

**Center for Policy, Research,  
and Evaluation (PRE)**

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**NYU Metro Center**

**KENTUCKY COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH STUDY — YEAR 3**

# **Making the Case for Statewide Family Engagement:**

The Prichard Committee and  
the Kentucky Collaborative for  
Families and Schools

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**Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation**

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Sponsored by The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence



**The Prichard Committee**  
Building a Groundswell for a Big Bold Future

## Acknowledgments

The research team would like to thank everyone who took their time to help with this study. This includes all the KY Collaborative Partners, the Prichard Committee, Daviess County Public Schools, Learning Grove, National Centers for Family Learning, Partners for Rural Impact, and the Kentucky Department of Education. Thank you to all the participants who responded to the survey, participated in the case studies, or facilitated connections to make this research possible. With the support of these stakeholders, we were able to learn more about models of family engagement across the state of Kentucky.

## About the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

NYU Metro Center advances equity and excellence in education by connecting to legacies of justice work through critical inquiry and research, professional development and technical assistance, community action and collaboration.

This report reflects the shared work of the Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools, which includes the following organizations:

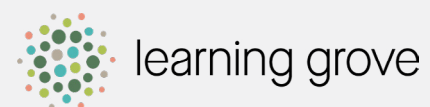
**The Prichard Committee** is a citizen-led, bipartisan, solutions-focused nonprofit, established in 1983 with a singular mission of realizing a path to a larger life for Kentuckians with education at the core. Prichard Committee is the managing partner of the KY Collaborative and the administrator of the research.



**Daviess County Public Schools'** mission is to prepare students to succeed for life by developing a learning community that provides quality instruction by meeting the individual need of students.



**Learning Grove** cultivates success by growing knowledge, capabilities, and confidence to allow children and families to flourish, now and into the future. They offer childcare and preschool, enriching out-of-school time opportunities, and supports for parents and families.



**The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL)** promotes family education solutions across three approaches by engaging families, educators, administrators, and advocates to drive results and ultimately reduce education inequities.



**Partners for Rural Impact (PRI)** exists to accelerate outcomes for rural youth from cradle to career. Our mission brings hope and opportunity.



**The Kentucky Department of Education** partners with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.



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## Executive Summary

In her 2021 speech on strategies to build meaningful family-school partnerships, Dr. Karen Mapp posited that “This is the moment where we can have an impact on changing the practice of family engagement, now and forever.” Over the last four years, we’ve experienced a global pandemic that shifted the landscape of schools, national uprisings and justice movements, book bans and anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) bills. This upheaval has impacted student learning, especially among historically and presently marginalized communities due to their racial/ethnic, linguistic, religious, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Now more than ever, we understand the critical role that families play in ensuring schools are welcoming and affirming spaces for all students to learn.

Creating opportunities for families and schools to learn from each other, and build better practices to enhance student learning and success became the work of the Kentucky Statewide Family Engagement Center, otherwise known as the “Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools.” The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence served as the lead grantee, and was joined by three regional partner organizations and a school district that each offered a variety of programming and services for children, young people, and families throughout their regions: Learning Grove, Partners for Rural Impact, the National Center for Families Learning, and Daviess County Public Schools. The Kentucky Department of Education, served as a statewide agency/policy lever. See a description of each organization in Table 1 below.

The NYU Metro Center was contracted by the Prichard Committee to evaluate the KY Collaborative and research the statewide impact of transformative family engagement. We used mixed methods to explore the following questions:

1. How does the KY Collaborative support schools?
  - a. What is the depth of schools’ engagement in KY Collaborative offerings, and how does engagement change over time?
  - b. How and to what extent are schools implementing the Dual Capacity-Building Framework? How does this change over time?
  - c. What is the relationship between implementation of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework and changes in family-school partnerships over time?
  - d. What is the relationship between changes in family-school partnerships and changes in school-level outcomes (academic, attendance, discipline, school climate)?
2. How do CIPL fellows experience personal transformation, engage in collective action, influence public officials and school officials, and create more equitable educational systems? What conditions facilitate or hinder success?
3. How does the KY Collaborative support integrated, systemic, and sustainable family engagement? What conditions facilitate or hinder success?
  - a. What changes do families report as a result of participation in KY collaborative programs?
  - b. What is the statewide impact of the KY Collaborative?

| <b>Table 1.</b><br><b>Description of KY Collaborative Partners</b> |                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Organization</b>                                                | <b>Region/<br/>Population</b>                     | <b>Key Services</b>                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Target<br/>Demographic</b>                                                     |
| <b>Daviess County Public Schools</b>                               | Daviess County                                    | School district, academic programming, professional development for educators, and parent leadership/ family engagement workshops                                                                     | School-aged children, families, and educators                                     |
| <b>Learning Grove</b>                                              | Northern Kentucky/<br>Emergent Bilingual Families | Early care and education centers, before and after school programs, college and career prep, parent leadership and resource support                                                                   | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, and parents/ caregivers         |
| <b>Kentucky Department of Education</b>                            | Statewide                                         | Policy lever                                                                                                                                                                                          | All ages                                                                          |
| <b>National Center for Families Learning</b>                       | Louisville/<br>Southeastern Region/Urban Families | Place-based family literacy, learning and engagement programming, professional development to support family learning and literacy practitioners, and community development to highlight local voices | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, adults, and parents/ caregivers |
| <b>Partners for Rural Impact</b>                                   | Appalachian Region/ Rural Families                | College preparation, academic skill building, college and career mentoring, and family engagement programming                                                                                         | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children and parents/ caregivers          |
| <b>Prichard Committee</b>                                          | Statewide                                         | Community based advocacy networks, trainings, leadership institutes, and post-secondary attainment and career readiness                                                                               | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, adults, and parents/ caregivers |

## Theoretical Framework

The Dual Capacity Building Framework (DCBF) for Home-School Partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019) is the prevailing way that schools and districts nationwide anchor their family engagement strategies, and the guiding framework used by the Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools. The ultimate goal of the DCBF is effective partnerships between families and schools.

According to the DCBF, both process conditions and organization conditions facilitate capacity development. Programs, practices, policies, and activities must be relational, linked to learning and development, asset-based, culturally responsive and respectful, collaborative, and interactive. Family engagement must also be systemic (embraced by leadership across the organization), integrated (embedded in all strategies), and sustained (with resources and infrastructure). When the right process and organizational conditions are in place, parents' and educators develop their capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (shifts in beliefs and values), and confidence (self-efficacy).

While traditional approaches position families mainly as supporters of the school's agenda — consider the model of an engaged parent who attends school events, volunteers when asked, helps their child with homework — the DCBF acknowledges that families can engage in diverse roles, including co-creators, supporters, encouragers, monitors, advocates, and models. An engaged parent may play only one of these roles, and this role may not be visible to educators. Meanwhile, educators are empowered to connect family engagement to learning and development, engage families as co-creators, honor family funds of knowledge, and create welcoming school cultures.

## Methods

Data for this report stems from observations of KY Collaborative meetings and events, quarterly data reported by KY Collaborative partner organizations on program engagement, surveys administered to parents/caregivers participating in a KY Collaborative training/workshop (retrospective surveys) or one day event (exit surveys), and yearly interviews with KY Collaborative partners. Additionally, we collected family and school staff survey data across 57 schools from the Family Friendly Schools Network. Qualitative case study data was also collected from one school (Berea Community School), one district (Boone County Public Schools), and one community-based organization (AMPED, an arts organization in Louisville).



## Findings

We use the Equitable Collaboration for Transformational Family Engagement Framework (Perry & Geller, 2021) to integrate data from surveys, case studies, interviews and observations to share how the KY Collaborative set in motion the conditions for equitable collaboration for transformational family engagement.

Figure 1.  
**Equitable Collaboration for  
Transformational Family Engagement**

|                               |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bottom-Up Leadership</b>   | Families and communities have a voice at every level                                                                                              |
| <b>Diffusion</b>              | Sharing unified narratives about the power of transformational family engagement across the system                                                |
| <b>Dual Capacity Building</b> | Families, teachers, leaders, and providers receive ample support for sharing power                                                                |
| <b>Growing Power</b>          | Families, especially those who have been most marginalized, drive the agenda and hold education officials accountable                             |
| <b>Changing Policy</b>        | Developing public will for family engagement to create policies that facilitate family engagement and leadership and undo policies that impede it |

We illustrate how equitable collaborations for transformational family engagement must attend to five components:

**(1) Bottom-up leadership:** Families and communities have a voice at every level—the collaborative itself, districts, schools, and community-based organizations.

The KY Collaborative was structured as a “hub and spoke” model, with the Prichard Committee as the “hub” or convener, and each of the partner organizations as the “spokes.” One partner described how the KY Collaborative partners operated as:

“a network of families, schools, districts and community partners focused on increasing open communication, learning opportunities, and shared decision-making power across the Kentucky education system. We share a unified voice in advocating for family leadership and effective family-school-community partnerships.”

The KY Collaborative centered family voice and leadership by co-creating with families and elevating the unique cultural, values, norms, and practices in each of the regional communities across Kentucky.

**(2) Diffusion:** Sharing unified narratives about the power of transformational family engagement across the system.

Originally, the KY Collaborative set a goal for each partner organization to run 10 programs. The idea was that the KY Collaborative would help the partners expand the geographic reach of their existing programs. Thus, the KY Collaborative began with 60 unique programs to serve families. But, the partners soon learned that it was difficult to recruit families from different regions to participate in programs that had been developed elsewhere for another population. They also learned that if a program didn't stick within the culture of a school, it would not outlast principal turnover.

So, they shifted to a model that emphasized people and places, building capacity in a way that was responsive to the local context and aligning existing programs to the 4Cs (cognition, connections, confidence, capabilities). They became less focused on the number of programs and more focused on the number of schools where they were deeply engaged.

Thus, the KY Collaborative pooled their collective knowledge and experiences to create several new initiatives to support schools with family engagement, including developing the Family Friendly School Network, creating statewide operational definitions and guidelines to establish a common understanding of effective high-impact family engagement, and disseminating the Kentucky Family and School Partnership Guide, which included a school self-assessment, online modules, and guidance for collaborative family engagement action planning. They also created a Family Friendly School Certification Program. Receiving certification involved schools developing a family engagement action team that completed online modules and school self-assessments, and then implemented high-impact family engagement strategies based on their areas for growth.

The FFS learning network and the Family Friendly School Certification program are both still active beyond the end of the funding period. Almost all partners identified these collective initiatives as the most important lasting legacy of the SFEC funding. This legacy is a testament to the strong foundation and collective buy-in underlying these initiatives. Further cementing the legitimacy and sustainability of these two initiatives, the Kentucky Department of Education has included the “percentage of schools who receive Family Friendly Certification” on their dashboard of school accountability measures.

**(3) Dual-capacity building:** Families, teachers, school leaders, and service providers receive ample support for sharing power.

The Kentucky Collaborative worked as a collective to build the capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence of educators and families across the state by offering 60 high-impact activities for parents, and 33 high-impact activities for school, district and state staff. Between 2021-2023, 70 schools received family engagement support from KY Collaborative partner organizations in the form of book studies, webinars, small group learning pods, self-paced resources, and/or coaching. During this time period, there were statistically significant increases in:

- Educators and families reporting that their school reaches out to families and fosters a climate for family leadership.
- Educators inviting families to partner in school-related activities and having the capacity for culturally responsive teaching.

- Family knowledge about the educational system and engagement in their children's learning.

Furthermore, among educators and families who participated in KY Collaborative activities, these outcomes were significantly stronger, and there was a significant relationship between educator participation in family engagement training and job satisfaction.

**(4) Growing power:** Families, especially those who have been most marginalized, drive the agenda and hold education officials accountable.

Through the work of the KY Collaborative, we identified three essential conditions that were present in instances where power rippled from families and communities to schools, rather than the converse: 1) creating space for families to co-create, lead, and facilitate; 2) building equitable relationships between families and schools, and 3) employing qualified and committed staff. Notably, each of these conditions involved partnerships with community-based organizations, highlighting that community is central to home-school partnerships.

Families in each of our case study sites had the opportunity to co-create, lead, and facilitate within both community and school spaces. For example, AMPED grew parent power by allowing families to define what racial equity should look like in the schools. Families at AMPED worked for two years developing an Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit (see example here) and accompanying virtual component for each module.

Once we saw power shift from schools toward families and communities, we saw more equitable relationships begin to take shape between families and schools. The KY Collaborative made it possible to adapt CIPL – Prichard’s longstanding parent leadership program – to Spanish-speaking Latina mothers in Boone County. Newly connected and informed about the local educational system, CIPL alumni formed the Families, Inclusion, Education, Society, Traditions, Access (also known as FIESTA) Initiative, which helped families “feel empowered to advocate for their child” by creating opportunities for parents to form relationships with school staff across language barriers.

At the core of this work were qualified and committed staff. These staff consistently: showed up, were vulnerable/ honest about equity being a process and where they were as a community in that process, and valued families, their identity and culture by ensuring that their voices and lived experiences led the work.

**(5) Changing policy:** Develop public will for family engagement in order to create policies that facilitate family engagement and leadership and undo policies that impede it.

The KY Collaborative worked to build sustainable family engagement throughout Kentucky by working on the following policy-related issues:

1. Catalyzed background check clarification from the Kentucky Education Commissioner around requirements for parent volunteerism in schools. This shift allowed local advocates to work directly with school districts to establish alternate procedures as needed for individuals wishing to volunteer in local school districts but who do not have Social Security numbers. This policy was particularly beneficial to immigrant families, who shared their stories about the barriers they experienced in participating in activities at their children's school, such as volunteering in classrooms or on field trips. Through the advocacy of parent leaders, now each local school district has the ability to have a local board policy addressing volunteers.
2. Updated the statewide Kentucky School and Family Partnership guide (known as "The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle"). This document, used widely by school-based decision-making boards and councils throughout Kentucky, was originally commissioned by the former state education commissioner in 2006. The Kentucky Collaborative updated the document in 2021. These updates were needed to help set a standard for family engagement in Kentucky, including offering key recommendations for engaging families and communities in supporting student learning. The updates also included a specific focus on equity and the need for schools to be inclusive spaces for learning, practices for uplifting student voice, and identifying measures for sustainable family-school partnerships. Partners, families, and community members from the KY Collaborative played a role in contributing to the recommendations made, by providing feedback on proposed updates, highlighting what they believed should be key priorities, and sharing their stories and experiences in order to set a standard for family engagement in Kentucky.
3. Influenced the reorganization of Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) to the Family Partnership Council (FPC) through the work of the KY Collaborative to more accurately welcome all caregivers, resetting membership of the group to include more family seats and less seats to staff from family service organizations. "The council serves in an advisory role to KDE and provides input regarding topics of interest to families, such as ways that families and communities can assist schools in ensuring that the achievement level of all students is increased." Renaming the council to reflect the centering of all caregivers beyond the traditional recognition of just parents ensured the council was a space that was inclusive of all family members, in name and in practice. Advocacy efforts from current members, including parent leaders, community members, and KY Collaborative partners sharing their stories and experiences in Kentucky Schools and beyond, helped advance the FPC.
4. Advocated to uplift early literacy instruction in Kentucky. After the passage of KY Senate Bill 9, known as the Read to Succeed Bill, the KY Collaborative Advisory Council wanted to ensure the "reading at home" requirement was taken seriously and done in a meaningful way. Together, members created a guidance document outlining the roles of families, educators, and administrators in effectively implementing reading at home strategies. The group decided the tool should be targeted to administrators to outline the mindset, systems and conditions that would need to be in place for reading at home to be based on relationship building and 2-way communication. This document is still a core training resource for the implementation of this bill.

