

Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement

by

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The National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group was created to inform educational policy on family engagement and in so doing, to improve educational opportunities for all children, from cradle to career.

Across the country, there is growing consensus that bolder approaches and break-through strategies are necessary to improve public education. Long recognized as fundamental to success in the business sector, innovation is now being tapped to help address challenges in the social sector, including education. In the 2009 Federal Register Notice announcing the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) put the identification and scale-up of innovations front and center in its efforts to reform schools and improve student success. James Shelton III, the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, explains that USDE's objectives are "to invest in the creation of breakthrough models that are going to change outcomes for students, teachers, and productivity...and to make systemic changes to foster innovation in education."¹

Social innovation is "redefined" in a recent article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* as "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions."² Social innovation in school reform, then, taps into the undiscovered and overlooked strategies that can leverage improvements in student learning. *Family and community engagement in student learning is a fundamental innovation itself*, and within this field, further innovations offer new and better solutions to improve educational outcomes for children and youth. Although certainly not an original idea in the decades-long push to improve student outcomes, family engagement is now being employed as an integral and effective strategy in systemic education reform. Findings from Chicago's reform efforts, for example, underscore that parent, school, and community ties are essential supports to in-classroom school improvement, especially in low-performing schools serving poor students.³

In response to increased attention to innovation, the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group (<http://www.hfrp.org/WorkingGroup>) compiled 12 examples of leading innovations in the family involvement field to advance student learning. These examples provide a snapshot, rather than a comprehensive listing, of some breakthrough strategies; they represent an array of approaches to reform schools and improve student success. As shown in the chart on page 3, the twelve family engagement initiatives described in this document align with the four key reform areas laid out in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and have developed scalable approaches nationally, regionally, or locally.

The innovations presented here are meant to engage policymakers and practitioners alike in a "design thinking" process. Design thinking incorporates consumer insights and relies on local expertise to help designers improvise, test, and refine systemic solutions to social problems.⁴ Innovating research and development capacity for educational improvement entails a blend of researchers and practitioners who focus on a core problem of practice, design solutions that are tested and improved over time, and engage the commercial sector for scale-up.⁵ Each of the featured family engagement examples grew from problem-solving, attention to family experiences, and constant refinement in the context of emerging opportunities and challenges. Many of these innovations were created by community-based organizations, universities, or education advocates, and conducted in partnership with schools and families. They attest to the capacity for creative solutions to emerge locally and to bubble up for broader replication.

As a set, these innovations represent a vision of family, school, and community engagement as a shared responsibility and a continuous process that occurs wherever children learn and throughout their development into young adults. These innovations engage families along a continuum, drawing hard-to-engage parents (Tellin’ Stories), supporting and reinforcing involved families (FAST), and empowering parent leaders to transform schools (CIPL). We chose individual programs that tackle some of today’s critical education issues: closing the achievement gap from early childhood (Project EAGLE); engaging underserved cultural communities (PIQE); developing effective teachers (Grow Your Own); engaging families in math education (MAPPS); using student data to support college readiness (New Visions); and building state (Federal PIRC program) and district (Miami-Dade) capacity for effective family engagement. We deliberately excluded examples of the programs of Working Group members.

Rather being viewed as recipes, these innovations should serve as a menu of ideas for developing policies that promote systemic, integrated, and sustainable family engagement. Mindful that top-down education policy interventions can be diluted by the time they reach the local level, it is crucial that policies encourage bottom-up “design thinking” innovations guided by a theory of change and a commitment to continuous improvement.⁶

We characterize the innovations using the design criteria that USDE described in its initial announcement of the i3 Fund (outcomes, evidence, learning, sustainability, and scale) as well as the merit of the innovative idea itself. In doing so, we recognize that the innovations present a spectrum of an evidence base—ranging through those ready to be replicated, those that need to be validated, and those that are pure innovation—although the majority of efforts within the family, school, and community engagement field have not been rigorously evaluated and would thus fall in the category of pure innovation. Given the dearth of investment in evaluation, we recommend that the USDE allocate resources, through i3 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, for the integration of family engagement into broader innovations and evaluate the extent of its value to program impact. We also recommend that USDE invest in rigorous evaluations of stand-alone family engagement initiatives. In this way, USDE will build the knowledge base of what works in family engagement.

