as part of a continuous improvement process, administered a survey to school stakeholders to gather input that the family engagement team would use to make data-informed recommendations to the district’s family engagement plan.

## 2 Learning Together and Discussing Evidence-Based Practices:

One district used a book study of *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships* and *Powerful Partnership: A Teacher’s Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success*, as a tool in a professional development activity for school site staff. This PD entailed targeted reading and group discussion of the research, practices and strategies outlined and how those might be applicable to their school communities. The materials were particularly useful for guiding individual and group reflection and goal setting in assessing welcoming environments; integrating principles of effective parent teacher conferences and volunteer processing and training; and the importance of needs assessments to tailor the work to families.

## 3 Reflecting on Learning:

Participants also cited that their deeper understanding of continuous improvement allowed them to “pause and reflect” and be more intentional about the “types of activities and applications that we can modify to the culture of our schools and district.” For example, one interviewee shared that while there were disruptions in the district, the CI process allowed her, and the family engagement staff to engage in a moment of “pause” to assess “... where we were at” and reflect on possible next steps. Still another interviewee explained that CI is used to assess the effectiveness of on-going parent skill-building workshops “to review and reflect on how to improve for next time.”

There was consistent reference by participants to their own personal and professional growth as an improvement in and of itself. Their increased knowledge of research, frameworks, and new ideas as well as skills to connect those to actual planning, implementation and evaluation of family engagement was acknowledged.

# Strengths & Challenges

## Local Control Accountability Plan

### **Strengths:**

Both FE Specialists and LCAP Administrators identified their districts' strengths in carrying out the LCAP planning process as:

- **The authentic and intentional involvement of all stakeholders in the LCAP meetings;**
- **Having structures in place to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the planning process;**
- **Developing stakeholders' capacity to fully understand LCFF; and**
- **A vehicle that has enabled stakeholders to provide input and recommendations that are attainable.**

### **Challenges:**

- **LCAP Administrators point out the challenge, yet importance of keeping the focus "on what is good for students based on data, versus what adults would like to see included in the LCAP based on their personal needs."**
- **FE Specialists acknowledged the need to continue to grow parent participation and input and highlighted the fact that changes in administration leadership can negatively impact the planning and implementation process of family engagement activities at the district and school site levels.**

## Family Engagement

### **Strengths:**

FE Specialists and LCAP Administrators reported their districts' strengths related to family engagement this past year were:

- **Family engagement is infused as part of everything the district does.**
- **Schools have Parent Centers, Parent Involvement Specialists, and Community Liaisons working directly to support family engagement goals and initiatives; and Positive relationships have developed between the district and parent leaders and community partners as evidenced by the peer relations developed in the PON PLN and reported district surveys and the PON survey**

As a result of increased family engagement efforts, PLN participants reported that: family engagement has increased at both the site and district levels as evidenced by the number of parents on decision-making committees, attending family events, and participating in parent workshops or conferences.

### **Challenges:**

While progress has been made, persistent challenges related to family engagement remain. PLN participants identify these as:

- 1) limited time and resources (staff),**
- 2) lack of training for classroom and school support staff on the importance of building strong partnerships with families,**
- 3) inadequate leadership support, and**
- 4) less than optimal communication and cooperation between school and district departments.**

LCAP Administrators highlight the challenges resulting from a lack of collaboration across departments, noting that departments work in isolation and that there needs to be better communication across departments in order to work collaboratively to address and coordinate family engagement efforts.

These themes will be explored further in the next section.

## Achieving & Sustaining Systems Change

Systems change is about identifying root causes and changing structures, practices, resources, and “the people in a system, their values, beliefs, relationships, and feelings.”, Producing changes in outcomes requires system leaders, practitioners and beneficiaries to have difficult conversations with one another about “power differentials and implicit biases that lead to imbalances in resources, influence, and credit.” To achieve and sustain change requires assessing the system’s readiness to implement changes; building the capacity of system leaders, practitioners, and families/communities to think systemically; and providing transformational experiences to align beliefs and practices with the new paradigms.