## Conclusion

Family engagement that is transformational, integrated, and sustainable requires full buy-in from all key members, including families, community partners, school and district staff, and policymakers. We document the success of the KY Collaborative and the ability of the partners to facilitate connections between the aforementioned groups to ensure the development and implementation of policies and practices that enhance the capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence of educators and families.

We conclude by offering the following recommendations:

### • **Families**

- Your expertise matters. Share your knowledge, cultural understandings, and rearing practices to build better learning environments.
- Build meaningful relationships with your child's school to have a significant impact on the academic, social, and emotional development of your child and other students.
- Seek out resources, build partnerships, and use your voice to shift the policies and practices within your school and community.

### • **Community Partners**

- Commit to building intentional spaces when families feel welcomed and supported in sharing their stories.
- Target services and supports to be responsive to the needs of families/communities, including language accessibility. Be prepared to shift focus as needed.
- Employ staff who are committed to the process, and want to uplift the voices, needs, and assets of families.
- Consider partnering with existing services providers when creating new programs. The blueprint for the work may already exist.

### • **Educators and District Leaders**

- Focus on giving families opportunities to lead, building equitable relationships between families and schools. Ensure that school policies, values, and norms are developed in partnership with families.
- Employ qualified and committed family-facing professionals.
- Build educator capacity for family engagement, prioritizing opportunities for educators and families to learn and act together.

### • **Statewide Family Engagement Centers**

- Include partners with deep authentic relationships with families.
- Be ready to pivot in response to local and national events that affect families.
- Sustain opportunities for family voice through the implementation phase.

### ● **Policymakers**

- Dismantle institutional and structural barriers to family engagement, including increased hiring of more diverse school staff, resources, supports, and translation services for multilingual families, family engagement specialists for all schools/ districts.
- Provide clear and consistent policies uplifting a sustainable model of transformational family engagement.
- Increase resources to support dual-capacity building for families (e.g. parent leadership training/ family engagement workshops) and educators (e.g. professional learning/ racial equity and social justice training / cultural competence).

### ● **Researchers**

- Expand asset-based frameworks centering the lived experiences of families, especially historically and presently marginalized families.
- Examine how to dismantle power structures that impede equitable family-school partnerships.



## Introduction

Despite a large body of research on family engagement, widespread district, state, and federal family engagement policies, and a proliferation of school- and community-based family engagement programs, equitable and impactful family-school partnerships tend to occur in isolated pockets. Many interventions to improve family-school partnership have floundered because they focus heavily on the achievement of specific goals or objectives, such as reaching out to parents using new forms of technology, additional math nights, or hiring family engagement coordinators (Mattingly et al., 2002; Ishimaru, 2020; White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992). These technical interventions tend to overlook the importance of altering institutional and individual norms, values, and attitudes (Chapman, 2002; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Warren and Mapp (2011) distinguish between transactional change, “the achievement of specific goals or objectives,” and transformational change, “an internal change in how people or institutions act” (228). Transformational family engagement strategies fundamentally change relationships between families and schools and interrupt deeply ingrained beliefs about low-income families, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families, and immigrant families to combine “the experience of educators and policymakers” with the “brilliance of young people and their families and communities” (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 34).

In this final report from our 3.5-year study, we integrate data from surveys, case studies, interviews and observations to share how the Kentucky Statewide Family Engagement Center (KY SFEC), otherwise known as the KY Collaborative, set in motion the conditions for equitable collaboration for transformational family engagement. The KY Collaborative is “a network of families, schools, districts and community partners focused on increasing open communication, learning opportunities, and shared decision-making power across the Kentucky education system.” The KY Collaborative received funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program from 2018-2023. See [Appendix A](#) to learn about the KY Collaborative Theory of Change.

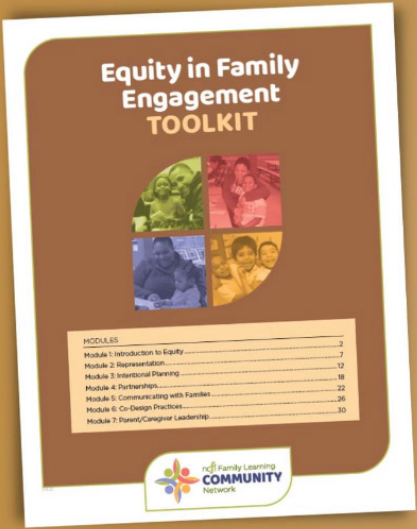
The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a nationally recognized, independent, non-partisan citizen’s advocacy organization based in central Kentucky, was the lead grantee for the Kentucky Collaborative. The organization has operated the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) for almost 30 years, which builds families’ knowledge, skills, and power related to improving public education. Joining the Prichard Committee were three regional partner organizations that each offered a variety of programming and services for children, young people, and families throughout their regions. Additionally, Daviess

County Public Schools joined the KY Collaborative in April, 2021. Daviess County excelled in prioritizing transformational family engagement in their local schools. The original partners invited them to join the Collaborative because they believed Daviess County could aid in building an integrated and sustainable model of family engagement across Kentucky. The Kentucky Department of Education, served as a statewide agency/policy lever. Table 2 describes the KY Collaborative partners.

| <b>Table 2.</b><br><b>Description of KY Collaborative Partners</b> |                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Organization</b>                                                | <b>Region/<br/>Population</b>                     | <b>Key Services</b>                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Target<br/>Demographic</b>                                                     |
| <b>Daviess County Public Schools</b>                               | Daviess County                                    | School district, academic programming, professional development for educators, and parent leadership/ family engagement workshops                                                                     | School-aged children, families, and educators                                     |
| <b>Learning Grove</b>                                              | Northern Kentucky/<br>Emergent Bilingual Families | Early care and education centers, before and after school programs, college and career prep, parent leadership and resource support                                                                   | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, and parents/ caregivers         |
| <b>Kentucky Department of Education</b>                            | Statewide                                         | Policy lever                                                                                                                                                                                          | All ages                                                                          |
| <b>National Center for Families Learning</b>                       | Louisville/Southeastern Region/Urban Families     | Place-based family literacy, learning and engagement programming, professional development to support family learning and literacy practitioners, and community development to highlight local voices | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, adults, and parents/ caregivers |
| <b>Partners for Rural Impact</b>                                   | Appalachian Region/<br>Rural Families             | College preparation, academic skill building, college and career mentoring, and family engagement programming                                                                                         | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children and parents/ caregivers          |
| <b>Prichard Committee</b>                                          | Statewide                                         | Community based advocacy networks, trainings, leadership institutes, and post-secondary attainment and career readiness                                                                               | Early childhood (aged 0-5), school-aged children, adults, and parents/ caregivers |

We used mixed methods to explore the following questions:

1. How does the KY Collaborative support schools?
  - a. What is the depth of schools' engagement in KY Collaborative offerings, and how does engagement change over time?
  - b. How and to what extent are schools implementing the Dual Capacity-Building Framework? How does this change over time?
  - c. What is the relationship between implementation of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework and changes in family-school partnerships over time?
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3. How does the KY Collaborative support integrated, systemic, and sustainable family engagement? What conditions facilitate or hinder success?
  - a. What changes do families report as a result of participation in KY collaborative programs?
  - b. What is the statewide impact of the KY Collaborative?



The image shows the cover of the 'Equity in Family Engagement TOOLKIT'. The cover is brown with a white border. It features a circular collage of four photos showing diverse families. Below the photos is a table of contents. At the bottom left is the 'ncfi Family Learning COMMUNITY Network' logo.

| MODULES                               |    |
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| Module 1: Introduction to Equity      | 2  |
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**Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit**  
Support for educators to build family partnerships and equitable learning spaces



The logo for the 'ncfi Family Learning COMMUNITY Network' features a stylized white flower-like icon to the left of the text. The text is in a sans-serif font, with 'ncfi' in lowercase, 'Family Learning' in a smaller font, 'COMMUNITY' in all caps, and 'Network' in a smaller font below it.

## Background Literature and Frameworks

Our study is guided by the goal of “transformational family engagement,” which we define below. We then describe common barriers to transformational family engagement. Next, we explain the two frameworks that guided our study: the Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Mapp & Bergman), which highlights how educator and family capacity-building results in better partnerships; and the Equitable Collaboration for Family Engagement framework (Perry & Geller, 2021), which identifies how collaborative efforts, such as Statewide Family Engagement Centers, can build the systemic conditions for transformational family engagement.

### Transformational Family Engagement

A wealth of compelling educational research has demonstrated how relational trust is a critical precursor to the type of effective cooperation that makes schools thrive (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Warren et al. (2009) contrast traditional parent involvement programs, which are “individualistic, school-based, and activity-focused” with the “relational approach,” which affords opportunity for meaningful conversation and mutual learning between families and schools. We detail the differences between community-based and school-centered family engagement in Table 3 below.

| <b>Table 3.</b><br><b>Difference between Community-Based and School-Centered Family Engagement</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Community-Based Family Engagement</b>                                                           | The community-based model is relationship-based, emphasizes parents as members of a community and leaders and collaborators in setting the agenda, provides training for leadership development and personal growth, and emphasizes a mutual exchange of power. |
| <b>Traditional School-Centered Family Engagement</b>                                               | The traditional school-centered model is activity-based, treats parents as individuals, encourages parents to follow the school agenda, has workshops that provide information, and focuses on communication from the school to parents.                        |

Families have particular strengths, resources, and knowledge they can offer schools. When their voices are honored and uplifted, this knowledge can inform school leaders, teachers, and other school staff on how best to support student learning, highlighting students and families’ assets and future possibilities. Understanding the varying contexts in which families live helps schools uplift their racial/ ethnic and cultural identities that influence who they are, their values, thought processes, and expectations for their children’s learning (Ishimaru, 2019).

Several barriers impede transformational family engagement. First, is the pervasiveness of the cultural deficit model, which attributes the low achievement of students of color to deficient cultural values, such as large, disorganized, and female-headed households, less emphasis on the importance of education, and the use of non-standard English at home (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The myth that low-income parents do not care about their children’s education

and that they are not capable of helping their children succeed is pervasive in many schooling spaces (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Greene, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Second, and related to the cultural deficit model, are limited opportunities for teacher capacity building. Teacher education programs tend to direct little attention to family engagement (Broussard, 2000; Pushor & Aremdt, 2018). Furthermore, teacher education programs and ongoing professional development for working with diverse populations tend to be superficial and ignore discussion of race and racism (Milner, 2013).

Third, there is often insufficient infrastructure for meaningful shared decision-making and leadership. As has been demonstrated since the War on Poverty attempted to assert a more central decision-making role for families (Fege, 2006; Travis Bland, 2018), districts rarely have the adequate structures, systems, and processes to engage the public in meaningful ways, such as high-quality translation and interpretation services, facilitators who can navigate power differentials between families and administrators and manage conflict, and the ability to share data with families (Marsh & Hall, 2018; Porras, 2019). Further, educators and school and district administrators often resist parent voice, and school board members of color often navigate hostility from other school board members and the public (Sampson, 2019). Therefore, the research consensus is that the potential of even the best community-based efforts to develop parent leadership and organizing skills are hindered by institutions and individuals who are unprepared for parent power (Geller et al., 2015; Gorski, 2019; Montemayor & Chavkin, 2016; Jiménez-Castellanos, Ochoa, & Olivos, 2016; Quezada, 2016).

## **Dual Capacity-Building Framework**

The consensus that relationships are central to any strategy to enhance family-school partnerships led to the development of the research-based Dual Capacity-Building Framework (DCBF), which was initially authored with the U.S. Department of Education (SEDL, 2014) and later revised based on intensive feedback from the field (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). The DCBF assumes that both families and educators need opportunities to develop their capacity to engage with one another. When the right conditions are in place, parents and educators develop their “4 Cs”: capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (shifts in beliefs and values), and confidence (self-efficacy). Therefore, educators and families are both empowered, and effective partnerships can form. Families are equipped to advocate, support, and collaborate with schools, using their voice to shift schooling climates, cultures, policies, and practices to best support student learning and achievement. Subsequently, educators are more prepared to honor and learn from the lived experiences of students and families and create welcoming learning environments.

According to the DCBF, effective home-school partnerships require three organizational conditions. First, family engagement must be systemic, meaning leaders across the organization must communicate a commitment to family engagement and allocate the necessary resources for it. Second, family engagement must be integrated, or in other words, “embedded in all strategies”, including staff recruitment, professional development, strategic planning, etc. Third, family engagement must be sustained with resources and infrastructure, including funding, leadership positions, and written policies and procedures. Yet, few models illustrate these organizational conditions in action. The KY Collaborative offered a unique opportunity for learning about how to build the organizational conditions for family

engagement because its promise is to build a “groundswell movement,” with leaders across the state embracing family engagement, supporting schools to integrate family engagement into core activities, and establishing the will for resources and policies to sustain family engagement.

## **Equitable Collaboration for Transformational Family Engagement**

The KY Collaborative uniquely adapted a collective impact model that brought together community-based organizations, state department of education staff, and families. While some research has demonstrated the contributions of collective impact (ORS Impact, 2018), collective impact has been critiqued for being too “grasstops” – led by professionals without meaningful engagement from those most closely affected (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; FSG). Ishimaru (2019) affirms how a collective impact model she studied had “little integration of systemic change efforts, educator capacity-building, and scaffolded parent leadership development strategies with one another or with core district priorities” (p. 379).

Christens and Inzeo (2015) distinguish between collective impact and community organizing, in that the latter has deep resident engagement, closely analyzes power arrangements, and engages in conflict when necessary. The authors argue that collective impact and community organizing can complement and inform one another and call scholars to document and examine work at the intersection of these two approaches. The KY Collaborative offered a rare opportunity to inquire about how both approaches can complement and inform one another, as student and family leadership is so central to the history and mission of Prichard.

In Perry and Geller (2021), we combine a framework of principles for collaborating for equity and justice (Wolfe et al., 2020) with a framework for “next-generation” family engagement (Weiss et al., 2018). The five “next-generation family engagement” strategies and the six principles for collaborating for equity and social justice overlap considerably. Both models allow us to consider more deeply how change can be driven by those who have the most to lose or gain; how systems, structures, policies, and mindsets need to shift to accomplish change; and how leadership may be diffused across a system rather than concentrated with a single entity.