| Program | Program Description Full contact information for all programs is listed in Appendix A | Alignment with Major Education Reform Priority Areas | | | |
|--|---|--|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | Standards and Assessments ^a | Data for Instruction and Accountability | Teacher Effectiveness | Low-Performing Schools ^b |
| National Programs | | | | | |
| Families and Schools Together | Program helps families address children's problem behaviors and increase their academic competencies | | | | X |
| Math and Parent Partners | Program seeks to improve children's mathematical knowledge by improving parents' math understanding | X | | X | X |
| Parent Institute for Quality Education | Program reaches out to immigrant parent populations to explain how the US system works and instill goal of college attendance | | | | X |
| Regional Programs: K–12 | | | | | |
| Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership <i>Kentucky</i> | Program trains parents to take leadership roles in school improvement plans | X | X | | X |
| Grow Your Own Teachers <i>Illinois</i> | Program helps identify and train low-income parents and community members to become certified teachers | | | X | X |
| New Visions for Public Schools <i>New York City</i> | Program teaches parents of ninth graders to use student data to support high school graduation and college readiness | X | X | X | X |
| Parent Teacher Home Visiting Program <i>Sacramento</i> | Program trains teachers to conduct relationship-building home visits to strengthen home-school collaboration | | X | X | |
| PIRC/iSPIN <i>Iowa</i> | Program offers ongoing technical assistance to help build capacity for family engagement across the educational system | X | | X | X |
| Tellin' Stories <i>Washington DC, MD</i> | Program focuses on improving home-school relationships, and trains parents to conduct classroom visits | | | X | X |
| The Parent Academy <i>Miami</i> | Program at district level helps parents become active partners in children's learning | | X | X | X |
| Regional Programs: Early Childhood Education | | | | | |
| Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors <i>L.A.</i> | Program developed by and for Latino parents to advocate for their children and help them enter school ready to learn | | | | X |
| Project EAGLE <i>Kansas City, KS</i> | Program helps parents of young children use data to promote healthy child development and school readiness | | X | | |

^a Programs are using their state or district's current standards and assessments.

^b Several programs have already been used in low-performing schools (Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, The Parent Academy), while others can potentially be adopted by low-performing schools, given the applicability of the programs' approaches to the problems faced by such schools.

Families and Schools Together: Collaborating to support at-risk youth

When children and youth begin to exhibit troublesome behaviors—from missing school to picking fights with other students—it is critical to marshal the supports that can intervene and help them be successful. Families and Schools Together (FAST) is one such approach that leverages the expertise of all the adults in a child’s life to ensure that he or she can get back on track for success. FAST is an early intervention and parent involvement program that aims to strengthen families and children and reduce the incidence of problems such as school failure, substance abuse, child abuse, and delinquency. The program takes a prevention approach that requires interagency collaboration.

Once a school decides to implement FAST, a program cycle begins with the teacher or school counselor identifying children with multiple risk factors. After obtaining parent permission, a FAST graduate parent and another member of the FAST collaborative team conduct a home visit to invite parents to participate in FAST. Subsequent program meetings follow a uniform agenda that includes carefully planned opening and closing routines, structured family activities, parent support time, and parent–child play therapy. The lively and fun activities are intended to build family unity.

Outcomes: Findings from four different randomized controlled trials have found increased parent volunteerism and leadership; reduced aggression, anxiety, and delinquent behaviors in youth; and improved academic competence for youth. These benefits have also been shown to persist for a full one to two years following participation in FAST.

Evidence: The FAST program has been rigorously evaluated over the past two decades. Evaluations include randomized controlled studies, a longitudinal study, and ongoing internal and external evaluations on program fidelity and outcomes.⁷

Learning: FAST demonstrates that targeted interventions among mental health providers, law enforcement, educators, and families can help keep youth from “slipping through the cracks.” Collaboration is a key strategy to ensuring that all of the adults with a vested interest in student success can explicitly work toward common goals.

