



Lawrence Public Schools

Policy

Section A: Foundations and Basic Commitments

ABC

Subject: Family and Student Engagement

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The Lawrence Public Schools believes that family and student engagement is an integral part of the student success equation. Families, students and schools need to be in partnership to maximize opportunities for students to achieve their full potential. To that end, this policy fosters pro-active communication, student voice, education and support for the roles families can play that best support their students' learning, as well as collaboration and shared decision making among all stakeholders. It also provides guidance on capacity building in schools and with families in order to realize high quality engagement.

Communication

The district and our schools commit to communication methods that are welcoming and accessible to our student and family populations. This includes translation into high incidence languages, as well ensuring that messages are jargon free. While some messages by necessity call for mass-communication methods, such as those regarding the ongoing promotion of events, weather cancellations or whole school community incident reports, to the extent possible, communications should be personalized and provide for two-way dialogue or response. To that end, the district and its schools shall:

- Prioritize methods of communication with families that allow for direct, personal and two-way communication, such as phone calls, in person meetings, and the use of texting technology
- Assure that the school staff communicates clear expectations for performance to both students and parents
- Ensure that every document shared with families is translated and available in high incidence languages,* which may be defined as languages spoken by at least five percent of the enrolled population, and includes contact information for possible questions or follow up
- Ensure that an interpreter (staff, contracted or community partner-provided) is available to support interpretation requests by families whose first language is among those identified in the district as high incidence, and for essential conversations, such as IEP meetings, in the language requested regardless of incidence level
- For families whose first language is a low-incidence language, include in important messages home a notation translated in the appropriate language that encourages the family to have the entire notice translated
- Use multiple methods to reach families about activities or resource offerings, such as, but not limited to, outreach in the community (fliers in salons, stores, etc.), social media and website promotion, school newsletters, in backpacks through the schools, and automated calls, as necessary.



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- Extend frequent and clear invitations for parents and other caregivers to be involved in student- or school-related activities, volunteer opportunities and related events, providing realistic lead times and reminders for families, as well as expressing the value of said opportunities as it correlates to student success. To the extent possible, at least one touch point per invitation should provide for two-way communication, such as a phone call, texting application, or similar.

The district shall also:

- Maintain an accessible and up to date website, with translation options available for all main content areas, as well as links to translations for all embedded documents
- Provide annual opportunities to build capacity in school leaders and staff to engage in intercultural communications.

Family Partnerships

While the responsibility to partner in service of a student's success should be shared equally by schools, families and students, the onus belongs with the district and schools to invite families (the parents, guardians or others who provide daily care and support) and students into partnership. To that end, proactive opportunities to build relationships should be identified and incorporated in school educational goals and operational calendars.

To foster family partnerships, schools must:

- Initiate proactive two-way communication with families and students. This may include, but is not limited to, personal calls, home visits, email, or physical mail that includes a reply mechanism, such as who to call or email for questions.
- Strive for regular touch points with families, such as, but not limited to, during student entry points (including for those who begin after the start of the year), semester, and/or mid-term check-ins.
- Frequent reports to parents on their children's progress.
- Encourage and create opportunities for families and educators to share information, discuss student needs and strengths, develop relationships and, as needed, build collaborative plans for safety and academic success.
- Schedule parent/teacher or student led conferences in accordance with the school's operational plans.



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- Plan for meaningful meetings and conferences with families that include clearly stated objectives and, as needed, proper interpretation as well as translated materials, as outlined in the Communications section of this policy.
- Welcome the advocacy of parents and students seeking access to differentiated learning, alternative coursework or pathways (i.e. early college, credit recovery, AP coursework), as opportunities exist.
- Collaboratively plan with their school community to host welcome to school opportunities for new students in order to welcome, orient, and support their successful transitions. Said activities should support community building and the sharing of critical school level information and related resources.

The district shall identify and make available opportunities for development that build capacity of school leaders, staff and families in ways that enable and foster said partnerships.