Drawing from both models, we posit that equitable collaborations for transformational family engagement must attend to five components:

- (1) Bottom-up leadership: Families and communities have a voice at every level—the collaborative itself, districts, schools, and community-based organizations
- (2) Diffusion: Sharing unified narratives about the power of transformational family engagement across the system
- (3) Dual-capacity building: Families, teachers, school leaders, and service providers receive ample support for sharing power
- (4) Growing power: Families, especially those who have been most marginalized, drive the agenda and hold education officials accountable
- (5) Changing policy: Develop public will for family engagement in order to create policies that facilitate family engagement and leadership and undo policies that impede it

## Methods

Data for this report stems from observations of KY Collaborative meetings and events, quarterly data reported by KY Collaborative partner organizations on program engagement, surveys administered to parents/caregivers participating in a KY Collaborative training/workshop (retrospective surveys) or one day event (exit surveys), and annual interviews with KY Collaborative partner staff, totaling 33 interviews with 16 individuals.

Additionally, we conducted an annual survey of families and school staff from 2021-2023 across 57 schools from the Family Friendly School Network (FFS). In total, there were approximately 4,900 parent responses across the three years, including repeat responses from parents who participated in the survey over multiple years, and/or who took the survey for multiple schools within the same year. There were approximately 3,250 responses from school staff across the 3 years, also including repeat responses over time.

We wanted to understand how transformational family engagement could take place in a range of settings, so we conducted three qualitative case studies: in a school (the Berea Community Elementary School in the Appalachian region); a district (the Boone County School District in northern Kentucky); and a community-based organization (Adventurous Minds Produce Extraordinary Dreams (AMPED) in Louisville. Regional partners recommended these sites because of their innovative approaches to family engagement, and because they engaged historically marginalized families (rural families, migrant families, and Black families, respectively).

A more detailed description of our methods can be found in [Appendix B](#).



## Findings

The findings presented below are organized into the categories of the Components of Equitable Collaborations for Transformational Family Engagement framework (Perry & Geller, 2021).

We first discuss how the KY Collaborative embodied bottom-up leadership. The family-informed and family-driven nature of the KY Collaborative ensured that programming was responsive to the priorities of families. We discuss how this ethos of family leadership rippled out to Boone County, where partners adapted the CIPL program to support the first ever bilingual cohort of parent leaders.

With the foundation of bottom-up leadership, we then discuss how the KY Collaborative diffused new family engagement models and narratives across the state. They developed tools and processes that embodied essential principles of transformative family engagement and could also be adapted to local contexts.

Next, we move from the systemic level to the school-level, describing how the KY Collaborative built the educator and family capacity to partner with one another. We describe how key elements of family-school partnerships increased markedly from 2021-2023, and that parents and educators who participated in KY Collaborative capacity-building activities also reported significantly higher family engagement-related outcomes.

We then discuss how family and community power grew at a systemic level. We discuss how three conditions enabled growing family and community power: 1) opportunities for families to co-create, lead, and facilitate; 2) equitable collaboration between schools and families; and 3) the presence of staff who worked closely alongside families. In all of these cases, community partners were essential.

Finally, we discuss how statewide policies shifted as a result of the KY Collaborative.

### Bottom-Up Leadership

The KY Collaborative was structured as a “hub and spoke” model with the Prichard Committee as the “hub” or convener, and each of the three regional partner organizations as the “spokes.” The partners defined the KY Collaborative as:

“a network of families, schools, districts and community partners focused on increasing open communication, learning opportunities, and shared decision-making power across the Kentucky education system. We share a unified voice in advocating for family leadership and effective family-school-community partnerships.”

In this section, we discuss how the KY Collaborative was structured for co-creation with families and communities, and how partners elevated the needs and priorities of marginalized communities as they created a statewide family engagement infrastructure. We share an example of how the KY Collaborative set in motion grassroots leadership, which then influenced statewide policy.

## **Co-Creation on the KY Collaborative**

Family voice and leadership was a core value of the KY Collaborative. As one partner put it, the goal was to “integrate the voice and perspectives of families into everything we’re doing.” Another partner affirmed, “Family engagement is about families. It’s not about anything else other than centering the needs of families.” For some partners, this meant “involving the voices and experiences of [parents/ caregivers] to provide resources and tools for families that come from their own desires.” One partner described that this process creates “opportunity [for families to better partner in a very real way, not a ceremonial way, with the school districts and with impacting change.”

The five partner organizations met weekly to share updates and innovative practices in their regions, and to plan and discuss collective initiatives. Additionally, an advisory council, consisting of families, school staff, state education department staff, business partners, and other community-based organization staff met monthly. The advisory council guided the direction of the KY Collaborative, including discussing the feedback of families, students, and educators, developing a theory of change, and linking family engagement with other education efforts. Finally, a learning network met monthly to learn best practices in family engagement. The learning network included the advisory council, as well as others who were interested in learning more about family engagement. One partner contrasted the KY Collaborative to other siloed collaboration models, saying, “They wanted anybody and everybody to come to the table who wanted to be a part and they got out and they worked with other people to recruit them in.”

Partners recognized that a sustainable model of community-based transformative family engagement needed to be co-created with families. One partner affirmed the KY Collaborative made efforts to not only invite families but also ensure parents “have the space to express their voice and that families have an opportunity to provide feedback through multiple means.” Another partner described why this was important:

“Looking through everything through a lens of equity, language, and justice is way more important. For us, as an organization is top priority. Making sure that we’re co-developing and collaborating with families to bring that voice, the parent and student voice into everything that we do.

## **Families’ Needs and Priorities Were Elevated Across the KY Collaborative**

A key quality of the partners that composed the hub and spoke model was that each organization worked in a deeply close and relational way with a different group of historically marginalized families. Across Kentucky, each partner organization “had their own niche” that allowed them to be the expert in the communities they served. They could bridge those connections to other partner organizations to create a statewide network of families, practitioners, educators, policymakers, and other key stakeholders. For example, one partner mentioned that she regularly elevated awareness about the importance of adapting programs and services for rural families. Another partner mentioned how her organization’s engagement elevated the needs of special education students, and that she, in turn, learned a great deal about family engagement in special education.

In addition to partners becoming more aware of the needs of specific groups, the ethos of family leadership that defined the KY Collaborative influenced each individual organization. One partner noted that her organization now acts much more intentionally in co-creating programming and services with families. Another organization deepened their parent advisory work as a result of the KY Collaborative.

Additionally, the KY Collaborative partners worked together to confront historical legacies of marginalization, including language accessibility, racial barriers, and challenges around equity and inclusion. In 2020, the covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying school closures, as well as racial uprisings, allowed the KY Collaborative to pivot their programs and services. During this time, the KY Collaborative affirmed their commitment to listening to the needs of the families, communities, and schools. Partners spoke to: 1) shifting from place-based to remote offerings of programs and services as needed, 2) intentionally focusing on racial equity and social justice, and 3) increasing offerings of linguistically inclusive services.

The KY Collaborative continued to reach families amidst a global pandemic that forced nationwide and statewide policy and practice changes. While many challenges came from this shift, one partner recalled some highlights:

“On the other hand, I do think that it has given us some opportunities to re-envision the way that we were doing things and pushed us to try new and different ideas in ways that we wouldn't necessarily have done if we hadn't been so pushed. We did find that some of our programming actually had larger numbers because it was virtual and I don't think some of that's going to go away.

This shift in programming allowed a larger reach to some families who hadn't deeply engaged in KY Collaborative programs or services.

Further, some partners spoke to the intentional inclusion of more voices from BIPOC families and other historically marginalized families. One partner believed “local, statewide, and national events created space for families to be able to express their voice.” They went on to highlight the KY Collaborative's reach to “parents who are of color...parents who are of that low socio-economic situation, [and] parents who have been taught all of their lives that they have no voice,” who were suddenly given a platform to share their expertise. Statewide and local community response to racial uprising, including the murder of Breonna Taylor (which occurred in Louisville, a direct service area for the KY Collaborative) allowed for “deep reflections and re-imagining of schooling spaces” in order to best support communities of color.

In 2021, new models of family engagement emerged from KY Collaborative partners, including the first bilingual cohort of the CIPL program, community-based partnerships with programs like the Racial Healing Project, and district-wide shifts like the creation of a new equity director in the Berea school district, who would be responsible for working with schools to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion plans.

## ***The Boomerang Effect Between “Grasstops” and “Grassroots”***

At the start of this study, we wondered to what extent the “grasstops” and “grassroots” nature of the KY Collaborative could be a vehicle toward stronger accountability and stronger implementation of policies that benefit children and families. Here, we share an example of how the KY Collaborative seeded a local grassroots effort that ultimately led to changes in statewide policies around parent volunteering. We highlight this “boomerang” effect - the statewide KY Collaborative making possible grassroots organizing, and grassroots organizing, in turn, influencing statewide policy.

As discussed, the Prichard Committee has operated the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) since 1997. However, the leadership training was not offered for non-English dominant families until 2021, when the partnership between Prichard and Learning Grove made it possible to expand and adapt CIPL to the unique experiences of migrant families in northern Kentucky.

CIPL was crucial to strengthening families. “It’s making the invisible visible and the visible more intentional,” by ensuring that “families are always invited to the table.” CIPL promoted resources, voice, and agency amongst the parent leaders participating in CIPL’s bilingual adoption, serving Spanish-speaking families. Parent leaders highlighted how they planned and facilitated different parts of the workshop.

A 2021 CIPL Fellow, a Latina mother of four, spoke about her experience co-planning and facilitating the 2022 cohort:

“ *I can say that it changed my life since I graduated from CIPL because that was really where I found the opportunities...We assisted [the program coordinator] ... in everything related to the programs, we decided what kind of resources we were going to need, what people we were going to invite, what topics we were going to talk about, what role each one was going to play. Meal planning, what we were going to bring, schedule planning, what time we were going to start, the timing of each person, how we were going to serve people, etc., everything related to planning.*

CIPL’s success was rooted in programming that was responsive to the needs of families. Particularly in the bilingual iteration of the CIPL program, families’ cultures and lived experiences were integrated into the curriculum. Families ensured that tools, activities, and overall learning were reflective of the needs of the parent leaders participating in the workshop. For example, when the CIPL bilingual program was developed, materials weren’t simply translated from English to Spanish. Program coordinators took into consideration how the unique cultural practices in Latinx communities may affect engagement styles. A partner discussed how Spanish-speaking parents in this CIPL cohort weren’t familiar with the concept of chain of command:

“ *[The facilitator] drew out a picture of how it works and stuff and I’m like, “I never thought of that being something to think about, that that’s not common in every culture.” That’s shifting how we’re providing their parent leadership*

*programming. We're going to spend a little more time on that now. I just think our family engagement practices are getting more and more diverse but in really meaningful ways and not just, "Oh, yes, we translated that, check."*

CIPL parent leaders influenced more inclusive statewide and district policies. Bilingual families raised district-wide concerns around language accessibility and documentation/identification challenges. For instance, in May 2021, the cohort hosted Kentucky Commissioner of Education, Dr. Jason Glass. Over 40 families, the Boone County Superintendent, and leadership staff from Jones Middle School attended the event. The families expressed their desire to better support their children despite the barriers they faced with schools. They posed comments and questions, and voiced their concerns about the issues of language differences and documentation requirements to volunteer in the classroom. As a result of this engagement, background check clarification from Dr. Glass was published, allowing local boards of education to change requirements for parent volunteering in schools, rather than adhering strictly to state policy.

In this example, we see how a partnership seeded by the KY Collaborative led to the parent-led local adaptation of a successful program. CIPL in Boone County empowered migrant families to understand their right to volunteer in the schools and to speak up to a powerful public official - the state education commissioner - to express why this right mattered to them. This interaction resulted in changed statewide policy.

Now that we have illustrated how the KY Collaborative was structured to uplift diverse family experiences in the design of programs, resources, and trainings, we next turn to how the KY Collaborative partners worked together to diffuse new family engagement practices and narratives across the state.

## **Diffusion**

Weiss and colleagues (2018) identified “generating public interest in and excitement about family and community engagement through public communication” as one of the five strategies for next-generation family engagement.

The KY Collaborative partners pooled their collective knowledge and experiences to create several new initiatives to support schools with family engagement. Originally, the KY Collaborative set a goal for each partner organization to run 10 programs. The idea was that the KY Collaborative would help the partners expand the geographic reach of their existing programs. Thus, the KY Collaborative began with 60 unique programs to serve families. But, the partners soon learned that it was difficult to recruit families from different regions to participate in programs that had been developed elsewhere for another population. They also learned that if a program didn't stick within the culture of a school, it would not outlast principal turnover.

So, they instead shifted from a model that emphasized scaling up programs in different geographic regions to a model that emphasized people and places, building capacity in a way

that was responsive to the local context and aligning existing programs to the 4Cs (cognition, connections, confidence, capabilities). They became less focused on the number of programs and more focused on the number of schools where they were deeply engaged.

The KY Collaborative worked diligently to create defining criteria for “high-impact” family engagement programs, for example ensuring programs had opportunities for parent leadership and partnership, two-way engagement, and could be integrated and sustained in schools. Defining these criteria collectively gave all partners a lens through which to decide which programs to continue implementing.

With their common understanding of what effective high-impact family engagement looked like, the partners pooled their collective expertise to co-create resources that were disseminated statewide, for example, the Kentucky Family and School Partnership Guide, which included a school self-assessment, digital playbook, online modules, and guidance for collaborative family engagement action planning. They also co-developed workshops, summits, and leadership training. For example, each partner organization presented on family engagement strategies and practices during a Family Engagement in Education Summit, in spring 2021. This event boasted hundreds of attendees over two days with a total of 13 sessions. Recordings of each session, including slides in English and Spanish were posted as a resource for continued engagement.

The resources discussed above became the foundation for deeper engagement with schools. In spring 2021, the KY Collaborative developed the Family Friendly Schools learning network (FFS). FFS schools received tailored support from their regional KY Collaborative partner agency in the form of regional learning pods, webinars, book studies, and coaching. Partner agencies could ask other KY Collaborative members for support to meet the unique needs of their schools, for example, best practices for engaging families encountering accessibility challenges, such as transportation to meetings and programs, language barriers/ interpretation services, and materials.

The KY Collaborative also developed a Family Friendly School Certification program. With ample input from the advisory board, the KY Collaborative identified the most important steps schools could take to advance their family engagement practices. Receiving certification involved schools developing a family engagement action team with a minimum of two teachers, two parents, and one building leader. Action teams completed online modules and school self-assessments, and then implemented high-impact family engagement strategies based on their areas for growth.

The FFS learning network and the Family Friendly School Certification program are both still active beyond the end of the funding period. Almost all partners identified these collective initiatives as the most important lasting legacy of the SFEC funding. This legacy is a testament to the strong foundation and collective buy-in underlying these initiatives. Further cementing the legitimacy and sustainability of these two initiatives, the Kentucky Department of Education has included the “percentage of schools who receive Family Friendly Certification” on their dashboard of school accountability measures.