A key root cause hindering family and community engagement identified by family engagement research including the “Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships” is the lack of opportunities for school staff and families to build their capacity to partner. Across the nation, most school staff (school administrators and teachers) do not receive training to work with families in their pre-service programs, induction programs, or professional development. This gap often leads to harboring negative perceptions about family engagement, especially low-income families, and more particularly with families from minority communities.

Acknowledging this lack of capacity building, Governor Brown and the State Legislature acknowledged this gap in training and approved \$13.3 million dollars in 2018, for a Community Engagement Initiative. This

<sup>4</sup> Abercrombie, R.; Harries, E. & Wharton, R. (2015). Systems Change: A Guide to What It Is and How to Do It. New Philanthropy Capital. <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/thinking-big-how-to-use-theory-of-change-for-systems-change/>

<sup>5</sup> Kania, J, Kramer, M. & Senge, P (2018). The Water of Systems Change. [https://www.fsg.org/publications/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change](https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change)

<sup>6</sup> Misra, S. & Maxwell J. (2016). Three Keys to Unlocking Systems Level Change. Stanford Social Innovation Review [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/three\\_keys\\_to\\_unlocking\\_systems\\_level\\_change](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/three_keys_to_unlocking_systems_level_change)

initiative's primary goal is to build capacity in communities and school districts to have difficult conversations with each other and collaborate to improve student outcomes.

The CDE Family Engagement Toolkit proposes a process to address the typical challenges to family engagement, which had also been identified by the four PON PLN districts, by following a three-step strategic planning process:

- 1. Laying the foundation: where a district establishes a district-level family engagement team composed of multiple stakeholders (e.g. District Family Engagement Coordinator, other district administrators that work with families, site administrators, teachers, parent leaders, community partners, and support staff) to create a vision, discuss core beliefs, and develop a vision statement for family engagement that is then reflected in policies, plans, and practices. See appendix B to see Lynwood Unified School District's vision statement which resulting from applying this process.**
- 2. Community and family asset mapping to assess trust levels between parents and educators and activities linked to learning.**
- 3. Beginning the process of continuous improvement: plan, do, reflect and adjust.**

Although this tool guided the PLN learning throughout the two years, only one of four districts was ready to implement the toolkit. To follow is a report on districts' progress in adopting system change strategies while navigating complex systems and experiencing the common reality of leadership transitions, budget deficits, and shifting priorities.

### ***Modifying beliefs or perceptions about families***

Interview participants universally acknowledged that "there's still work to be done", although most felt that progress had been made – "I think we've broadened." They recognize that change takes time. The PLN participants further highlighted that while the work to engage parents and change their beliefs and behavior about involvement in their student(s) education is primary, there is a "need for balance" and a need for "more on the staffing end", especially to engage teachers since currently most FE Specialists are expected to build capacity of parents, not necessarily staff. As one respondent pointed out, "... one PD is not enough," and fluctuations in leadership and resources make it difficult to "maintain the fidelity to our family engagement efforts" and "cuts off our rigor."

### ***Increasing Stakeholder Buy-In***

PLN participants cited that not having "buy-in" across the board from all stakeholders was a component of

their work that is challenging yet, for various reasons, not all used the strategy of forming family engagement district teams.

### **Teachers**

- **There is low or lack of involvement of teachers in family engagement work.**
- **There is a need for professional development specific to teachers, that would help build teachers' cultural competency in working with diverse families, how to foster authentic relationships and foster trust, as well as provide teachers practical tools or ideas to support building positive teacher-parent relationships.**
- **There was universal acknowledgement of the need for greater efforts to establish, build, and sustain teacher participation in family engagement efforts.**

### **Leadership**

- “ **... [C]an make or break family engagement work.” refers to the critical role administrators play in family engagement, given that administrator buy-in or lack thereof:**
- **Impacts budget/fiscal decisions on family engagement efforts.**
- **Stable resource allocation is critical to maintain consistency, a key ingredient for continuous improvement.**
- **FE Specialists typically do not have authority over their work.**

Each participating school district experienced different challenges during the two years and the responses from district leaders and teams led to different results. Yet despite changes, disruptions, and challenges, participants persisted with “staying on task” in providing parent engagement activities and/or focusing on training school site staff in preparation for developing a family engagement plan.