Sustainability: The goal of all FAST programs is to become institutionalized over time into sustainable, community-owned programs. Sustainability of FAST programs requires attention to four characteristics of long-term service delivery: organizational readiness, a collaborative vision, community ownership, and renewable support.

Scalability: Evaluations have pointed to the “universality” of FAST based on its evidence-based success in a diversity of populations, and FAST has been adapted for families of infants, prekindergarten students, elementary students, and teens. FAST sites exist in 48 states and 8 countries. FAST replication sites receive three months of training to prepare interagency teams to deliver the curriculum and ongoing consultation as part of the FAST network once they have launched their program.

Math and Parent Partners (MAPPS): Raising school-age mathematical competencies with family engagement

Begun in 1999 with a grant from the National Science Foundation, the Math and Parent Partners (MAPPS), a K–12 family involvement program, seeks to improve children’s mathematical performance by improving parents’ own math skills, and to create opportunities for parents and children to learn about math together. Unlike other types of parent workshops which simply transmit information, MAPPS facilitates inquiry and gives voice to parents’ ideas and concerns about their own and their children’s mathematical experiences.

MAPPS provides three kinds of activities for parents that strengthen their roles as parents, learners, and teachers. In the 2-hour math awareness workshops, parents work with their children in cooperative, hands-on problem solving around a specific math problem. The workshops establish a dialogue in which both parents and children see that it is constructive to talk about mathematics; the workshops also help parents make connections between math activities, real world applications, and access to careers. In the “math for parents” mini-courses, parents take a series of courses that focus on specific mathematical topics, such as algebra or organizing data; courses are designed to give parents confidence and understanding in math to better help their children’s learning. Finally, leadership development sessions are used to recruit parent and teacher leaders to facilitate math awareness workshops. Designed to prepare parents and teachers to become workshop facilitators, the workshops give participants strategies and guidelines for leading, recruiting and managing workshop activities. A distinctive aspect of the program is that parent and teacher leaders often work as a team to facilitate the workshops.⁸

Outcomes: Parents who participated in MAPPS programs reported that they acquired new ways to help their children learn math and that the experience changed the dynamics for learning math within their families. Students in schools implementing MAPPS showed an increase in their math achievement over the course of the academic year.

Evidence: Evaluations of MAPPS have included both formative and summative qualitative assessments, including pre- and post-surveys; parent interviews; focus groups with parent leaders, teachers, students, and parent participants; and participant observation.

Learning: By including family and community funds of knowledge in their instructional practices, teachers have learned how to better engage parents in students’ mathematical learning and have gained greater insights into how parents understand mathematical concepts.

Sustainability: MAPPS is supported by a variety of public and private funds, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, Title I, district funds, and support from the University of Arizona’s math department, which houses the MAPPS Center.

Scalability: Originally based in four states in the southwest, MAPPS Programs are now in place in 12 districts in 9 states around the country. In a single year at a typical site, over 2,300 parent hours were logged in different MAPPS activities.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), CA: Raising awareness and concern about student achievement among immigrant and culturally diverse communities⁹

Founded in 1987, PIQE has a long history of involving low-income parents in their children's education. PIQE is particularly effective in recruiting and retaining parents who have previously felt unwelcome or insecure in their children's schools because of education, language, cultural, or economic concerns. The program's success in these areas is in large part due to the ability of its recruiters and facilitators to form personal and respectful connections with parents. In addition, PIQE employs strategies that may be more common to community organizing efforts than to parent education. PIQE raises parents' awareness of their rights to be involved in their children's education, the problems that may arise if they are not involved, and the benefits of becoming involved with their children's schools.

