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CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

HIGH-IMPACT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:  
PROMOTING EQUITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

***Family-Friendly First Impressions:  
Front Office, Safety and Support Staff as  
Partners in Family Engagement***

Webinar Series – Session 3

May 25, 2018

# Welcome!

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Judy Carson  
School-Family-Community Partnerships  
Connecticut State Department of Education



## Agenda for the Webinar

- Defining Family Engagement
- High-impact practices in family engagement
- Front office staff in a “welcoming school”
- Shifting expectations
- Ideas to Get Started

# Defining Family Engagement (draft)

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Family engagement is

**a full, equal and equitable partnership**

among families, educators <sup>*school staff*</sup> **^** and community partners  
to promote children's learning and development, from  
birth through college and career.

## Student/Family/Community Engagement

**Create a welcoming school culture that invites family engagement as a core value.**

*Research on why families get involved indicates that a welcoming environment is one of the most influential indicators of family engagement. The degree to which parents feel welcome at the school, trust staff, and have positive interactions with staff is positively associated with student outcomes (i.e., students' grades, problem behaviors at school, and repeating a grade).*

# Invisible Labor

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*“The front office sits in the hyphen written between home-school and between teacher-parent relations.”*

(Thomson, Ellison, Byrom & Bulman, 2007)

# Building Strong Partnerships with Families



## Building Strong Partnerships with Families

3 years ago

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Building Strong Pa...  
Highline Public Schools

<https://vimeo.com/135506454>

# In addition to answering phones...

- Putting cones in a car park.
- Telling people when and how to get out of a busy car park.
- Administering first aid.
- Mediating between a head and an LEA over admissions.
- Making budget predictions.
- Dealing with child protection issues.
- Receiving deliveries.
- Organizing orders and sending them to suppliers.
- Selling uniforms.
- Chivvying staff to go to meetings on time.
- Dealing with two parents fighting in the yard.
- Dealing with a mother's boyfriend coming in to fight with the father.
- Running book club.
- Following up unpaid accounts.
- Dealing with sick children.
- Administering medication.
- Filling out order forms for teachers.
- Doing marketing-related activities.

- Dealing with the security buzzer.
- Handling lost property.
- Taking money for music lessons.
- Handing out late slips to pupils.
- Handing out toilet permission slips.
- Checking teachers have handed notes to pupils.
- Making a buffet for governors.
- Doing visitor badges.
- Keeping the administration going when the head is out (small schools)
- Letting school premises.
- Handling immigration problems.

“The school front office relies on the capacity of its staff to manage multiple tasks at once, to remain calm in all circumstances, to be highly organized, flexible and responsive.”

# Responsibility But No Say

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“The work of the office can be characterized as having a lot of responsibility but very little power. Office staff are expected to meet and communicate school, district and central [office] policy decisions over which they have almost no say. This often involves them in difficult transactions with members of the public, including parents.”

- ❑ Lack of training opportunities
- ❑ Intensification of work
- ❑ Low pay



# Family-Friendly First Impressions: Front Office, Safety and Support Staff as Partners in Family Engagement

Anne Mead, Director  
School-Family-Community  
Partnerships

Estela Camacho, Director  
Morris Street Family  
Resource Center

Danbury Public Schools



# Family Engagement → Family Partnership

- Family partnerships is invisible → Take meeting to where families are
- Hard to reach families → Are we going where families are
- Meet the Teacher Night → Meet the Families Night

- ❑ Schools think they know families → We need to seek to understand
- ❑ Concentrate on Deficits → Capitalize on assets
- ❑ All families should have the same level of engagement → every family will engage in their own way
- ❑ School assume parents need help and need help, “we can fix them” → Families have assets and social, economic and educational capital

- Listening is only through the lens of what we know → Listen and walk in their shoes
- Suspend judgment & Deconstruct assumptions  
→ Change institutional mindsets
- Replace frustration → Thoughtful questioning and probing
- Defining success only through quantitative data  
→ Mindset shifts towards friendlier, more inclusive landscapes

- Schools know families best narratives  
→ Families know their own narrative
- Use traditional school-centric approach → Meet families in their communities
- Long standing history of school-community strategies that read like edicts → On their own turf & open up limited accessibility
- Marginalization positioning of families → Full partnerships with balanced understanding of families

# Getting Started

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IDEAS



# Resources

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- How Welcoming Is Your School? Training & Assessment <http://www.crec.org/welcomingschools/>
- Connecticut State Department of Education Evidence-Based Practice Guides <http://portal.ct.gov/SDE-EvidenceBasedPracticeGuides>
- Thomson, P., Ellison, L., Byrom, T. & Bulman, D. (2007). Invisible labour: home-school relations and the front office. *Gender and Education*, 19(2), 141-158.

# Webinar Series

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HIGH-IMPACT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:  
PROMOTING EQUITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Session 4 – June 8, 2018

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

**“Linking to Learning: Bringing Families into The Learning Process and Launch of Summer Book Club”**



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Community and Family Engagement

# Friday CAFÉ

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And Family Engagement

Monthly Sessions  
8:30 to 10:30 a.m.

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# Thank you!

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