The FFS learning network and certification program made it possible to diffuse the principles of transformational family engagement to schools statewide. When asked how the KY Collaborative as a whole was stronger than the individual organizations that comprised it, one partner said, “The unified message. I think the fact that we’re all rallying around relationship-building and two-way communication has been the biggest impact.” While the unified messages were clear, each school and collaborating partner agency shaped the specifics on *how* they were adopted.

Now that we have discussed how the KY Collaborative as a whole built an infrastructure for systemic, integrated, and sustainable family engagement, we turn to the impact on schools. How did educators and families develop their capacity for partnership during this time? What changed in schools as a result?

## Dual-Capacity Building

Transformational family engagement happens in responsive and sustaining ways when both families and educators are equipped with the needed tools to partner together. The Kentucky Collaborative developed a statewide collective impact model to build the capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence of educators and families across the state. Partner organizations offered educators family engagement learning pods, webinars, book studies, and coaching. As a result, educators were more prepared to reach out to families, invite families to partner in school-related activities, and create a more culturally responsive learning environment. More opportunities became available for families to have a more enriched knowledge of the child’s educational system, establish open communication channels with their child’s school, and build a better climate for family leadership. Table 4 displays examples of dual-capacity building activities.

| <b>Table 4.</b><br><b>KY Collaborative Dual-Capacity Building Activities</b> |                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example 1</b>                                                             | Staff learned a new language in order to communicate with families. This opened doors for communication and relationship building.            |
| <b>Example 2</b>                                                             | Staff created drive-through events and take-home activity bags for families, acknowledging the ongoing needs of families during the pandemic. |
| <b>Example 3</b>                                                             | Partners supported schools in creating space for families to share their voice through parent cafes.                                          |
| <b>Example 4</b>                                                             | Partners offered parent leadership training specifically for Spanish-speaking families and refugee families.                                  |

### ***The KY Collaborative Built Capacity for Family Engagement Throughout the State***

The KY Collaborative set a goal of serving 50,000 parents by the end of the project period. By year 5, this goal was exceeded when 84,709 families were reached. They offered 69 high-impact activities for parents, and 36 high-impact activities for school, district and state staff to increase their capacity for engaging with families.

Seventy schools across 29 districts were either part of the FFS Learning Network or received a Family Friendly Schools Certificate. Fifty-nine schools joined the Family Friendly Schools (FFS) Learning Network, and 39 schools received Family-Friendly School Certificates. These 39 schools included 27 of the FFS schools and an additional 12 schools that were not part of the learning network. Of the 70 schools, four were early learning centers, 41 were elementary schools, 12 were middle schools, 12 were high schools, and one was a middle-high school. Local partners supported these schools in myriad ways, with coaching as the most common form of support, received by 75% of the schools. On average, schools had a monthly touchpoint with their supporting partner agency.

Families in FFS schools reported engaging with the KY Collaborative in several ways, the most common being attending a school or district family engagement training (55%), completing the Kentucky Family and School Partnership Self-Assessment (21%), and using online family engagement modules (17%). One third of staff reported attending a school or district family engagement training, 26% supported a family engagement action plan, and 17% completed the Self-Assessment and participated on a family engagement action plan.

This increased support was evident in the FFS survey data, where school leaders noted a significant increase in support from 2021-2023 for family engagement from their districts and the State.

- There were statistically significant increases from 2021 to 2023 in school leaders agreeing that the **state** supported their school with:
  - Setting policies for engaging families in school activities  
**34% agreed** in 2021 (N=29); **63% agreed** in 2023 (N=16)
  - Providing family engagement training to school staff  
**21% agreed** in 2021 (N=29); **62% agreed** in 2023 (N=16)
  - Providing funds for family engagement  
**37% agreed** in 2021 (N=29); **71% agreed** in 2023 (N=16)
- There were statistically significant increases from 2021 to 2023 in school leaders agreeing that their **district** supported their school with:
  - Setting policies for engaging families in school activities  
**50% agreed** in 2021 (N=30); **84% agreed** in 2023 (N=25)
  - Providing family engagement training to school staff  
**33% agreed** in 2021 (N=30); **80% agreed** in 2023 (N=25)

## ***Educators and Families Participated in Family Engagement Workshops and Trainings that Built Their Capacity for Partnership***

A significantly greater percentage of school staff and families participated in family engagement workshops and trainings from 2021-2023. The percentage of **school staff** who reported participating in a family engagement training or workshop almost doubled – an increase from 21% in 2021 to 41% 2023. The percentage of **families** who had participated in a family engagement training or workshop increased from 50% in 2022 to 64% in 2023.

Overwhelmingly, school staff and families reported that Kentucky Collaborative activities improved their capacity for family engagement. Seventy-two percent of families who participated in a KY Collaborative program or activity agreed or strongly agreed that, “Activities with the KY Collaborative better prepare me to support my child’s learning.” Seventy-five out of 76 educators (99%) who attended a KY Collaborative training or workshop offered through the FFS learning network reported that they learned something that would help them engage in better family engagement practices, and 67 out of 76 educators (88%) reported that they became more aware of educational programs, services, or resources to support student learning. As another indicator of capacity improvement, in 2021, 52% of school staff had a lot or a great deal of confidence in engaging families. By 2023, 61% had a lot or a great deal of confidence.

Participants remarked on surveys that they enjoyed workshops where they could learn from tangible examples from people in similar roles, interact with one another, and leave with actionable tools and next steps. At Berea Community School, school staff and families even participated in family engagement professional development together in 2021, a helpful way for each group to get on the same page and also learn from one another. Unfortunately, families were not included in subsequent years.



### ***Family-School Partnerships Improved Across the State***

The capacity building appears to have made a difference. Families and staff reported significantly improved home-school partnerships from 2021 to 2023. As shown in Table 5, staff reported significant increases in school outreach to families, family leadership climate, and culturally responsive education capacity. There was also an increase in invitations for involvement, but it was not statistically significant.

| <b>Table 5.</b><br><b>Changes in staff-reported outcomes, 2021-2023</b> |                 |                 |                 |                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Outcome Measure</b>                                                  | <b>2021 Avg</b> | <b>2022 Avg</b> | <b>2023 Avg</b> | <b>Difference, 2021-23</b> |
| Invitations for Involvement                                             | 3.04            | 3.02            | 3.14            | +.10                       |
| School Outreach to Families*                                            | 4.15            | 4.14            | 4.23            | +.07                       |
| Family Leadership Climate***                                            | 3.34            | 3.36            | 3.54            | +.19                       |
| Culturally Responsive Education Capacity**                              | 4.12            | 4.11            | 4.21            | +.08                       |
| *=<.05; **=<.01; ***=<.001                                              |                 |                 |                 |                            |

The most improved actions among **staff** included:

- Teachers sending communications about what children learn in class (+10% change in doing this routinely)
- Schools encouraging parents to reach out to other parents (+9% change in staff agreeing/strongly agreeing)
- Staff applying knowledge of parents' cultural backgrounds when collaborating with them (+8% change in staff agreeing/strongly agreeing)

School staff remarked on the survey that they increased communication through phone calls and Zoom, created more convenient times for parent-teacher conferences, developed resources with activities for families, surveyed families to get their feedback, conducted home visits, spent additional time planning family engagement activities, created a family-friendly space in the school, recorded messages to families, held more regular parent-teacher conferences, and offered more opportunities for parents to talk to the superintendent or principal. During the pandemic, schools offered drive-through events and take-home activity bags. For in-person events, they started to provide meals, childcare, and transportation, or held events in more accessible community spaces. Berea Community School linked events to learning - an essential condition of the DCBF. For example, they held a "Math Madness" event for students and families, related to the March Madness basketball tournament.

As shown in Table 6, families also reported significant increases in their knowledge of the educational system, school outreach to families, family leadership climate, and their engagement in their child’s learning. They did not report a significant increase in welcoming and responsive climate, although there was an increase.

| <b>Table 6.</b><br><b>Changes in family-reported outcomes, 2021-2023</b> |                 |                 |                 |                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Outcome Measure</b>                                                   | <b>2021 Avg</b> | <b>2022 Avg</b> | <b>2023 Avg</b> | <b>Difference, 2021-23</b> |
| Knowledge of Educational System**                                        | 4.12            | 4.14            | 4.22            | + .10                      |
| School Outreach to Families***                                           | 3.93            | 3.97            | 4.09            | + .16                      |
| Family Leadership Climate***                                             | 3.22            | 3.27            | 3.46            | + .24                      |
| Engagement in Student Learning***                                        | 2.40            | 2.41            | 2.73            | + .33                      |
| Welcoming and Responsive Climate                                         | 3.78            | 3.76            | 3.86            | + .08                      |
| *=<.05; **=<.01; ***=<.001                                               |                 |                 |                 |                            |

The most improved family engagement actions among **families** included:

- Ever attending family events (+25%) and volunteering (+22%)
- Believing teachers regularly communicate about how to help their children learn and encourage parent feedback (each +12% change in strongly agreeing)
- Perceiving stronger climate for family leadership in all areas (+10-11% change in strongly agreeing)
- Knowing special programs available at the school to help their child (+10% change in strongly agreeing)

Additionally, there was a significant increase in principals reporting that parents helped to develop family engagement activities, with 76% reporting involvement in 2021 and 91% reporting involvement in 2023. Regarding changes in families as a result of shifting schoolwide practices, one partner remarked, “These families clearly have advocacy voices that they did not have before.”

Further, statewide, FFS survey data indicated that schools overall became more linguistically responsive. The percent of schools that translated all information for parents and had signs in multiple languages increased significantly from 2021-2023. Despite these improvements, school staff frequently remarked on the survey that interpretation and translation services were woefully inadequate.

### ***Family and Staff Engagement in Family Engagement Capacity-Building Activities was Significantly Associated with Improved Outcomes***

School staff who participated in family engagement training had significantly higher scores on all outcomes. As shown in Table 7, school staff who attended a family engagement training reported a significantly higher score (between 0.30 and 0.55 higher) on all outcomes, including job satisfaction.

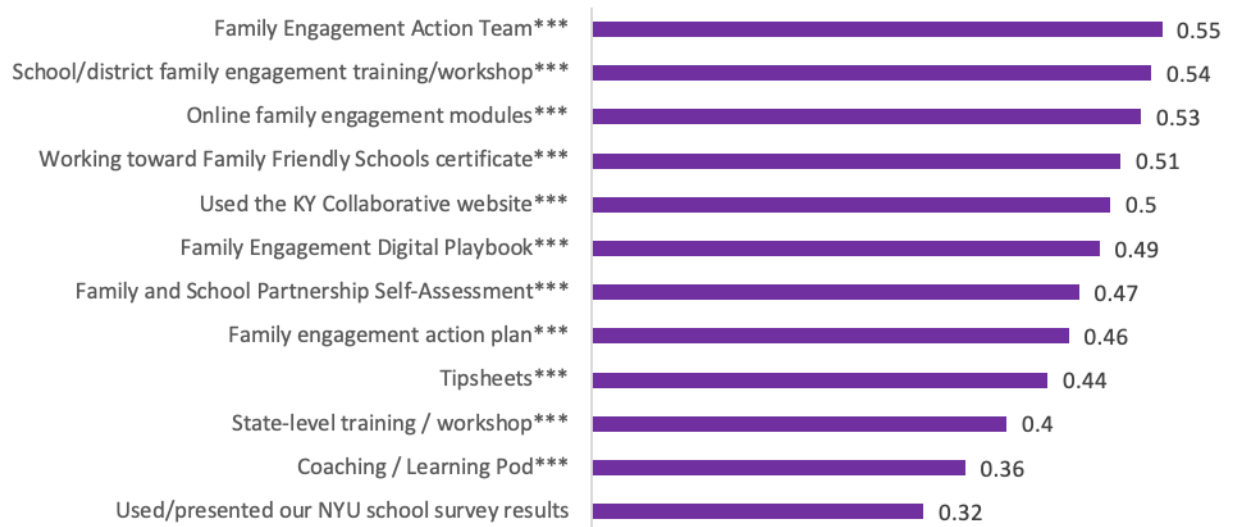
| <b>Table 7.<br/>Average outcome scores for school staff,<br/>family engagement training<br/>vs. no family engagement training</b> |                                    |                                     |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                                                                                   | <b>Avg Score - No<br/>training</b> | <b>Avg Score - Yes<br/>Training</b> | <b>Difference</b> |
| Invitations for involvement                                                                                                       | 2.85                               | 3.4                                 | +.55              |
| School outreach to families                                                                                                       | 4.07                               | 4.4                                 | +.33              |
| Family leadership climate                                                                                                         | 3.3                                | 3.6                                 | +.3               |
| Job satisfaction                                                                                                                  | 4.3                                | 4.6                                 | +.3               |
| Culturally responsive climate                                                                                                     | 4.0                                | 4.3                                 | +.3               |

Additionally, staff who attended a family engagement training or workshops were **almost twice more likely** to report a great deal of confidence with family engagement (32%), compared with staff who did not attend a training (17%), a statistically significant difference.

Staff who engaged in KY Collaborative activities reported more frequently inviting families to be engaged. Among staff who engaged in KY Collaborative activities, the average score on invitations for involvement was **3.31** (the equivalent of **between once or twice per year and every few months**), whereas staff who did not engage in KY Collaborative activities had an average score of **2.68** (the equivalent of **between every few months and monthly**).

Figure 1 shows the relationship between participation in various KY Collaborative activities and staff invitations for family involvement. For example, staff who worked on a family engagement action team reported an average score on invitations for involvement that was 0.55 points higher than that of staff who did not work on a family engagement action team. As shown in Figure 2, the **activities that were most strongly related to higher scores** on invitations for involvement included: developing a family engagement team, attending a school or district family engagement training, and working toward a Family Friendly School Certificate. Notably, these were collaborative or localized activities.

Figure 2.  
**Strength of Relationship Between KY Collaborative Activities  
and Staff Invitations for Involvement**



Families who participated in KY Collaborative programs also had significantly higher scores on all outcomes. As shown in Table 8, families who participated in KY Collaborative programs reported a significantly higher score (between 0.15 and 0.64 higher) on all outcomes.

**Table 8.**  
**Average outcome scores for families,**  
**KY Collaborative participation**  
**vs. no KY Collaborative participation**

|                                   | Avg Score -<br>No KY Collab<br>Activities | Avg Score -<br>Yes KY Collab<br>Activities | Difference |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------|
| Knowledge of Educational System** | 4.13                                      | 4.28                                       | +.15       |
| School Outreach to Families***    | 3.94                                      | 4.17                                       | +.23       |
| Family Leadership Climate***      | 3.19                                      | 3.66                                       | +.47       |
| Engagement in Student Learning*** | 2.35                                      | 2.99                                       | +.64       |
| *=<.05; **=<.01; ***=<.001        |                                           |                                            |            |

## ***A Deeper Look at how the KY Collaborative Developed Capacity***

Additional data from surveys and case studies illustrate how programs for families build their capacity, and how these effects ripple into changing school cultures to become more responsive and welcoming to families.

