*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley  *Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:** | November 7, 2022 |
| **Subject:** | Family Engagement: Review of October 28, 2022 Summit and Next Steps |

As previewed at last month’s Board meeting, on October 28, 2022 more than 400 family members, educators, administrators, and state organizations participated in the *Better Together: Strengthening Family School Partnership* summit in Sturbridge, organized by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and numerous partners. The summit was an opportunity to foster an understanding of family engagement and model strategies for creating and strengthening meaningful partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations.

Twenty-nine school districts sent family school partnership teams to the event. The day included keynote addresses from Deputy Commissioner Regina Robinson and myself, and a workshop session led by Board member Mary Ann Stewart. Participants joined a total of 37 workshops focused on a wide range of effective family partnership practices, including tapping family members as literacy advocates, improving school family communication, the new IEP improvement project initiative, strategies for supporting multilingual families, leveraging social media for family partnership, and many more. More than 40 family members and educators also joined a special session facilitated by the Department where they shared their thoughts on the future of learning in Massachusetts. To see pictures and social media posts from the day, visit Twitter [#SchoolFamilyMA](https://twitter.com/hashtag/SCHOOLFAMILYMA?src=hashtag_click). The Department’s Office of Student and Family Support will continue to [provide ongoing support](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bvumWa9OsKKJCJa9lClUGfH1aS8pwJqutMd-OOjMCIg/edit?usp=share_link) to districts interested in deepening family partnerships.

The day focused on ways to strengthen family engagement, with this Department definition in mind: *Family engagement builds relationships between students, families, educators, and the community. These relationships over time develop into meaningful partnerships rooted in the strengths and assets of all.*

* *Family engagement is an intentional, authentic, respectful, and equal partnership between educators and families with the ultimate goal of positive results for children and youth.*
* *Effective family engagement is culturally responsive, collaborative, equitable, and respectful of families' diverse languages, norms, and values.*
* *Effective engagement strives to eliminate barriers to participation.*
* *These engagement practices take place in schools, in the community, and wherever students and their family live and learn.*

**Supporting Families and School Districts After the Summit**

Family and community engagement is an integral part of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and can be deeply woven into the design of all educational initiatives. Schools and districts are expected to actively engage families and community members in developing state and local education plans for the use of funds including [Federal grants such as Title I, Part A](https://www.doe.mass.edu/federalgrants/titlei-a/) that provides financial assistance to districts and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. Additionally, schools are required to partner with stakeholders including families in the development of school improvement plans for [schools identified for support and improvement](https://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/level4/) under ESSA.

Below are examples of resources and supports that the Department is providing, sponsoring, and promoting in partnership with other organizations, to help families and school districts deepen family school partnerships. Updated information regarding these resources will be available this fall on the Student and Family Support’s [Family Engagement webpage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/?section=family).

**Professional Development, Training, Networking, and Consultation**

* **Family Engagement Professional Development and Networking Series:** Regular opportunities are offered throughout the school year for family liaisons, coordinators, and other staff leading family engagement work to connect and learn together.
* **Massachusetts Family Institute for Student Success (FISS)**: An in-depth training opportunity for teachers, administrators, and community partners (9 hours + follow-along training opportunities) will be provided this school year. FISS promotes cultural and linguistically responsive two-way communication that elevates family voices to support systemic change.
* **Massachusetts Family School Partnership Initiative (FSPI)**: FSPI is a highly supported opportunity for district teams to use the *Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals* and stakeholder feedback to reflect on family partnership strengths, opportunities, and priorities.
* **Parent and Community Education and Involvement Advisory Council (PCEIAC):** The PCEIAC provides family members and family engagement coordinators an opportunity to inform and advise the Department on policy issues related to student success.
* **Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center** **Train the Trainers (ToT):** Through our Statewide Family Engagement Center (SFEC) grant, training for educators, healthcare providers, child development professionals, and other youth-serving community organizations interested in developing a community-wide, cross-agency approach to family engagement is available to foster understanding of our state’s [family engagement framework](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf) and build meaningful school, family, and community partnerships.

**Featured Tools**

* [The Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement Framework for Massachusetts](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf) (a framework promoting family engagement that includes education, health and human service sectors)
* [Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals Self-Assessment Version 2.0](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/fscp-fundamentals.docx) (reflection tool for educators, school and district administrators)
* [DESE Family Portal](https://www.doe.mass.edu/families/) (School Finder, Grade Level Learning Guides for Families in different languages, etc.)
* New tools in development:
  + Family-Friendly Communication Guide
  + Social Media Toolkit for Family-Led Groups and District Staff
  + *Better Together: Massachusetts Family School Partnership Fundamentals* Online Training Module for educators

Department staff, including Deputy Commissioner Regina Robinson and Family Engagement Specialist Olga Lopez, will be available to provide more details and join the discussion at the November 15, 2022 Board meeting.