The PIQE facilitators speak with a sense of urgency and use language such as, "We are here on a special mission. We are an emergency team to help you support your children and help each of you create a vision of a quality K-12 education." PIQE staff also emphasize that they share parents' goals of having their children go to college. The facilitator introduces parents to the idea that "Anything is possible and especially your child attending college. Together we can make it a reality. We are going to dream and have a vision, and it is going to come true." At the end of the first session, parents are asked to raise their hands and pledge to do all that is possible to get their child to college.¹⁰

PIQE uses a 9-week training process that provides parents with information, knowledge, skills, and a personal commitment to improve the conditions surrounding the educational and personal development of their children. The curriculum is provided in 16 diverse languages. Classes include an education process on how parents can 1) create a home learning environment; 2) navigate the school system; 3) collaborate and communicate effectively with teachers, counselors, and principals; 4) understand what is needed to enter college; and 5) support a child's emotional, social, and academic development.

Outcomes: Evaluations of PIQE's 9-week process have found that it is effective in informing parents about how the education system works, helping parents to support their children's schoolwork, and motivating parents to encourage their children to pursue a university level education. Student outcomes include increased school persistence, reduced dropout rates, and increased college participation.

Evidence: There have been a number of evaluations of PIQE, including a quasi-experimental study investigating parent outcomes and a separate longitudinal investigation of student outcomes. Most evaluations have been specific to Latino families and their children.¹¹

Learning: The barriers that discourage immigrant parents from participating in schools are not insurmountable. A well-designed curriculum and program process that involve promoting respectful interpersonal relationships, demystifying the school system, establishing college as a goal, and providing concrete parent-child interactions to support learning help create the conditions that motivate typically hard-to-involve parents.

Sustainability: In 2006, the California State University pledged \$575,000 for three years to implement PIQE classes in 15 schools in each of the 23 campus regions.

Scalability: PIQE has graduated over 450,000 parents from more than 1,600 K-12 schools and 200 GEAR-UP middle school sites in 160 different school districts across California over the past 22 years. The program has also expanded to other states, including Texas, Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, Virginia and the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), KY: Developing parent leaders to promote student achievement and hold schools accountable

Across the country, various sponsors—local community organizations, statewide advocacy groups, school districts, and state legislatures—have developed and offered leadership training to help parents and community members improve local schools and participate in developing systemic policy and practice changes at the school or district level. Kentucky’s Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) is a flagship example of this leadership training. It has a well-developed curriculum to help parents understand how the state reform law works; how to build productive partnerships with school staff, parents, and community members; and how to access and use data on student performance both to hold schools accountable and to develop programs to improve achievement.

Founded in 1997 by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a statewide citizens’ organization, CIPL has produced about 1,500 parent graduates to date. It is designed to train parents of all backgrounds to be partners and leaders in school improvement: each graduate commits to designing and implementing projects that will improve student achievement, engage many more parents, and have a lasting impact. In many schools, teams of parents have attended the program and developed joint projects to improve science instruction, open after-school programs, increase the number of students applying to college, and help students and families with the transition to middle or high school.

Outcomes: Two evaluations show that CIPL graduates have moved into leadership positions around the state, becoming members of school boards, school councils, superintendent selection committees, local and regional task forces and committees, and the state-level Commissioner’s Parent Advisory Council, as well as serving as PTA/PTO presidents. Funding is now being sought to evaluate the impact of projects on student outcomes.

Evidence: The first evaluation examined the immediate results of the training on CIPL graduates’ knowledge and leadership activities and the second tracked the subsequent educational leadership trajectories of the participants. The 2008 follow-up evaluation of all CIPL graduates combined qualitative and quantitative methods. Of 1,200 CIPL graduates, 60 participated in in-depth interviews and 389 responded to a mail and/or online survey.¹²

Learning: Given training, information, and support, parents will shift their educational involvement from being concerned about their own children to promoting the best interests of all children. CIPL fellows sustained their post-training involvement and broadened their scope beyond their children’s schools to assume community- and state-level leadership positions. In short, the CIPL fellows not only remained actively involved, but became influential.