A 2021 CIPL Fellow, and Latina mother of four children, discussed the power of opportunities for interaction, mutual support, and knowledge exchange with peer participants and guest speakers. For instance, she learned about the U.S. educational system and how to navigate the local school district. She expressed her insecurities about her lack of knowledge about the system, the rights of her children, and how to best help them:

“*...The education system is totally different from the one I graduated from. You arrive in a new country and you do not understand anything... you are like, “Where am I going? Who do I go with? What do I do? What do I not do? What are the rights of our children? What are the opportunities out there?” ...All those things I was unaware of and it was really one of the areas in which CIPL helped me with a lot of people that they invited, with a lot of people that gave us information, resources that they provided us, they instructed us a lot on the system as well, on how it works. I cannot tell you that I handle everything, but I have a clearer notion, at the beginning I knew nothing.*

CIPL was a place where families could engage in transformation, collective action, and create more equitable systems due to the opportunities for knowledge development and exchange, leadership development, and collective action. Prior to joining the CIPL program, some families expressed feeling hesitant and insecure about how to voice their concerns and needs from schools. One CIPL Fellow credited the CIPL program for building the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to advocate for her children. She said, “I feel that these programs have awakened that confidence in me and I know how to get there or by what means to go first.”

Another CIPL fellow highlighted that CIPL taught her how to access and mobilize the social and academic resources of her children’s schools and the local community. In a welcoming and affirming space, where parents were given the opportunity to engage in conversations with families from similar backgrounds, she shared how she learned to voice what she needs from schools to facilitate access and engagement for her and other immigrant families. She affirmed: “The CIPL program gave me a lot of information that maybe I did not know about, so I could ask for help for my children [and] my children’s education...If we do not have help at school, they gave us some options of where to ask for help.”

At the end of the training series, 26 CIPL Fellows rated themselves on a series of statements before the training and after the training. As shown in Appendix G, there was positive growth in all three areas measured, with the strongest growth in leadership and decision-making (+1.42), followed by knowledge of the educational system (+1.02), followed by engagement in children’s learning (+.82). Statements with the most growth included, “I feel prepared to be an effective parent leader,” “I feel prepared to establish a home-school partnership,” and “I know special programs available at the school or district to help my child.” One partner shared, “Some of [the CIPL Fellows] didn’t even know the first person to talk to about their child maybe needing some accommodations. Now, they do.”

Although we did not study other KY Collaborative programs in depth, retrospective survey data illustrates a similar degree of impact on family capacity. As shown in Appendix G, 43 parents completed the retrospective pre-post survey for other KY Collaborative family engagement programs. The majority of these parents participated in the NCFL Family Literacy program (81%). As shown in Appendix G, there was positive growth in all three areas, with the strongest growth in knowledge of the educational system (+1.37), followed by leadership and decision-making, (+1.21), followed by engagement in children's learning (+.93). Statements with the most growth included, "I know special programs available at the school or district to help my child," "I feel prepared to be an effective parent leader," and "I understand the steps my child needs to take in order to graduate high school."

Families at Berea Community School discussed the helpfulness of another KY Collaborative program, Families and Schools Together (FAST), offered by Partners for Rural Impact. One parent said,

“*They would have a parent breakout session where they would take the kids outside to play, and parents could just shoot the breeze and ask questions about things that worried us, or scared us, or frustrated us. You'd have a bunch of people being like, 'Yes,' and so you weren't alone, you weren't crazy. There was community, group therapy a little bit...*”

As illustrated in this quote, cultivating a sense of community was a critical component of any capacity-building activity. Notably, these programs equipped parents to better support their own children academically and socially, and also developed their skills and knowledge to advocate for all children.

In this section, we have described how the KY Collaborative offerings increased state- and district-level infrastructure for parent and staff capacity building. We have offered evidence that capacity and family-school partnerships increased across the board from 2021-2023, and that perceptions of partnerships, family engagement behaviors, and confidence were higher for families and staff who engaged in capacity building activities.

According to the DCBF, capacity outcomes include educators being empowered to engage families as co-creators and honor family funds of knowledge, and families being co-creators and advocates. These outcomes require more than trainings and workshops, but rather, a fundamental shift in where power rests. In the next section, we discuss how schools, families, and communities benefit when power shifts from schools to families and communities.

## Growing Power

Mapp and Bergman state that “to move toward a new normal, we must dismantle the barriers to family engagement created by unjust power structures” (p. 8). They describe schools as places where too often, families’ expertise is “overlooked or devalued” and educators are positioned as the “providers of information and families as the needy receivers” (p. 9). Recall how we define transformational family engagement as fundamentally changing relationships between families and schools and interrupting deeply ingrained beliefs about low-income families, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families, and immigrant families to combine “the experience of educators and policymakers” with the “brilliance of young people and their families and communities” (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 34).

Typically, schools decide how families are engaged (or not). Through our case studies, we saw examples of how the capacity of families, schools, and communities grows when power grows to include families and communities. We identified three essential conditions that were present in instances where power rippled from families and communities to schools, rather than the converse: 1) creating space for families to co-create, lead, and facilitate; 2) building equitable relationships between families and schools, and 3) employing qualified and committed staff. Notably, each of these conditions involved partnerships with community-based organizations, highlighting that community is central to home-school partnerships.

### ***Creating Space for Families to Co-create, Lead, and Facilitate***

Families in each of our case study sites had the opportunity to co-create, lead, and facilitate within both community and school spaces.

AMPED grew parent power by allowing families to define what racial equity should look like in the schools. For example, families at AMPED worked for two years developing an Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit ([see example here](#)) and accompanying virtual component for each module. Meeting for weekly sessions, families engaged in deep conversations around their experiences as Black mothers of children in their local public school district, Jefferson County. Families shared stories as a catalyst for change during the first phase of toolkit development. Weekly sessions allowed AMPED staff to develop authentic and meaningful relationships with parents/caregivers by listening to their stories. Using virtual tools like Jamboard to capture what they believed was important for schools to know in order to best support their child’s academic, social, and emotional development, families co-created training resources that covered:

- 1) The importance of cultural competency (e.g. learning environments that reflect the linguistic and racial/ethnic makeup of students and their families).
- 2) The value of partnerships between schools, families, and communities to strengthen school communities, better support student learning, and build educator capacity.
- 3) The need for educational equity (e.g. tools, resources, and supports that meet the needs and uplift the assets of students and their families).

The Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit was designed to “enhance educator capacity in partnering with families,” specifically BIPOC families. AMPED, with the support of NCFL, created a virtual reality companion to the Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit utilizing the stories of families. Using Oculus goggles and Spatial programming, families designed a virtual training module for each of the 7 components of the Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit. The purpose of these virtual modules was to address learning barriers and improve academic success, including building capacity among both educators and families to better partner with one another.

With technology becoming a key factor in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, AMPED, with support from NCFL, went beyond traditional forms of family engagement. Families’ direct involvement in the co-design process resulted in a tool that allowed creativity in how they saw themselves, and encouraged educators to also be imaginative in how they build their curriculum and instructional plans to ensure that their classrooms are affirming and welcoming spaces for all students and families.

AMPED offers an example of parent leadership that is seeded in the community and then ripples out to schools. Berea Community School offers an example of how families can be invited into leadership roles within the school setting. The school held parent cafes - both virtually and in-person - that offered parents informal opportunities to connect with one another. Importantly, the school-based family engagement specialist went into the community to reach parents who were unlikely to join on their own. At an in-person parent cafe, parents rotated to different tables, each with a different discussion prompt, such as “What is your biggest fear?” The cafe offered families the opportunity to have “real conversations with parents that we didn’t [know].” Through sharing their mutual concerns, parents organically coalesced around leadership projects that mattered to them. For example, parents of children with special needs connected during a parent cafe about the need for accessible playground equipment. This connection ultimately led to a new, fully accessible playground. Here, we see an example of how growing parent power benefited the entire school community. Rather than the school telling parents what it needed, conditions were created to allow families to identify pressing needs and take action toward solutions.

### ***Building Equitable Relationships Between Families and Schools***

Relationship building between families and schools can be understood as schools cultivating authentic, equal partnership with families that is rooted in a deep knowledge and appreciation for the rich social and cultural identities, assets, habits and contexts that families bring to learning. Mapp and Bergman state that, “Fundamentally, we believe that any family engagement practice that does not explicitly seek to build and restore relational trust is ultimately doomed to fail” (p. 12). Engaging in deep and meaningful relationships with families is a continual process that requires commitment.

Once we saw power shift from schools toward families and communities, we saw more equitable relationships begin to take shape between families and schools. Across the KY Collaborative schools and across all years of our study, parents and staff alike expressed concerns about insufficient translation and interpretation services, insufficient training for teachers in how to support newcomer families, and discrimination and bullying toward

students and families due to race, sexuality, and language. Although imperfect, our case studies illustrate how equitable relationships between families and schools can be seeded in community spaces and then ripple into schools.

In Boone County, for example, the Families, Inclusion, Education, Society, Traditions, Access (also known as FIESTA) Initiative, helped families “feel empowered to advocate for their child.” FIESTA united Latinx families, district and school staff, and cross-sectoral partners from local government, businesses, community-based organizations, and public agencies. Understanding how some families had difficulty requesting interpretation services, families in FIESTA developed an introduction card, similar to a traditional business card, that read, “Hello my name is ‘name’ and my child’s ‘name’ attends this school. I am formally requesting an interpreter.” The message was in Spanish on one side and English on the other side of the card. For families who had historically been excluded in traditional schooling spaces, this card opened doors of communication, allowing families and educators to get to know each other in different ways. The card let schools know that these families wanted to be engaged but faced linguistic challenges. The cards shifted power by allowing families to be the ones to state that they needed translation rather than waiting for schools to offer it.

FIESTA families also initiated a “godparent program,” to guide newcomer families on how to navigate the school system, facilitate connections, and advise them on school policies, procedures, and events such as parent-teacher conferences and how to report a child’s absence and tardiness.

Newly aware of their rights and an understanding of who in the system had power, families in Boone County further elevated the importance of linguistic justice to district leadership. A district leader shared how Spanish-speaking parent leaders lamented how the high school graduation ceremony did not have interpretation, leaving many families unaware of what was happening on such an important day for their family. Rather than growing defensive, the leader said, “It kills me to think that we have not been employing empathy enough to even realize it to this point.” This example illustrates how an engaged and empowered group of parents can elevate issues of which the district was unaware – but also, the importance of having people in power on the other end who would listen and respond. This leader also shared the importance of integrating family engagement into everything they do, saying, “Family engagement is an integral part of our job. It’s not an add-on, it’s not an ‘if’ or it’s not a ‘maybe when I get to it,’ it’s integral to our students’ success.” To this end, he envisioned educators out in the community more: “I’d like to see us out in the community more meeting with people on their turf, because I think that would bring a lot of good trust.”

According to the DCBF, leaders across an organization must “embrace family and community engagement as indispensable to system-wide improvement” (Mapp & Bergman, p. 15). Another example of a system being receptive to parent voice happened in Berea County, where parents sent a letter to the school board in the wake of the spring 2020 racial uprisings, urging the district to prioritize equity. The letter catalyzed the district into motion, leading to the creation of a district equity committee, the hiring of a DEI coordinator, an externally-led equity audit, and a curriculum review. Parents and district staff also acted deliberately to ensure that committee membership was representative of the broader community.

### ***Employing Qualified and Committed Staff***

Lastly, qualified and committed staff who worked closely with families were present in every instance we observed transformational family engagement occurring across the KY Collaborative. This observation aligns with other literature that identifies the importance of family-facing professionals, sometimes known as cultural brokers (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru, 2019; NAFSCE, 2022). Ishimaru (2019) imagines “reciprocity and agency” to be at the core of the work of staff who work with families, supporting families to influence broader policy and reform” and “leverage their expertise about their own children to redesign systems.” The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (2022) identified four core competencies for family-facing professionals, including that they reflect, connect with families through listening and dialogue, collaborate with families, and lead alongside families to change systems.

Learning Grove had a Hispanic Family Engagement Coordinator, Theresa Cruz, who developed trusting relationships with Latinx families participating in the bilingual CIPL cohorts. She also worked with CIPL alumni to co-design and co-lead the following year’s session.

At Berea Community School, a family engagement specialist, was instrumental in creating different family engagement activities, including the parent cafes in collaboration with families, school staff, and other community members. The specialist went into the community, especially to local churches, to recruit parents to attend events and join leadership committees. While the structure for parent power existed through the state-mandated School-Based Decision-making Council, the family engagement specialist ensured that a more diverse group of families had access to this opportunity. When this role went vacant in subsequent years, there was a “sharp decrease” in family engagement opportunities, including previously recurring events and informal opportunities for families.

At AMPED, key staff members co-facilitated the Parent University and Equity in Family Engagement toolkit planning sessions. Within their roles of Family Liaison and Diversity Specialist, they held virtual and in-person meetings with families to create a safe and affirming space for them to share their stories and contribute their expertise. Families were able to define in their own words what educational equity meant to them, and what it could look like when done well. AMPED staff supported families to lead the planning and development of each of the toolkit virtual reality components, letting their stories lead the work, and providing guidance as needed.

In each of these examples, when there were qualified and committed staff present, these staff consistently: showed up, were vulnerable/honest about equity being a process and where they were as a community in that process, and valued families, their identities and cultures by ensuring that their voices and lived experiences led the work.

## Changing Policy

Scholars contend that community-driven, bottom-up approaches to change have been insufficient because they focus too narrowly on local issues and not enough on state and federal policy (Anyon, 2005; Smrekar and Mawhinney, 1999). The KY Collaborative worked to bridge these connections by working with schools, districts, and community partners to understand local needs, challenges and future possibilities, and advocate for change. The partners hoped to build long-term sustainable change in the ways families are viewed, supported, and engaged in their child's schooling by bridging relationships and connecting family engagement tools and assessments to policy through the Kentucky Department of Education.

Some specific ways the KY Collaborative worked to build sustainable family engagement throughout Kentucky included working on the following policy-related issues:

- 1. Catalyzed background check clarification from the Kentucky Education Commissioner around requirements for parent volunteerism in schools.** This shift allowed local advocates to work directly with school districts to establish alternate procedures as needed for individuals wishing to volunteer in local school districts but who do not have Social Security numbers. This policy was particularly beneficial to immigrant families, who shared their stories about the barriers they experienced in participating in activities at their children's school, such as volunteering in classrooms or on field trips. Through the advocacy of parent leaders, the policy was changed so that each local school district can develop a local board policy addressing volunteers.
- 2. Updated the statewide Kentucky School and Family Partnership Guide (known as "The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle").** This document, used widely by school-based decision-making boards and councils throughout Kentucky, was originally commissioned by the former state education commissioner in 2006. The Kentucky Collaborative updated the document in 2021. These updates were needed to help set a standard for family engagement in Kentucky, including offering key recommendations for engaging families and communities in supporting student learning. The updates also included a specific focus on equity and the need for schools to be inclusive spaces for learning, practices for uplifting student voice, and measures for sustainable family-school partnerships. Partners, families, and community members from the KY Collaborative contributed to the recommendations by providing feedback on proposed updates, highlighting key priorities, and sharing their stories and experiences in order to set a standard for family engagement in Kentucky.