Student Voice

Just as the partnership of parents/caregivers is critical to student success, so are the contributions of students' ideas, inputs and feedback in areas both individual and collective. Here, too, the district and schools must lead the way, creating the capacity and space for student voice to thrive and to help shape the culture, climate and academic opportunities that define student experiences in Lawrence Public Schools. Specific guidance for these efforts may be found in [See revised LPS policy # JIB Student Involvement in Decision Making].

Shared Decision Making

Successful school improvement is best accomplished through a shared decision making process that involves all stakeholders. Equitable engagement requires school leaders to share power with students, families and staff. In such a model, school decisions are centered on students and inclusive of considerations for context, community, and capacity.

At the district level, decisions are made by the superintendent of schools, with input from a leadership team, which represents matters related to academics, operations, engagement and student supports, with matters of policy and budget approved by the district's governing body. To ensure equitable opportunities for additional stakeholder contributions, the district must:



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- Foster and maintain regular opportunities for parent, student, educator and school leader input and feedback. These should include regular meetings with principals, the establishment and maintenance of a student advisory (see JIB) and a districtwide stakeholder council, and the hosting of community dialogues as appropriate.
- Maintain a district entity to provide capacity building for schools and families, support schools in their related efforts, and bolster stakeholder engagement.
- Implement an annual school climate survey for parents and students, with resulting school-level data shared with individual schools for the purposes of whole school improvement planning.

Schools, as with the district, must foster shared decision making by establishing inclusive opportunities to bring parents, students, and educators into discussions that support collaborative governance. To this end, each school must:

- Maintain a school council (commonly referenced as a School Leadership Team) as required by MA Ch 71:59C
- Develop a parent leadership and networking council that, at the discretion of the school, may be a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or a family council that meets independently but includes staff support to assist with maintenance of the organization and to act as the liaison between the school and the families (as outlined in Title 1 regulations)
 - This body should be the entity for electing parents to the school council
- Lead a collaborative effort to annually draft, review and potentially revise a home-school compact that outlines the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders to support student success in their community (as required in federal ESSA requirements). The home-school compact shall be included on individual school pages of the District's website.
 - The school may determine to use their council (School Leadership Team), a PTO or similar, or a newly organized group of stakeholders to carry out the home-school compact development.
- Create opportunities at the classroom level to provide forums that foster safe spaces for shared voice, and the open and safe expression of ideas or concerns
- Maintain student government entities at the middle and high school level, with encouragement for similar leadership and contributory opportunities at lower grade levels

Nothing in these guidelines should be construed as a mandate to establish a new entity if an existing structure exists that meets the guidelines provided herein.



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Fostering Roles Families Can Play to Support Student Success

Research points to five caretaker roles that are proven strategies for supporting students' academic success. Schools must maximize opportunities to inform, encourage and foster these roles:

- Monitoring their child's performance
- Guiding their child's education
- Communicating high expectations
- Supporting learning at home
- Advocating for their child

To this end, schools should be intentional in the building of their school year calendar to identify opportunities for one-to-one conversations, messaging and events that feature one or more of these roles so that schools help families build their own capacity in each of these areas.

Further, parent/guardian access to a student's assignments, grades and attendance must be made consistently available, utilizing the parent portal or similar technology so that parents may monitor frequently their child's performance.

Utilizing proactive communication strategies (see above), schools can support learning at home, with suggestions about curriculum questions to ask their children or tips on how to extend learning at home.

Schools should include evidence in their Title 1 submissions of the promotion and incorporation of these roles in their school communities.

Building Capacity

The district must provide school leaders and staff annual guidance, regular professional development opportunities, and/or ongoing coaching to help schools build capacity for these authentic efforts.

** The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the U.S. Department of Justice interchangeably use the terminology "high incidence languages" and "major languages."*

Legal references Massachusetts General Laws: 71:59C, Federal Title 1 and ESSA regulations.

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