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COVID-19 ELEVATES NEED FOR EDUCATORS TO BETTER ENGAGE DIVERSE FAMILIES

New Report by Parent Organization Network (PON) Challenges Status Quo of Teacher Training

A copy of the report is available at the link below:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7ce800a65f6b4998972009/t/5f0e3c329ffd6f1268fef5b6/1594768505722/2020_PON_Report+III.pdf

(Los Angeles-July 15, 2020) The school alarm bells are ringing for parents of color throughout California as schools across the state remain closed for the foreseeable future because of the coronavirus. Years of research and now COVID-19 highlight the critical nexus between parent partnerships and student learning. Amid all the nationwide calls for change on how we teach children during the pandemic and after, a new report by the Parent Organization Network (PON) goes in-depth to see how teachers are prepared to engage families of color as required by state law. The report found that California must do better and the PON report provides some critical recommendations on how to improve.

During a webinar media briefing to discuss the findings of its report on teacher training and family engagement, parent advocates said educators must recognize the critical role parents play as partners in their child's education. And they stressed that the chaos currently swirling around our schools because of the coronavirus will only be calmed if educators work effectively with the parents of their students.

Family Engagement Training for Educators in Pre-Service: Common Sense but No Common Practice, takes a close and critical look at the way public school teachers are trained to work with families. In its simplest terms, the report found that while requirements do exist, they are not enforced or implemented. With guidance from San Diego State University, PON analyzed the requirements across educator preparation programs and conducted a landscape scan of selected California universities that prepare our educators. Findings of the scan suggest the lack of consistency in program requirements leads to a wide variance in how teacher candidates are trained.

Rigel Spencer Massaro, Senior Legislative Counsel with Public Advocates who provided the legal analysis in the report, said it's clear that federal law *values* educators' ability to engage families, and California law *requires* educators to be prepared to engage diverse families, but actual practice is a different story.

"The laws as written see parents as equal partners in the schools, but accountability for this skill building is unclear and we don't see proof in the field that these requirements are being met," Spencer Massaro said. "While there are exceptional schools and exceptional administrators and teachers, the reality on the ground in many schools is very different," she added. "The predominant experience for the parents we have worked with over seven years is that parents are fighting for a seat at the table."

Dr. Shulamit N. Ritblatt, Professor of Child and Family Development and the Director of the Center for Family, School, and Community Engagement at San Diego State University, provided guidance on the content of the report and has been preparing students to work with children and their families since 1995. "I can't over-emphasize the importance of healthy socio-emotional development of children as being key to their future success and a critical component of this is the presence of a child's positive relationship with

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trusting and caring adults such as parents, but also teachers,” Dr. Ritblatt said. “Research clearly shows that meaningful parental engagement is essential for positive student outcomes, and schools of education play a critical role in ensuring that our teachers can build effective relationships with the students sitting in their classrooms, but also with their parents.”

From 2009 through 2015 Dr. Ritblatt also served as Chair of the Child and Family Development Department.

California law through the Education Code has mandated family engagement preparation and field experience in educator and other certificated staff credentialing programs for over 27 years, but the PON Report shows that a filtering system nullifies the intent of the requirements which are not reflected in any of the educator preparation programs studied.

PON Program Director Araceli Simeón says lack of family engagement training in pre-service is the root cause of the disconnect between research and practice that results in ineffective family-school partnerships.

“Of all educator preparation programs in California, the general education teacher program has the weakest requirements for family engagement. Consequently, professors still consider family engagement an optional “add-on” even though it has been a requirement for over 27 years,” Simeón stated. “Training for administrators is growing, but the time, effort and funding needed to establish effective parent engagement practices are not prioritized and educators still don’t see parents as bringing significant assets to the dialogue on student learning,” Simeón said.

PON has worked with low-income parents of color for 15 years to build their capacity to engage with their children’s schools and to advocate for student success and school improvement. Parent Yesica Limón has been actively engaged in the education of her children for over 16 years and said parents are an important component of the teacher-school relationship.

“I believe that we have a shared responsibility for making sure our children succeed in school and life, and have taken the initiative to establish relationships with my children’s teachers,” Limón said, “but unfortunately this is not the usual pattern at most schools where many parents are not engaged.” Limón not only advocates on behalf of her children but also for other parents who are afraid to talk to the teacher at school because they’re not welcomed there. “One of the challenges in being active in school is that not all teachers want to have a conversation with parents,” Limón said, “they don’t want to pay attention to them or take them seriously in co-developing academic plans for their children.”

PON’s Simeón said today’s uncertainty in education caused by COVID19 provides a unique opportunity for educators and public schools to better serve their students, particularly students of color whose needs were not being met *before* the pandemic. PON is sharing the Report’s findings to call attention to an issue that’s been discussed for many years but not successfully addressed, with an expectation that those responsible for teaching children and working with parents will bring about needed systems change to better support families.

About PON: PON’s mission is to unite the power of underserved parents to break through barriers in public education, so parents and educators can effectively partner to ensure equity and excellence for all students.

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