**3. Influenced the reorganization of Commissioner’s Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) to the Family Partnership Council (FPC).** The KY Collaborative helped to make this council more welcoming to all caregivers and reset membership of the group to include more family seats and fewer seats to staff from family service organizations. The Kentucky Department of Education website states, “The council serves in an advisory role to KDE and provides input regarding topics of interest to families, such as ways that families and communities can assist schools in ensuring that the achievement level of all students is increased.” Renaming the council to reflect the centering of all caregivers beyond the traditional recognition of just parents ensured the council was a space that was inclusive of all family members, in name and in practice. Advocacy efforts from current members, including parent leaders, community members, and KY Collaborative partners sharing their stories and experiences in Kentucky Schools and beyond, helped advance the FPC.

**4. Advocated to uplift early literacy instruction in Kentucky.** After the passage of KY Senate Bill 9, known as the Read to Succeed Bill, the KY Collaborative Advisory Council wanted to ensure the “reading at home” requirement was taken seriously and done in a meaningful way. Together, members created a guidance document outlining the roles of families, educators, and administrators in effectively implementing reading at home strategies. The group decided the tool should be targeted to administrators to outline the mindset, systems, and conditions that would need to be in place for reading at home to be based on relationship building and 2-way communication between families and educators. This document is still a core training resource for the implementation of this bill.

Implementing these policies meant building accountability measures around family engagement. One partner described why this was important:

“ Sometimes teachers don’t have strong examples of what this looks like, and parents don’t have strong examples of what this looks like. I think if we can walk away from the grant with having been able to provide those examples that then KDE recognizes and puts accountability measures towards, I think that we will have done a very good thing.

As mentioned, sustainability was a desire of all the partners. Many partners expressed their belief that if they could shift family engagement practices statewide and get backing from KDE, policies could be created and implemented that not only modeled what effective family engagement should look like but also assessed family engagement in schools across the state. Including the percentage of schools receiving Family-Friendly School Certification on the state accountability dashboard was a major step in that direction.

## Challenges

Over the past 3 years, we observed great progress in family engagement efforts across the state of Kentucky as a result of the work of the KY Collaborative. However, we also observed opportunities for family engagement to be strengthened, including centering equity and building sustainable family engagement practices.

### Centering Equity

We previously reported an increase in diversity in Kentucky public schools and communities. As the demographics of schools and communities shift, cultural and linguistic needs change too. Yet some families continue to question how information is being shared in accessible ways, who has access to resources and tools, who is being invited to partner with schools, and how schools can be more responsive and sustaining to families' ways of being.

Although there was progress in creating more equitable relationships between families and schools, gaps remained. As shown in Table 9, there were some notable sub-group differences in the FFS survey data, underscoring that equity must still be an important goal for family engagement work. The data revealed that White parents still reported having significantly more knowledge about the educational system, stronger perceptions of school outreach to families, and stronger beliefs that schools offered a welcoming and culturally responsive climate, compared to families of color.

| <b>Table 9.</b><br><b>Differences in Parent Outcomes by Race</b> |                       |                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
|                                                                  | <b>White Families</b> | <b>Families of Color</b> |
| Knowledge about the educational system                           | 4.29                  | 3.89                     |
| School Outreach to Families                                      | 4.17                  | 3.75                     |
| Welcoming and culturally responsive climate                      | 3.90                  | 3.61                     |

As shown in Table 10, higher-income families had significantly higher scores on knowledge about the educational system, compared to lower income families (the difference was especially meaningful for families whose annual income was under \$50,000). Conversely, higher-income families had lower perceptions of climate for family leadership.

| <b>Table 10.</b><br><b>Differences in Parent Outcomes by Income</b> |                        |                             |                             |                             |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                     | <b>\$0-<br/>24,999</b> | <b>\$25,000-<br/>49,999</b> | <b>\$50,000-<br/>74,999</b> | <b>\$75,000-<br/>99,999</b> | <b>\$100,000+</b> |
| Knowledge about the educational system                              | 1.27                   | 3.94                        | 4.24                        | 4.47                        | 4.30              |
| Climate for family leadership                                       | 3.88                   | 3.46                        | 3.38                        | 3.56                        | 3.32              |

Finally, Table 11 shows that parents with a bachelor's degree reported higher scores on their support for their children's learning.

| Table 11.<br>Differences in Parent Outcomes by Education |                  |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                                                          | Bachelors degree | No bachelors degree |
| Family support for learning                              | 2.90             | 2.63                |

Creating equitable opportunities for families to engage in schooling spaces is critical to ensure that all families not only feel welcomed, but also have the resources and tools to support their child's learning in schools and at home. We found that schools valued family engagement. However, there needs to be more support for BIPOC and low-income families to participate in ways that they think are valuable, and for educators and other families to see the value that racially, ethnically, and linguistically rich families can bring with their engagement.

2020 and 2021 brought a shifting focus and priority for many schools to center conversations about equity and build responsive programs and supports, particularly around issues of racialized injustice. While the KY Collaborative worked to address histories of marginalization for BIPOC families, three years is not enough time to undo a lifetime of systemic oppression. Each year during survey collection, resistance from some families to teaching about issues related to equity and social justice was reported, with a specific reference to no Critical Race Theory (CRT) in their schools. Simultaneously, other families reported the ongoing need for racial equity and social justice work. On the open-ended survey, one participant reported:

“Confederate flags are still worn daily by students and approved of by faculty. Also, the LGBTQ community is bullied and then ignored by administration. This school has some wonderful teachers but the majority of staff, faculty and administration are not concerned with the needs of any marginalized group. And if a teacher is brave enough to try and be an example of inclusion they are not supported. Unfortunately, ignorance and fear prevail.

A parent leader in another district shared another example. When asked to share how equity work was evolving in their school, they stated:

“We don't explicitly talk about [equity]...I know I have in those meetings, brought it up... like, 'Who are we leaving out? Who are we considering? How are we considering that?' I push it because I have the opportunity to. I am not provided with it. If I weren't involved in that team, I don't know that I would have known anything or had an opportunity to say anything.

There have been increased opportunities for conversations about equity, specifically racial inequity and the need for linguistic justice. The sociopolitical context following the 2020 racial uprisings created a unique opportunity for a lot of forward progress. However, as affirmed by

one of the partners, when it comes to transformational change in family engagement that can impact the lives of those historically and presently marginalized, “all of those challenges are still there. They have not gone away.”

### **Building Sustainable Family Engagement Practices**

We have highlighted how the KY Collaborative created a sustainable infrastructure for family engagement through the FFS learning network, the Family Friendly Schools Certification, changed narratives about what meaningful family engagement looks like, and new and deepened relationships across the state, including a partnership with the state department of education.

However, we observed that on the local level, the bulk of family engagement work still too often falls on one primary family engagement person or temporary grant-funded staff. Mapp and Bergman (2019) affirmed, “Equitable engagement can only be achieved at scale if resources are provided to build and sustain capacity in schools, classrooms, and the community” (p. 15). Family engagement needs to be the responsibility for all involved parties. If maintaining authentic partnerships with families is the sole responsibility of one person, whether that’s school personnel, a district leader, or person in a board role, the work is not sustainable. If the priorities for that person change, or they are removed from that role, the relationships with families can be jeopardized.

We reported that qualified and committed staff, such as the Hispanic Family Engagement Coordinator in Boone County and the Full-Service Site at Berea, were an essential condition for equitable engagement. However, at the close of this grant, both of those positions had been eliminated/left unfilled. The work of building and maintaining relationships with families was often the responsibility of the individuals in these roles, and these vacancies challenged the stability and sustainability of the family engagement practices put into place. In fact, in the second and third years of data collection at Berea, the decrease in opportunities for families to be engaged in school-related parent leadership and decision-making spaces had already been observed, with the termination of activities such as the parent cafes and parent input into educator PD sessions. Families looked forward to these activities as an opportunity to build relationships, gain valuable tools on navigating challenging situations (e.g. remote learning during the pandemic and transitions from elementary to middle school), and learn at-home parenting practices that supported student learning.

Trying to maintain spaces for family voice to guide the work wasn’t only a concern in the case study sites. On the advisory council, we observed that as partners moved into the implementation phase, parent voice was sometimes lacking, due to various constraints, such as time, accessibility, or overall burnout.

## Summary and Key Takeaways

This report explored the impact of the Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools on creating a statewide model of transformational family engagement. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, along with partners Learning Grove, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), Partners for Rural Impact (PRI), and the Kentucky Department of Education engaged families, school staff, LEA/district leaders, and community members in programs, trainings, and other services building family engagement practices across the state.

We found that transformational family engagement happens in responsive and sustaining ways when both families and educators are equipped with the needed tools to partner together. The Kentucky Collaborative for Families and Schools developed a statewide collective impact model to build the capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence of educators and families. Our mixed methods data indicate that educators were more prepared to reach out to families, invite families to partner in school-related activities, and engage in a more culturally responsive learning environment. Subsequently more opportunities were available for families to have a more enriched knowledge of the child's educational system, establish open communication channels with their child's school, and build a better climate for family leadership.

### **Building Trust and Community so that Family Engagement Practices Are Responsive to Families**

Family engagement happens in many ways that can be invisible to teachers and schools. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the voices of those most impacted by the work play a role in determining the policies, practices, and norms that will guide the future work. When this study began, partners highlighted the histories of marginalization that impacted many families in Kentucky schools. There were clear discrepancies across language, race/ ethnic, and socioeconomic status. In 2020 and 2021, there was a “call to action” for the nation, and the Kentucky Collaborative responded by: 1) establishing expansive language and linguistic support in their programs and services, including trainings and coaching for educators, and parent leaders workshops for multilingual families, 2) creating opportunities for families to co-create and facilitate programs that were important to them, such as the Parent University sessions at AMPED and the CIPL programs in Boone County and 3) centering equity and parent voice via parent cafes, school site decision-making councils, and other parent groups.

Families feel empowered to support their child's learning and development when they're given opportunities to contribute to leadership and decision-making opportunities. Across the case studies, families played integral roles as members of decision-making councils, parent leadership organizations, and facilitators of parent leadership development workshops. For example, at Berea, parent leaders led the school's equity reform by leading curriculum reviews and identifying significant gaps in how the school was building culturally responsive education. In Boone County, parent leaders revised the volunteer background check process and implemented a godparent program. At AMPED, families shared their stories and lived experiences as mothers of children enrolled in Kentucky public schools to develop the Equity in Family Engagement Toolkit.

When schools take the time to ensure that their family engagement practices are culturally responsive and sustaining, families exercise their ability to lead and contribute to decision-making. 2020 and 2021 presented various challenges to learning, and learning could not occur without the support of families. Schools needed to rely on the partnerships that they had built with families in order to make sure that student needs continued to be met during virtual and hybrid schooling models. The KY Collaborative played an important role in making sure this happened in a way that supported both the needs of families and schools.

### **Ripple Effect of Parent Leaders via a Commitment to Equity**

Building the capacity of parent leaders, educators, and community-based organization staff ripples out to benefit the broader community. We observed qualified staff who were committed to pushing family engagement forward across Kentucky. At AMPED, services were developed to specifically target zip codes where families were most likely to experience poverty, lack of access to communal resources or thriving businesses, and other disparities. The staff worked with families to build a space where they could be their authentic selves, sharing stories about what it meant to be silenced or ignored because of their social identities (e.g. race, class, gender). Families worked in partnership with AMPED staff and community partners for years to develop a physical resource and a virtual tool that would better prepare educators to partner with BIPOC families and support the learning and development of all students.

Family engagement and equity need to be a shared responsibility for all involved, including families, schools, community members, and district and state leaders. Families have always had the ability to create tools, share knowledge, and build better learning environments for students. However, they haven't always been given the space or opportunity. The KY Collaborative made this a priority, centering the voices of families with the understanding that enhancing their 4Cs would ripple out to benefit all parties involved.

### **The Impact of the KY Collaborative as a Collective**

The Kentucky Collaborative as a Statewide Family Engagement Center, had a collective hope of establishing a sustainable model of transformational family engagement. Together, they were able to impact the lives of families, communities, schools, and districts in ways that weren't possible as individual organizations. The Prichard Committee, the lead grantee, was identified by partners as the "backbone organization." The Prichard Committee, in collaboration with Learning Grove, NCFL, and PRI created a guiding vision for partnering with families in authentic ways, by engaging in intentional practices such as increasing their focus on racial equity and linguistic justice. This vision was supported by the Kentucky Department of Education via the implementation of statewide policies and practices that supported the Collaborative's definition of family engagement.

The KY Collaborative worked to have widespread reach across the state of Kentucky, with each partner contributing their unique approach to engaging the families and schools in their targeted area. Relying on each partner's niche to build a more liberatory and inclusive model of family engagement allowed for a broader impact across the state. In Northern Kentucky, Learning Grove had the cultural knowledge and experience in engaging multilingual families, which helped the KY Collaborative engage more Spanish-speaking families. PRI supported

the KY Collaborative to bring conversations about educational equity and family engagement into rural Kentucky. NCFL shared programming across the KY Collaborative so that families, regardless of where they resided or from which partner they received direct services, were able to participate in a 6-week Family Literacy Program, which “provided parents with educational opportunities and strategies to advocate for their children’s learning both at home and school.” Additionally, each of the partners leveraged their relationships across the state to build the Family Friendly Schools Network. The state department of education, as a partner in this work, helped sustain the Collaborative’s efforts by publishing guidance for how family engagement should occur in schools, between educators and families, and in community spaces.

Over the course of this grant, the KY Collaborative engaged in meaningful work that shifted the family engagement landscape of Kentucky. Partners discussed how they would continue to support one another’s ongoing family engagement initiatives. One partner shared, “I think if nothing else, we all now know someone in another part of the state that we can call for creative ideas.” The relationships, initiatives, and policies that were developed through the SFEC funding are now being channeled into the Prichard Committee’s federal full-service community schools grant, awarded in 2022.

While challenges still exist, the work of the KY Collaborative will have long-standing impacts on the families, communities, educators and district leaders in Kentucky as well serve as an example of integrated, sustainable, and transformational family engagement for other SFECs, policy makers, and researchers.



## Recommendations

We conclude by sharing a few key recommendations for each of the following groups.

### Families

- Your expertise matters. Share your knowledge, cultural understandings, and rearing practices to build better learning environments.
- Build meaningful relationships with your child's school to have a significant impact on the academic, social, and emotional development of your child and other students.
- Seek out resources, build partnerships, and use your voice to shift the policies and practices within your school and community.

### Community Partners

- Commit to building intentional spaces where families feel welcomed and supported in sharing their stories.
- Target services and supports to be responsive to the needs of families/communities, including language accessibility. Be prepared to shift focus as needed.
- Employ staff who are committed to the process, and want to uplift the voices, needs, and assets of families.
- Consider partnering with existing services providers when creating new programs. The blueprint for the work may already exist.

