

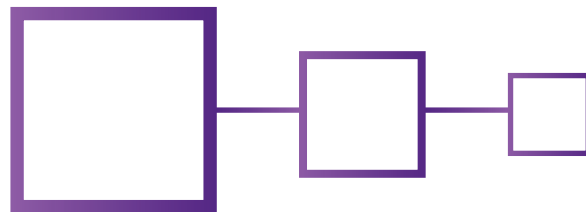
Family & Community Engagement

BRIEFING REPORT

DECEMBER 2017



Arlington
Public
Schools



FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Arlington Public Schools (APS) School Board adopted a new Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Policy in September of 2014 that is grounded in the recognition that “all students, schools and programs are more likely to achieve success when families and the wider community are positively engaged in achieving the mission and vision of Arlington Public Schools.” The policy defines family and community engagement as “a shared responsibility of families, schools, and the community to support students and their learning and to nurture students’ intellectual, personal, social, and emotional development to help them achieve their full potential.”

The FACE policy directs Arlington Public Schools to work actively, in a coordinated fashion, to achieve six goals:

- **Goal 1 – Welcoming all families into the school community**
Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to APS staff, and to what students are learning and doing in school.
- **Goal 2 – Communicating effectively**
Staff and families engage in regular, meaningful, two-way communication about student learning and social emotional development.
- **Goal 3 – Supporting student success**
Staff and families have opportunities to collaborate and strengthen their knowledge and skills to support student learning and social and emotional development at home and school.
- **Goal 4 – Advocating for every student**
Families and students are empowered to be advocates, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities, resources and supports that will ensure their success.



family and community engagement

- **Goal 5 – Sharing responsibility**
APS staff, families, and students are partners in decisions that affect students and together inform and influence policies, practices, and program.
- **Goal 6 – Collaborating with community**
APS staff, families, and community members connect students to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

In January 2015, APS created a FACE Specialist position in the Department of Teaching and Learning and established a FACE Action Team, composed of parents, staff and community partners, which developed the Policy Implementation Plan (PIP). The PIP provides guidelines to support school leaders and staff in achieving each of the FACE goals, and identifies main tasks and areas of responsibility for implementation at both the central and school levels.

MAJOR SERVICES PROVIDED

The FACE Office in the Department of Teaching and Learning focuses on the following areas:

- Educating stakeholders in the school community about FACE as an essential strategy for student and school improvement through a variety of means, including the creation and maintenance of a robust webpage and social media presence, presentations and updates about FACE work in APS.

- Providing a menu of learning opportunities for staff, including instructional staff, to build their capacity to engage families in ways that support student success, and non-instructional staff, to strengthen their ability to contribute to achieving FACE goals.
- Providing learning opportunities for families with a focus on helping families of English learners navigate the school system to support and advocate for students, and support the development of parent leadership and social networks.
- Providing tools, technical assistance and resources for school communities to assess their practice, develop strategies for engaging families as true partners, and measure their progress and impact.
- Contributing to creating a culture of collaboration and coordination across departments and with community partners for FACE to become integrated, systemic, and sustained.

BRIGHT SPOTS

FACE AND WHOLE CHILD CROSSWALK

An important contribution of the FACE Action Team this year was generating a crosswalk of APS FACE Goals and ASCD's Whole Child Indicators, as a way to begin to integrate and align various bodies of work. The team identified thirteen Whole Child indicators that are directly aligned with APS FACE goals. The FACE Action Team had worked on identifying performance measures for APS FACE goals, a necessary step for developing a system of accountability as referenced in the policy. Performance measures will provide the means to know how well schools and programs are doing at engaging families and the community and the impact of this work on families.

FACE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING STRATEGY

APS was one of 5 school districts selected this year by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) to document FACE strategies to be shared with over 190 school systems that are part of the National FACE District Leaders Network. In particular, IEL is documenting APS' efforts to build staff capacity to partner with diverse families for student success. The strategy includes the following components that, when bundled together, result in a more robust and comprehensive approach: High Impact Strategies for Engaging Diverse Families FACE Seminar designed for school teams who commit to participate in six workshops and meet in between sessions; FACE Checklists for school teams to assess their practice around the six FACE goals; FACE Mini-Grants for schools to implement high impact FACE projects in schools; FACE Dialogues for participants to continue meeting to consult with peers; and a Showcase webpage to share practices and tools across schools.

ENGAGING FAMILIES USING THE DUAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORK

FACE is using the Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp and Kuttner, 2014) as a lens for deepening this work. This research-based framework recognizes the need to build the capacity of both families AND school staff to partner effectively to support student achievement and school improvement. In October 2016, APS shared our work in schools using this new lens with the National District Leaders Network as part of a Learning Lab hosted by IEL. APS was selected to present its experience using this new lens at the 2017 National Family and Community Engagement Conference, which had over 1,700 participants. APS sessions were especially powerful in that we modeled inclusion of voices and perspectives of administrators, teachers and diverse parent leaders in each school team that presented.