Sustainability: CIPL has been funded by private sources such as foundations and corporations, federal programs, and contracts with school districts. The Prichard Committee has developed several versions of CIPL tailored to the funding source, such as GEAR-UP and STEM, and is now exploring a line item in the state budget.

Scalability: CIPL is offered in all regions of the state. Through its Center for Parent Leadership, the Prichard Committee also offers capacity-building technical assistance to groups that want to start a program in their area, such as Parents for Public Schools in Jackson, Mississippi and Cincinnati, Ohio, and the Learning Link of Delaware started by the Rodel Foundations.

Grow Your Own Teachers, IL: Improving teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness in low-income communities

Grow Your Own Teachers (GYO) is an Illinois initiative to identify, train, and employ fully qualified teachers who have ties to the low-income communities where they will work. Promoting better family, school, and community partnerships is a primary goal of GYO. The initiative seeks to develop parent leadership and involvement in education by offering family and community members in areas with low-income schools the opportunity to become certified teachers. GYO further seeks to develop teachers who are community leaders and create schools that respect, engage, and share ownership with families and communities. Each program under this initiative is organized and run by a consortium of institutions, including, at a minimum, a teacher preparation university or college, a community-based organization, and a school district. GYO began as an effort to develop teachers who shared the culture and the language of the students and to address high rates of teacher turnover. It started with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association's efforts to organize a group of parents through their Parent Mentors program, who then formed a partnership with Chicago State University.

The GYO initiative aims to create a pipeline of highly qualified teachers of color, improve teacher retention in low-income schools, recruit for hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-fill positions, and increase the community connections and cultural competence of teachers. To these ends, GYO candidates receive forgivable loans of up to \$25,000, additional financial aid, and child care during their participation in the program. Recognizing that most candidates work full-time, the initiative offers higher education classes in the community at convenient times. After graduation, participants teach in their own neighborhoods in hard-to-staff schools for a minimum of five years, often in predominantly minority areas where teacher turnover is nearly twice the national rate.

Outcomes: The GYO initiative now includes 16 community organizations, 8 public universities, 4 private colleges/universities, 12 community colleges, 23 school districts, and 2 unions. As of March 2009, the program has seen 11 graduates enter the classroom and has 500 candidates—mostly women of color—in the pipeline. Nearly 90 percent of GYO candidates are people of color with strong ties to their communities.

Evidence: A 2009 evaluation included tracking program expansion and graduate experiences with GYO, but can be expanded in the future to include more rigorous assessments of impact on school, classroom, and student outcomes.

Learning: GYO programs tap into a base of teacher education candidates whom traditional recruiting methods do not reach but who are well positioned to build connections among families, schools, and communities.

Sustainability: In 2004, the Illinois state legislature passed the concept of Grow Your Own Teachers into state law. The Grow Your Own Teacher Education Act: 093-082 sets a goal of preparing 1,000 GYO teachers by 2016. Funds to support Grow Your Own are appropriated annually. In addition to the \$1.5 million planning grant approved by the state legislature in 2005, another \$12.6 million has been appropriated for implementation since 2007.

Scalability: A partnership in one neighborhood in the Northwest side of Chicago between a community organization and higher education institution is now an expansive network of GYO programs across the state of Illinois. Other state education agencies, including Arizona, California, and Mississippi, have visited Illinois with plans to replicate the GYO initiative.

New Visions for Public Schools, New York City, NY: Using data to engage families in students' high school graduation and college/career readiness

Although several new high school initiatives are emerging to boost college and workforce readiness, few meaningfully integrate family engagement to achieve student success. New Visions for Public Schools provides an example of thoughtful innovation whereby families use student data to raise the rates of high school graduation and college readiness. New Visions is the largest education reform organization in New York City dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in the city's public schools.