### **Resources**

The adverse impact on family engagement efforts from a misalignment between family engagement as a priority and the allocation of resources – staffing, funds, facilities – was a sentiment repeatedly referenced by interviewees.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of on-going communication, including meetings and PD sessions that family engagement staff maintained with school site staff. FE Specialists consistently highlighted the significance of affirming the value of local site staff doing the work.

PLN participants consistently expressed that sharing the information on frameworks, strategies, tools and best practices with school site staff was of utmost importance to them.



<b>Negative Impact</b>	<b>Positive Impact</b>
<p>The misalignment or confusion was felt most strongly during times of changes in leadership/administration. The loss of school level staff at one district had a significant negative impact on family engagement efforts and the family engagement staff's ability to implement plans – "we felt it."</p>	<p>Inversely, at another district, after a change in leadership, staffing was increased, a parent space was designated at each school, and a consultant dedicated to family engagement was hired -- all in support of family engagement. This scenario allowed for a reciprocal relationship whereby the district staff supported school site staff, while in turn they received support and coaching from the consultant, resulting in "a strong team."</p>

### **Structural Changes**

(related to district policies, plans, practices, and/or resources). Interview participants cited both positive and negative effects on family engagement stemming from structural changes within their districts, often related to family engagement staffing.

<b>Negative Impact</b>	<b>Positive Impact</b>
<p>Participants from two districts shared that the reduction in staff had adversely impacted their ability to maintain family engagement work, "...we lost staff doing the frontline work." They shared that the reduction of key staff members who are "critical to building relationships with parents and families" had a negative effect and made it difficult to sustain family engagement efforts.</p>	<p>Conversely, other interviewees shared that structural changes in the form of increased staffing and other resources created a positive impact and/or potential for improving their work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding allocated through the LCAP for staffing and establishing designated parent spaces on school sites allowed for consistency in family engagement work and greater collaboration between departments.</li> <li>• Transferring FE Specialists from the accountability and compliance unit to the student outcomes unit increased access to teachers and assistants.</li> <li>• While one interviewee noted challenges resulting from an organizational restructuring, they expressed optimism for greater outreach to more families in their community as something positive and "cause for hope."</li> </ul>

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Overall, interviewees reported that communication and relationships improved as a result of their own increased knowledge and information sharing. There has been:

- 1) A higher volume of information on the LCAP, local plans, and committee/meeting notes, etc. shared, which has helped foster collaboration between district staff and school-based staff (e.g. community liaisons/assistants).
- 2) In two cases, the integration of a designated family engagement "administrator" helped to facilitate messaging to leadership about the value of family engagement and contributed to staff feeling "important and valued" and to receiving key resources.

Given that improving communication was a goal for Year 2, the survey asked one question on the topic. Overall, LCAP Administrators rated the level, frequency, and quality of communication higher than FE Specialists. No one used the lowest rating available to describe it.

<i>Level, frequency, and quality of the communication on LCAP planning and implementation</i>	<b>Participant Perceptions:</b>		
		<b>FE Specialists</b>	<b>LCAP Admin</b>
District level staff/ departments and school staff	Two-way communication is the norm and the level, frequency, and quality is commendable.	40%	75%
	Communication is adequate and the district is consistently implementing strategies to improve	20%	0%
	Communication is adequate but could be improved.	40%	25%
District level staff/departments and the community at large	Two-way communication is the norm and the frequency and quality is commendable.	20%	25%
	Communication is adequate and the district is consistently implementing strategies to improve.	60%	50%
	Communication is adequate but could be improved.	20%	25%
School staff and parents	Two-way communication is the norm and the frequency and quality is commendable.	20%	25%
	Communication is adequate and the district is consistently implementing strategies to improve.	60%	50%
	Communication is adequate but could be improved.	20%	25%

## Impact on Student Outcomes

When asked about the impact of the LCFF/LCAP process on student outcomes, the following are findings and insights based on responses from PLN participants:

General Findings	Insights
<p>LCAP Administrators and FE Specialists report that the LCAP process is helping to improve student outcomes by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Aligning district goals with State benchmarks,</li> <li>2) Compelling regular review of student outcomes data, and</li> <li>3) Facilitating on-going evaluation of the impact of district and school-based efforts on student achievement.</li> </ol>	<p>As an LCAP Administrator described, “we are monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the actions and services listed in the LCAP and we make modifications based on the analysis of data...” FE Specialists further report that the LCAP process is “helping to improve stakeholder engagement in the districts because it contributes to greater transparency, provides greater involvement and decision-making opportunities for more stakeholders, and supports relationship building.”</p>

When asked about the impact of family engagement on student outcomes, interviewees overall acknowledged the value in having family engagement work align with student learning outcomes and shared efforts they’ve made to support academic achievement:

- A few interviewees noted that they “examined areas of the LCAP to see where they can support the academic side” and to identify “high impact and low impact activities.”
- Participants enthusiastically described activities that they initiated to foster student academic success, which included a family math night designed to nurture parents’ support for math learning at home, and parent workshops focused on topics such as social emotional learning and supporting academic achievement. These workshops targeted the diversity of student populations, including English Learners (EL).
- One interviewee highlighted that while not a specific academic outcome, they targeted a reduction in absenteeism as a goal in support of student achievement. These efforts included providing consistent messaging – formal and informal – on the importance of attendance to parents. The results of this concentrated effort, as measured through an attendance tracker, was a three-point reduction in chronic absenteeism, “...we’re really proud of that.”

*“We’re not there yet...”* An area for improvement that was consistently cited by the interviewees was measuring the impact of family engagement on student outcomes, noting that “...we’re not there yet.” While the interview participants acknowledge the value of assessment, reinforced through their participation in the PON PLN, they are mindful that there is work to be done in this area and that these efforts require time, resources and cross-collaboration.

# Family Engagement & Professional Development

## **Benefit of participating in PON PLN**

Interview participants universally acknowledged that participation in the PON PLN is helpful in many aspects. Resoundingly, interviewees referenced the plethora of practical, relevant, valuable resources that were shared at the PLN meetings. The availability of resources such as rubrics, sample surveys, the CDE Toolkit and relational model, the Equity Toolkit, and the Covey trust building activities were some of the resources cited by participants.

In addition, the opportunity for networking and peer learning was consistently cited by interviewees as a benefit of participation in the PLN. FE Specialists were particularly grateful for the opportunity to participate in a PLN of so much depth and scope of work.

Interviewees also highlighted the mentorship and guidance provided by the PON Facilitator and colleagues, and the opportunity that the PLN offered them to get feedback, to troubleshoot, and have a space where *"I'm stealing all of your ideas."*

**Questions PLN participants grapple with: "...do we do a pre/post surveys?" "...can it be done with a cohort only?" "...how can we do this district wide?" "...can we tie it into what is already being done to assess learning?" Interviewees understand the need for an alignment with student learning outcomes and know what to ask and why, however, who and how appear to be elusive.**

**"To be honest, it felt like a class. There was so much offered."**

**"Professional development at this level (for an extended period) is not often available in the area of family engagement, I feel blessed..."**

**"[It] feels like a support group. It was good for us to see and share with others who were facing the same challenges."**

# Conclusion

PON PLN was successful at increasing participants' knowledge, developing peer-learning, and strengthening their practice of family engagement. The sessions also provided the facilitator with invaluable insight on school district's family and community engagement practices, and the opportunities and challenges to improve family engagement work. In turn, this helped inform and/or influence state level changes through the PLN Facilitator's participation in the California Practitioners Advisory Group and the CDE Ad Hoc Family Engagement Workgroup which updated the self-reflection tool for the Local Indicator for Priority 3: Family Engagement.

However, regularly engaging family engagement specialists and occasionally LCAP Administrators (without superintendents, principals, parent/community liaisons and families) is not enough to propel system change initiatives as it lacks commitment and accountability.

As a result of this process, practices within family engagement specialists' control began to change, demonstrating the critical need to continue supporting professional development for this group. But what was learned or changed often was not reflected in the district's LCAP plans and budgets, an omission that must be corrected if we are to bring about needed systemic change to improve student outcomes. For more details, please read the second part of the report: **"PON Professional Learning Network: Impact on LCAPs"**.