DATA THAT PROVIDES INSIGHT



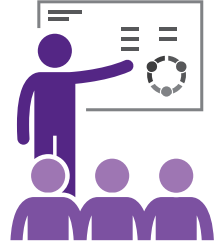
92 teachers attended FACE Introductory Workshop: *Building Meaningful Relationships with Families*

13 FACE Mini-Grants awarded to schools for FACE projects



18 additional parents leaders of English learners, including Spanish, Mongolian and Arabic speakers, completed Parent Leader Facilitation Training (PLF)

- 89% reported to have a better understanding of the role and characteristics of an effective facilitator;
- 95% have new tools to help them design and plan future meetings;
- 89% are more interested in facilitating meetings in their community.



PARTICIPA curriculum updated, translated into Mongolian, and 12 additional bilingual family liaisons and 12 parent leaders trained as co-facilitators

88 teachers/14 school teams participated in FACE Seminar: *High Impact Strategies for Engaging Our Diverse Families*



120 Latino parents participated in *Harvesting Dreams for Our Children* learning circles.

- 99% reported they received useful information about programs, opportunities and resources to help their children succeed,
- 96% made new connections and know who to contact to learn more, and
- 98% felt more energized and committed to forge home/school relationships to support student success.

HARVESTING DREAMS FOR OUR CHILDREN: OPPORTUNITIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL JOURNEY

The FACE office chairs the design team that plans this event, which is hosted by the Superintendent in celebration of Hispanic Heritage. This year's event was attended by 450 participants, including parents, students and staff. The event's core component consists of learning circles, where families are able to converse



with an expert about opportunities for their children at all grade levels. In 2017-18 there were 28 learning circles on 14 different topics. A bilingual resource handbook for families was produced summarizing the main points under each topic.

PARENT LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AMONG FAMILIES OF OUR ENGLISH LEARNERS

The FACE office offers a Parent Leadership Facilitation Training (PLF) as part of its effort to cultivate and grow a cadre of diverse parent leaders. The training is designed to help participants gain an understanding of the skills needed to plan and lead successful meetings and to be effective meeting participants in their schools and in the broader community. The 2016-17 PLF Training included Spanish, Mongolian and Arabic speakers. Latino parent graduates formed a Parent Leaders Facilitators Network that meets quarterly with support from APS and the CCPTA. Parent Leader Facilitators are actively engaged in various capacities, including PTA and CCPTA officers and members of APS advisory and design committees.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Teachers and administrators who participated in FACE professional learning have expressed a strong desire to forge stronger partnerships with families. A large majority also said that they never received extensive training in this area nor learned what effective family engagement practice actually looks like. APS teachers are not alone. Very few teacher-training programs nationally offer professional development programs or courses that prepare teachers and administrators to build strong partnerships with families. The FACE office is effectively filling in this gap.

The Dual Capacity Building Framework aligns quite nicely with the APS FACE policy and implementation guidelines, and has been very helpful for the FACE office in crafting a more balanced and holistic strategy to advance our work in this area. The research-based process conditions in the framework have been particularly helpful for teachers to use when planning family engagement activities to increase the impact. Teachers participating in the FACE Seminars consistently report that their thinking about family engagement has changed:

“Developing relationships, linking to learning, and addressing differences are the three criteria that I now use to think about family engagement. It’s my new lens.”
(FACE Seminar participant)

“The way I view my work has changed. I have learned the strength of high impact strategies and no longer see parent engagement and student achievement as two separate goals.” (FACE Seminar participant)

“I feel like my job description has shifted. I no longer see parent interactions as interruptions but as opportunities to do my (new) job as community builder.”
(FACE Seminar participant)

Effective partnering with families is easier to accomplish when school leaders are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and supportive about engaging families. With support from Administrative Services, APS offered a FACE professional learning opportunity for a group of administrators to take part in a two-semester course on Race, Equity and Family Engagement. Participants reported that they have gained new understanding, insights and ideas to strengthen family engagement in their schools.

Cultivating and supporting parent engagement and leadership among families of English learners is a necessary and critical investment in order to grow and diversify parent voices who engage with APS in decision-making processes. PARTICIPA and the PLF trainings have been very helpful in building a cadre of diverse parents, mostly Hispanic families, who are organizing their communities and engaging with APS. They need supports and opportunities to continue to develop their leadership skills, prevent burnout, and train the next generation of diverse parent leaders.

MOVING FORWARD

Expand professional learning opportunities for instructional and non-instructional staff in face-to-face, online, and blended learning formats.

Expand learning opportunities and supports for parents of English learners to strengthen their capacity to effectively support and advocate for their children, and engage with APS.

Identify, pilot, and share best practices in schools, with a focus on high impact strategies. We are currently piloting Academic Parent Teacher Teams, and will evaluate the results to decide on next steps. APTT is a nationally recognized high-impact system of family engagement that aligns grade level learning concepts, student performance data, and family-teacher communication and collaboration.

Work in collaboration with other APS offices, departments and initiatives, such as Whole Child, to address the policy directive for FACE to “be systemic, integrated, and sustained with adequate resources and infrastructure support.”

The FACE Action Team has made the following specific recommendations moving forward: 1) Select 3-5 Family and Community Engagement performance measures for schools to begin to track regularly; 2) Have an expectation that all schools adopt standards of welcoming behavior for their staff; 3) Provide training for front office staff on FACE goals and standards; 4) Integrate high impact FACE strategies into the School Management Plan; and 5) integrate FACE activities into all relevant parts of the 2018-24 Strategic Plan.