### Educators and District Leaders

- Focus on giving families opportunities to lead, building equitable relationships between families and schools. Ensure that school policies, values, and norms are developed in partnership with families.
- Employ qualified and committed family-facing professionals.
- Build educator capacity for family engagement, prioritizing opportunities for educators and families to learn and act together.

### Statewide Family Engagement Centers

- Include partners with deep authentic relationships with families.
- Be ready to pivot in response to local and national events that affect families.
- Sustain opportunities for family voice through the implementation phase.

## Policymakers

- Dismantle institutional and structural barriers to family engagement, including increased hiring of more diverse school staff, resources, supports, and translation services for multilingual families, family engagement specialists for all schools/districts.
- Provide clear and consistent policies uplifting a sustainable model of transformational family engagement.
- Increase resources to support dual-capacity building for families (e.g. parent leadership training/ family engagement workshops) and educators (e.g. professional learning/ racial equity and social justice training / cultural competence).

## Researchers

- Expand asset-based frameworks centering the lived experiences of families, especially historically and presently marginalized families.
- Examine how to dismantle power structures that impede equitable family-school partnerships.



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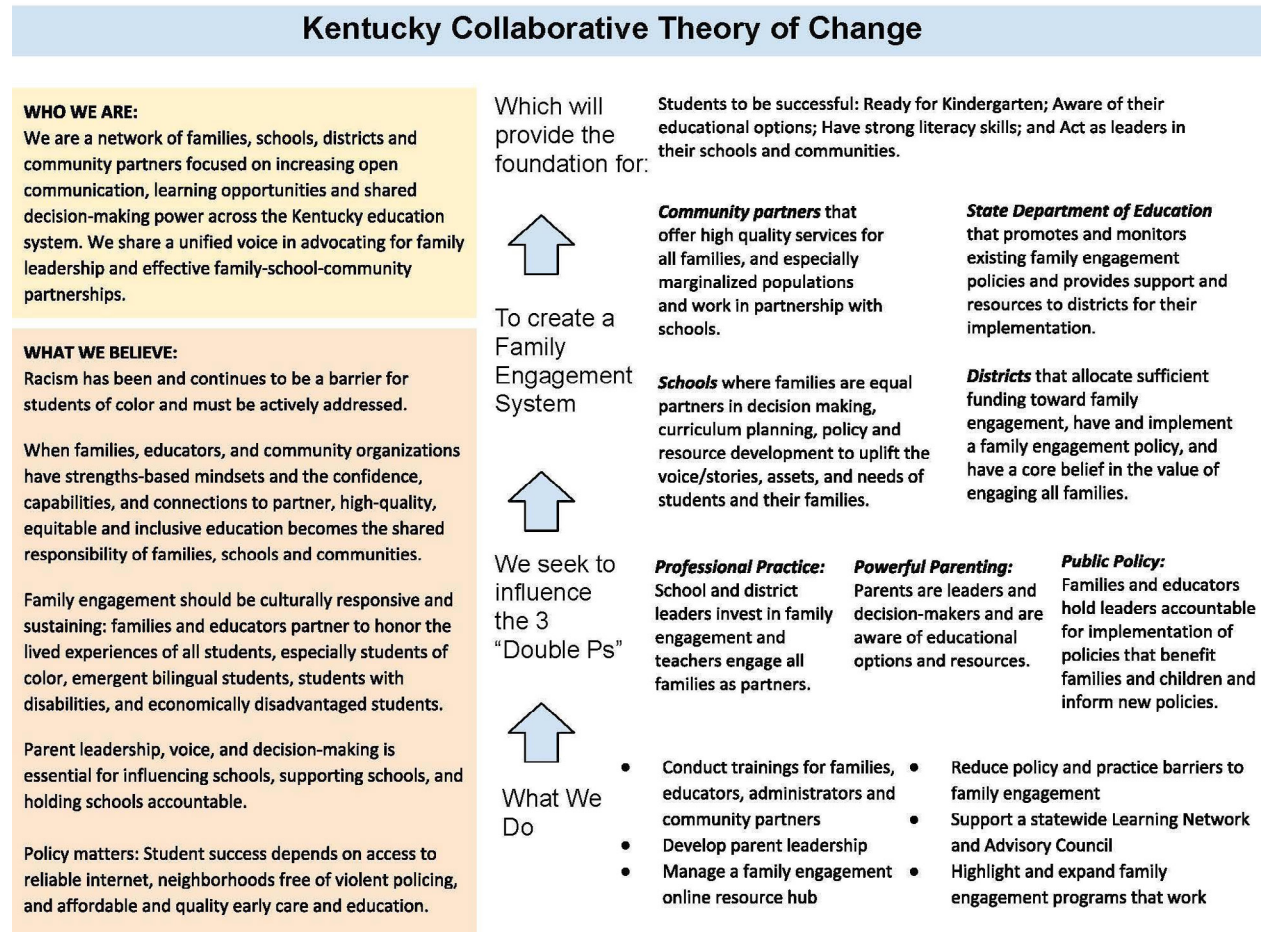
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# Appendices

## Appendix A. Theory of Change



## **Appendix B. Methods**

### **Survey Data**

The primary survey we used to assess outcomes was administered in the FFS schools, and was termed the “FFS Survey.” We supplemented the FFS survey with several additional surveys:

- Partner implementation survey: Each partner agency rated each of the schools they supported on their engagement with KY Collaborative supports, such as frequency of contact, type of supports used, and duration of engagement.
- Event exit survey: Participants in one-off family engagement events, such as workshops, conferences, and advisory council meetings completed a brief survey immediately after the event.
- Parent high-impact activity retrospective survey: Parents participating in high-impact family engagement programs took a survey reflecting on their capacity before and after the program.

Because the FFS survey was most closely related to the project’s research questions, we mainly discuss this survey in the methods below and in our findings. However, we make some references to the other surveys throughout the findings.

### ***Data Collection***

Each school was responsible for disseminating the survey to families and staff in spring 2021, 2022, and 2023. They distributed the survey through whichever channels they preferred, including e-mail, newsletters, events, and social media. We provided a communications toolkit to assist this process and sent a weekly update to schools detailing how many respondents they had. Schools that had 30+ families respond and 15+ staff respond received an individualized report with their results. In 2021, 22 schools met these criteria, in 2022, 36 schools met these criteria, and in 2023, 18 schools met these criteria.

### ***Instruments***

The surveys measured indicators of home-school partnerships that are positively correlated with academic improvement. The surveys included a combination of scales, individual items, and closed- and open-ended questions.

The teacher survey measured teacher invitations for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005), school outreach to families (University of Chicago, 2018), teacher capacity for culturally responsive family engagement (NYC School Survey), and perceptions of climate for family leadership (University of Chicago, 2018). The survey also included individual items designed to assess capacity for home-school partnerships, including confidence in engaging families, opportunities for training, and support from the district and state. Staff had the option of answering open-ended questions, including “What policies or practices are barriers to family engagement?”; “Please describe any ways your district or school has reduced barriers to family engagement in the past year”; and “Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the KY Collaborative or family engagement?”

Like the staff survey, the parent survey also measured school outreach to families and perceptions of climate for family leadership. Additionally, the survey measured family perceptions of the school’s culturally responsiveness (Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Project, 2015) and family support for learning (Panorama). The survey also asked parents about barriers to family engagement. Parents had the option of answering an open-ended question, “Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with your child’s school or KY Collaborative programs?”

### **Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Stata. To assess subgroup differences, we estimated an ordinary least squares regression model in which the scale score was regressed on indicators of each subgroup (withholding one subgroup as a reference category). For variables with two categories (e.g., earned HS diploma vs. did not earn HS diploma), we examined the regression coefficient that compared one category to the other and assessed its statistical significance. For variables with more than two categories (e.g., school role), we tested for the equality of each possible pair of regression coefficients and noted which pairs were statistically significantly different from each other.

### **Sample Demographics**

In total, there were approximately 4,900 parent responses across the three years, including repeat responses from parents who participated in the survey over multiple years, and/or who took the survey for multiple schools within the same year. Similar to the statewide population, the sample was overwhelmingly White (Table 11), with English as the primary language spoken at home (Table 12). There was a wide income distribution (Table 13).

| <b>Table 12.</b><br><b>Racial Demographics of Parent and Staff Survey Respondents,</b><br><b>Averaged 2021-2023</b> |                |                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
|                                                                                                                     | <b>Parents</b> | <b>Teachers</b> |
| American Indian or Alaska Native                                                                                    | 2.2%           | <1%             |
| Asian                                                                                                               | 1.6%           | <1%             |
| Black or African American                                                                                           | 5.7%           | 2.7%            |
| Hispanic, Latino/Latinx, or Spanish Origin                                                                          | 2.2%           | 1.8%            |
| Middle Eastern or North African                                                                                     | <1%            | <1%             |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander                                                                                 | <1%            | <1%             |
| White                                                                                                               | 88%            | 92%             |

*Note. Respondents could select as many racial groups as necessary.*

**Table 13.**  
**Languages Spoken Among Parent Respondents,**  
**Averaged 2021-2023**

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| <b>Arabic</b>  | <1%  |
| <b>Chinese</b> | <1%  |
| <b>English</b> | 97%  |
| <b>Somali</b>  | <1%  |
| <b>Spanish</b> | 1.5% |
| <b>Other</b>   | 1.7% |

**Table 14.**  
**Household Income of Parent Respondents,**  
**Averaged 2021-2023**

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| <b>\$0 -\$24,999</b>      | 12% |
| <b>\$25,000 -\$49,999</b> | 19% |
| <b>\$50,000 -\$74,999</b> | 20% |
| <b>\$75,000 -\$99,999</b> | 20% |
| <b>\$100,000 or more</b>  | 30% |

| <b>Table 15.</b><br><b>Role of School Staff, Averaged,</b><br><b>Averaged 2021-2023</b> |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Classroom Teacher</b>                                                                | 55% |
| <b>Special ed teacher</b>                                                               | 8%  |
| <b>Paraprofessional</b>                                                                 | 9%  |
| <b>Specialist (e.g., Art, PE)</b>                                                       | 6%  |
| <b>Counselor/social worker</b>                                                          | 3%  |
| <b>Administrative staff</b>                                                             | 4%  |
| <b>Principal</b>                                                                        | 4%  |
| <b>Assistant principal</b>                                                              | 2%  |
| <b>Family resource coordinator</b>                                                      | 2%  |
| <b>Instructional coach</b>                                                              | 2%  |
| <b>Nurse</b>                                                                            | 1%  |
| <b>Custodial staff</b>                                                                  | 1%  |
| <b>Other</b>                                                                            | 5%  |

In total, there were approximately 3,250 responses from school staff across the 3 years, also including repeat responses over time. The teacher sample was 92% White, 2.7% Black, and 1.8% Hispanic/Latino/a/e/x (Table 11). Over half of the school staff completing the survey were classroom teachers (Table 14).

## **Partner Interviews**

### ***Sample***

KY Collaborative staff members were asked to identify key team members to engage in yearly interviews. Partners were selected based on their engagement in KY Collaborative bi-weekly meetings, advisory council meetings, or engaged in other key areas of KY Collaborative programs and services.

### ***Data Collection***

We conducted in-depth interviews with KY Collaborative partners annually from 2020 to 2023, totaling 33 interviews with X individuals. We established rapport with participants prior to scheduling and conducting interviews by spending time in virtual meetings with each partner organization. Using a topical interview protocol, we conducted semi-structured individual interviews via Zoom. Interviews were conversational in nature and guided by

active listening and probing (Patton 1990). An example of key questions we asked during the interview include:

- Over the past year how have you prioritized family engagement?
- Over the past year how have you prioritized developing parent leaders?
- How have you adjusted your services and programs due to COVID-19?
- What would you describe as the leading successes and challenges of your organization in relation to the KY Collaborative? Why?
- How would you describe the work the Kentucky Collaborative has achieved so far?
- In your opinion, what, if anything, is different for families in Kentucky because the KY Collaborative exists?

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 min and was audio-recorded. Extensive observational notes were also taken. Other forms of data collection included observations of weekly partner meetings, monthly advisory council meetings, and SFEC evaluator meetings. An observation protocol was used to collect data in these meetings that assessed who was present, who spoke and when, what were the main points of conversation, and what were identified as key takeaways. Documents were also collected at each of these meetings (e.g., agendas, fliers distributed by hosts/participants, and any slides from presentations).

## ***Analysis***

We transcribed audio recordings verbatim and checked for quality by the documentation team. Multiple researchers coded all interview data. We used an emic coding method (e.g., focused on policies, practices, conditions, and beliefs of the collective KY Collaborative partners) (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lincoln and Denzin 2003) to identify the themes and patterns within and across regional sites. Data analysis also entailed creating data displays (e.g., proximity matrices and descriptive data displays) and memoing, which assisted in the organization and comparison of partners' responses from the interviews. Specifically, we used proximity matrices to process, organize, and analyze the large amount of interview data across regional partners (Saldaña and Omasta 2016). The proximity matrices contained data about how alike and different partners' responses were (Bernard and Ryan 2010). We used descriptive data displays to assist in the coding of KY Collaborative documents, publications, and observations to analyze descriptions, definitions, activities, people, and locations presented in printed materials and observed activities. Through the use of data displays, we were better able to identify patterns and themes, similarities, and differences, and make valid interpretations.

## ***Case Studies***

In collaboration with KY Collaborative staff, we selected three case study sites: the Berea Community Elementary School in the Appalachian region, the Boone County School District in northern Kentucky, and the Adventurous Minds Produce Extraordinary Dreams (AMPED) in Louisville. Regional partners recommended these sites because of their innovative approaches to family engagement. Our case study approach focused on one community center, one

school, and one district to demonstrate the ways systemic, integrated, and sustainable family engagement occurs in different settings, specifically highlighting the ways in which families and educators can both be empowered in these different settings.

### ***Sample***

The sample varied depending on the site, but a priority across all sites was speaking to families, particularly families of color, emergent bilingual families, low-income families, and families who have children with special needs. Beyond families, interviewees included district administrators, program staff, teachers, and family engagement coordinators.

### ***Data Collection***

The regional KY Collaborative partners for these three sites supported introductions and relationship-building. A researcher was assigned to each case study site and was responsible for outreach, recruitment, data collection, and analysis in their particular site. Data collection at each site occurred annually, from spring 2021-summer 2023. All interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom. Interviewees completed a brief demographic survey at the start of their interview. Parents received a \$20 gift card for participating in an interview or focus group, and teachers were entered into a raffle. Observations were conducted virtually and in-person, depending on the case study site. Relevant documents were collected and analyzed across all sites.

The research team co-developed interview protocols for a) parents; b) parent leaders; c) principals; d) teachers; and e) district administrators; and f) community-based organization staff. The questions were informed by research on equitable home-school partnerships, the Dual Capacity Building Framework, and parent leadership and decision-making (see Appendix C-F). When possible, the same questions were asked across all participant groups.

### ***Analysis***

We used similar methods to analyze the case study data as the partner interview data. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The research team decided on a set of codes to apply across all case studies, using themes from the interview protocols. Each case study researcher applied additional codes that were relevant to their unique site. Emergent themes were discussed among the research team.

## **Appendix C. Partner Protocol**

### **Introductory Comments:**

I would first like to start by welcoming you today and thank you for participating in this interview. I am here to discuss [organization] as part of an evaluation of the KY Collaborative. There are no wrong answers to the questions that I am asking, so please feel free to answer each question openly. You are free to skip any question you wish if you aren't comfortable answering.

### **Statement on Confidentiality:**

An audio-recorder will be used to record this session in effort to maintain the integrity of the dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential and only the researchers will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential and any information recorded will be solely used for research purposes. All data will be synthesized into common themes so as not to identify any individual. Should we need to identify you for any reason, we will ask your permission to do so.

Do you have any questions before we start?

### **Opening Questions:**

1. Over the past year how have you prioritized family engagement?
  - a. Can you provide an example of what this looked like in practice? (Series, programs, workshops)
2. Over the past year how have you prioritize developing parent leaders?
  - a. Can you provide an example of what this looked like in practice? (Series, programs, workshops)
3. How have your programs and services continued to adjust over the last year due to COVID-19?
  - a. Have you resumed in-person activities? What have you learned as a service provider during this time?

### **Organizational Impact:**

4. What would you describe as the leading successes of [organization name] in relation to the KY Collaborative? Why?
5. What would you describe as the leading challenges of [organization name] in relation to the KY Collaborative? Why? In what ways does [organization name] address these challenges?

**Alignment with SFEC:**

6. What is your understanding of what the collective hope for what a statewide model of family engagement could achieve in Kentucky?
7. How is backbone org supporting the key principles of the collective impact model?
  - a. Shared agenda, continuously communication, mutually reinforcing activities, strength of backbone organization, shared measurement
  - b. What changes would you make, if any?
8. How would you describe the work the Kentucky Collaborative has achieved so far?
  - a. How has this work met your hopes and expectations?
  - b. How would you shift this work to continue to uplift family engagement in Kentucky?
  - c. How has this work been influenced by events in the country, Kentucky, or your community?
  - d. How – if at all – has parent and family voice contributed to successes of the KY Collaborative?
  - e. In your opinion, what, if anything, is different for families in Kentucky because the KY Collaborative exists? (Please consider the KY Collaborative as a whole and not just your organization.)
    - i. How have families that have been historically marginalized due to race, language, class, immigration, religion, disability, or something else, benefited? Where is there room for improvement?
    - ii. What about the KY Collaborative – as opposed to the individual organizations – is driving these successes? How do you know?
9. What would you like to achieve with the KY Collaborative if extended funding is received?
  - a. Who do you imagine are the key members in making this happen?
  - b. How does this align with dual capacity building for educators and families?
  - c. What role might public policy change play?

**Evaluation:**

10. What do you think you've most learned/ better understood about the KY Collaborative during our first two years of evaluation?
11. What would you like to continue learning from our evaluation? What don't you know, that if you did could improve family engagement in Kentucky?
12. Do you have any suggestions regarding how our evaluation can be most useful to your organization and to the SFEC as a whole?
13. Would you reflect on how the evaluation team has been a useful partner in what they KY Collaborative is trying to achieve?

**Closing:**

14. Thank you again for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **Appendix D. Case Study Partner Protocol**

### **Opening Questions:**

How many children do you have in this school? What grades are they in?

How long have your children attended this school?

What is special or unique about this school?

Have you ever participated in a KY Collaborative program? [Prichard Committee, Learning Grove, Partners for Rural Impact, NCFL]

Have you ever participated in a family engagement or parent leadership program? If yes, which one?

### **Engagement, Leadership, and Decision-Making:**

How would you describe family engagement?

- What does an engaged parent look like?
- Can you discuss an example of when you've been engaged in your child's education in a way that you believe made a difference?

How would you describe parent leadership?

- What does a parent leader look like?
- Can you describe a time you've been a leader in your child's education in a way that you believe made a difference?
- Has there ever been a time when you've been a leader in your child's education that you didn't feel like made a difference?

How important do you think it is for families and school to be partners?

- Describe what it should look like for families and schools to work together
- Do you see this happening in this school? Why or why not?
- How important is it that families are included in decision-making at the school? Including school level policies and curriculum.
- If you are involved in the decision-making process, how valued do you feel by your child's teachers/ school staff? How do you know?
- In what ways can your child's school better partner with families?

What policies do you see as an asset to your child's education?

What policies do you see as a barrier to family engagement? (e.g. transportation, work, family/ other commitments, etc.)

What are qualities of a good teacher?

- Do you feel that your child's teacher has these qualities? Why or why not?
- How does your child's teacher communicate with you? What does s/he communicate about? How useful is this communication?

Can you describe how you felt the first time you came to this school?

- How welcome, valued, and respected did you feel?
- What made you feel this way?
- What might have helped you feel more welcome, valued, or respected?

How well do you know the family members of your child's classmates?

Do you hope to get to know them better? Why or why not?

### **Child Learning and Parental Support:**

What are the ways you believe parents can best support their child's learning?

- How does this look in schools?
- How does this look in your community?

How prepared do you feel to support your child's learning? What resources or supports in your home/school/ community prepared you for this? What additional resources or supports would be helpful?

How would you describe your at-home parenting practices? How does this support your child's learning at school?

When you have questions about how to support your child's learning, who do you ask?

Can you describe an example of when you asked for a support in your child's learning?

### **Closing Question:**

If you had the power to develop a perfect family engagement model at your child's school, what would it look like? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we have talked about today?

## Appendix E. District Staff Interview Protocol

### Opening Questions:

What is your role in the district?

How long have you been in this role?

What do you consider special or unique about this district?

Can you identify any resources your district offers to support parents in engaging their children at home/ school/ in their community?

Engagement, Leadership, and Decision-Making:

How would you describe family engagement?

- What does an engaged parent look like in your school/district?
- Can you discuss an example of an engaged parent in your district schools?

How would you describe parent leadership?

- What does a parent leader look like?
- Can you describe what a parent leader would look like in your district schools?

**How has your experience been as part of the [Family Friendly Learning Network](#)? (family friendly school certification process with learning modules and activities for teams (parents and more likely school staff) at schools).**

Can you describe how your district developed their family engagement framework?

- Are you familiar with the Dual Capacity Building Framework?
- How do you see your district aligning with this model?
- How do you engage in capacity building for families? For teachers or other educators/ school staff in your district?

How do you believe parents can best support their child's learning?

- How does this look in schools?
- How does this look in the community?

How important do you think it is for families and school to be partners?

- In what ways do you think family/school partnerships are best made?
- What strategies does your district use to engage families? How effective are those strategies? What changes have you seen as a result?
- What strategies does your district use to engage historically marginalized families? (e.g. race, SES, ELL, SWDs)? How effective are those strategies? What changes have you seen as a result?
- How important is it that families are included in decision-making in your district? Including school level policies and curriculum?

How do you work to ensure that families feel valued in your district?

- What steps do you take as a district for families to feel valued?
- How does your district build relationships with families?
- How does your district prioritize families' needs?
- In what ways can your district better support families in being engaged?

When a new teacher starts in your district, are there norms that are conveyed to them about how teachers are expected to engage families?

- What are these norms and how are they conveyed? For example, how do district leaders talk about family engagement?

What formal opportunities, if any, have you had this year to talk about family engagement with your colleagues? For example, at district meetings? How helpful were these opportunities?

How do you know when family engagement is working really well? How do you measure it?

Can you describe any challenges with family engagement in your district?

- What are challenges for teachers/staff?
- What are challenges for families?
- What supports or resources would help to address these challenges?

### **Closing Question:**

If you had the power to develop a perfect family engagement model for your district, what would it look like? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we have talked about today?

## **Appendix F. Principal/ School Staff Interview Protocol**

### **Opening Questions:**

What is your role in the school?

How long have you been in this role?

What do you consider special or unique about this school?

Can you describe what a typical day is like for you?

What do you believe is the role of parents/ families in your school?

What resources does your school offer to support parents in engaging their children at home/ school/ in their community?

To confirm, your school has worked with [name KY Collab partner-Prichard Committee, Learning Grove, Partners for Rural Impact, NCFL]

- What has been your experience with?
- What do you think of their programs/services currently offered to families in your school?

How has your experience been as part of the [Family Friendly Learning Network](#)? (family friendly school certification process with learning modules and activities for teams (parents and more likely school staff) at schools).

### **Engagement, Leadership, and Decision-Making:**

How would you describe family engagement?

- What does an engaged parent look like?
- Can you discuss an example of an engaged parent in your school?

How would you describe parent leadership?

- What does a parent leader look like?
- Can you describe what a parent leader would look like in your school?

Can you describe how your school developed their family engagement framework?

- Are you familiar with the Dual Capacity Building Framework?
- How do you see your school aligning with this model?
- How do you engage in capacity building for families? For teachers or other educators/ school staff?

How do you believe parents can best support their child's learning?

- How does this look in schools?
- How does this look in the community?

How important do you think it is for families and school to be partners?

- In what ways do you think family/school partnerships are best made?
- What strategies do you use to engage families? How effective are those strategies? What changes have you seen as a result?
- What strategies do you use to engage historically marginalized families? (e.g. race, SES, ELL, SWDs)? How effective are those strategies? What changes have you seen as a result?
- How important is it that families are included in decision-making at the school? Including school level policies and curriculum?

How do you work to ensure that families feel valued at your school?

- What steps do you take as a school leader/teacher for families to feel valued?
- How do you build relationships with families?
- How do you prioritize families' needs?
- In what ways can you better support families in being engaged?

When a new teacher starts in the school, are there norms that are conveyed to him or her about how teachers are expected to engage families?

- What are these norms and how are they conveyed? For example, how does the principal talk about family engagement?
- Do teachers share strategies with one another?

What formal opportunities, if any, have you had this year to talk about family engagement with your colleagues? For example, at faculty meetings or in common planning time? How helpful were these opportunities?

How do you know when family engagement is working really well? How do you measure it?

What assets does your school currently have to engage families?

- Strengths of teachers and families?
- Policies currently in practice?

Can you describe any challenges with family engagement at this school?

- What are challenges for teachers/staff?
- What are challenges for families?
- What supports or resources would help to address these challenges?
- When you have questions on how to support families, who do you ask?

### **Closing Question:**

If you had the power to develop a perfect family engagement model at your school, what would it look like? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we have talked about today?

## Appendix G. Survey Tables

| <b>Table 16.</b><br><b>Parents' ratings of family engagement</b><br><b>before and after participation</b><br><b>in intensive family engagement programs</b> |                                                                                                     |               |              |               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
|                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                     | <b>Before</b> | <b>After</b> | <b>Change</b> |
| <b>Engagement in children's learning (+.93)</b>                                                                                                             | How often do you have conversations with your child about what his/her class is learning at school? | 3.59          | 4.51         | +.93          |
|                                                                                                                                                             | How often do you help your child engage in educational activities outside the home?                 | 3.41          | 4.42         | +1.01         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | How often do you help your child understand the content s/he is learning in school?                 | 3.61          | 4.49         | +.88          |
|                                                                                                                                                             | How often do you and your child talk when s/he is having a problem with others at school?           | 3.68          | 4.58         | +.91          |
| <b>Knowledge of educational system (+1.37)</b>                                                                                                              | <b>I know special programs available at the school or district to help my child.</b>                | 2.92          | 4.56         | +1.63         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I know how well my child is doing academically in school.                                           | 3.32          | 4.58         | +1.26         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | <b>I understand the steps my child needs to take in order to graduate high school.</b>              | 3.21          | 4.54         | +1.34         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I know who to talk with at school regarding my concerns or questions about my child's education.    | 3.26          | 4.50         | +1.24         |
| <b>Leadership and decision-making (+1.21)</b>                                                                                                               | <b>I feel prepared to be an effective parent leader.</b>                                            | 3.16          | 4.53         | +1.37         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I feel prepared to make decisions about my child's education.                                       | 3.47          | 4.63         | +1.16         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I feel prepared to actively engage in my child's school.                                            | 3.42          | 4.58         | +1.17         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I feel prepared to support my child's learning.                                                     | 3.63          | 4.67         | +1.04         |
|                                                                                                                                                             | I feel prepared to establish a home-school partnership.                                             | 3.28          | 4.59         | +1.03         |

Twenty-six CIPL Fellows completed a retrospective pre-post survey. At the end of the training series, they rated themselves on a series of statements before the training and after the training. The statements related to the following:

- The frequency of engaging in their child's learning (1=Almost Never, 2=Once in a While, 3=Sometimes, 4=Frequently, 5=Almost all the Time)
- Knowledge of the school system (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)
- Leadership and decision-making (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree)

There was positive growth in all three areas, with the most positive growth in leadership and decision-making (+1.42), followed by knowledge of educational system (+1.02), followed by engagement in children's learning (+.82). Statements with the most growth included, "I feel prepared to be an effective parent leader," "I feel prepared to establish a home-school partnership," and "I know special programs available at the school or district to help my child."

| <b>Table 17.</b><br><b>Parents' ratings of family engagement</b><br><b>before and after</b><br><b>participation in CIPL training</b> |                                                                                                     |               |              |               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
|                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                     | <b>Before</b> | <b>After</b> | <b>Change</b> |
| <b>Engagement in children's learning (+.82)</b>                                                                                      | How often do you have conversations with your child about what his/her class is learning at school? | 3.96          | 4.65         | +.69          |
|                                                                                                                                      | How often do you help your child engage in educational activities outside the home?                 | 3.83          | 4.76         | +.93          |
|                                                                                                                                      | How often do you help your child understand the content s/he is learning in school?                 | 3.63          | 4.65         | +1.03         |
|                                                                                                                                      | How often do you and your child talk when s/he is having a problem with others at school?           | 4.25          | 4.89         | +.64          |
| <b>Knowledge of educational system (+1.02)</b>                                                                                       | <b>I know special programs available at the school or district to help my child.</b>                | 3.05          | 4.38         | +1.34         |
|                                                                                                                                      | I know how well my child is doing academically in school.                                           | 3.92          | 4.62         | +.70          |
|                                                                                                                                      | I understand the steps my child needs to take in order to graduate high school.                     | 3.36          | 4.45         | +1.09         |
|                                                                                                                                      | I know who to talk with at school regarding my concerns or questions about my child's education.    | 3.59          | 4.55         | +.96          |
| <b>Leadership and decision-making (+1.42)</b>                                                                                        | <b>I feel prepared to be an effective parent leader.</b>                                            | 2.8           | 4.52         | +1.72         |
|                                                                                                                                      | I feel prepared to make decisions about my child's education.                                       | 3.4           | 4.71         | +1.31         |
|                                                                                                                                      | I feel prepared to actively engage in my child's school.                                            | 3.28          | 4.52         | +1.24         |
|                                                                                                                                      | I feel prepared to support my child's learning.                                                     | 3.58          | 4.71         | +1.23         |
|                                                                                                                                      | <b>I feel prepared to establish a home-school partnership.</b>                                      | 3.04          | 4.70         | +1.66         |