In 2008, New Visions launched a Campaign for College and Career Readiness that consists of three mutually reinforcing components: increasing parental engagement, developing community resources to accelerate school progress in college readiness, and tracking student progress at the high school and post-secondary levels. The family engagement component consists of training parents of ninth graders to understand the importance of post-secondary education and what students need to do to get on the path to college and careers, and to use student data to monitor academic performance. The training is based on a Chicago study on what matters in ninth grade, and also on New York City's ninth-grade student data showing that attendance, grades, accumulation of course credits, and passing the state's Regents' exams together predict on-time high school graduation. New Visions has developed college readiness benchmarks and a tracker tool that offers information about a student's progress in terms of grades, attendance, and state tests. The tracker is color-coded so that users can readily note whether or not a student is on track on each of the benchmarks. Parents, teachers, and students each are responsible for using the tracker tool regularly at conferences to plan and take action steps.

Outcomes: New Visions seeks to achieve an 80 percent college-ready graduation rate by 2013. (New York City's on-time graduation rate in 2007 was 62 percent.) The family engagement initiative for ninth graders has developed short-term, measurable objectives toward this longer-term goal: 95 percent of ninth graders in participating schools are promoted to tenth grade having earned 10 or more credits, have achieved 92 percent attendance, and have passed at least one Regents' exam with a score of 75 or greater. In addition, participating schools are expected to have in place systems and practices for engaging parents.

Evidence: Although there is no formal evaluation, New Visions tracks parent participation and student and school-level performance relative to its benchmarks and desired outcomes.

Learning: Understanding student data can motivate families to support a college/career pathway for youth. The data provide a common ground for families and teachers to advance a student's academic progress.

Sustainability: Through a contract with the city's education department, New Visions assumes responsibility for a network of 76 schools and over 34,000 students.

Scalability: In the 2010 academic year, 32 high schools will implement the family engagement model. The model can be adapted for middle school for a continuous family engagement pathway from sixth through twelfth grades.

Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Program, Sacramento, CA: Improving teacher effectiveness

The concept behind the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) is simple: Rather than blaming each other, teachers and parents come together as equal partners to build trust and form a relationship. PTHVP accomplishes this goal by training teachers on conducting meaningful home visits, providing support during and after the visiting process, and tracking the outcomes of the visits to help evaluate the program's progress. Building on the lessons learned from home visiting in early childhood and modifying the approach to include community organizing principles of engagement and leadership development, PTHVP is able to effectively reach parents of students from elementary to high school. PTHVP represents a unique collaboration among the Sacramento City Unified School District, the Sacramento City Teachers Association teachers' union, and Sacramento Area Congregations Together (a community organizing group); together, these organizations work to forge school–family partnerships through home visiting.

Although teachers' unions, like community members, are often blamed as being roadblocks to reform, this project is an example of balanced leadership and progress. Participation for schools and individual teachers, as well as families, is completely voluntary. Following training by the teams of parents and teachers, educators begin visits and are paid a one-hour stipend (set by local contract guidelines). Teachers typically conduct two home visits per year for each student and participate in a debriefing and learning exercise in between these visits. These home visits allow teachers to build a relationship with families, learn more about their students' strengths and weaknesses, and pave the way for future home–school communication that will ultimately improve their teaching and outcomes for students.

Outcomes: Evaluations show increased parental involvement and improved parent–teacher relationships and communications. These studies have also found positive student outcomes including improved performance (e.g., attendance and grades), more academic credits, and higher graduation rates.

Evidence: The PTHVP has had a number of evaluations as it has scaled its services both in reach and in new developmental periods. Mixed methods were used in implementation and outcomes studies, and recently a longitudinal study found positive outcomes for students whose families received home visits.

Learning: Linking the program to the district improvement plan, and to initiatives to boost student graduation rates and other outcomes, is key.

Sustainability: In 1999, the Sacramento efforts became a model for a statewide program providing millions of dollars for K-12 home visiting in California. That resource, renewed again in 2000 and 2006, facilitated hundreds of schools' ability to launch home visiting efforts. Due to recent statewide budget cuts, however, PTHVP is working to explore local sustainability—specifically, but not exclusively, through Title I funds.

Scalability: Started as a local initiative, PTHVP has been adopted by the state of California and has been invited by over a dozen states to help train teachers on home visits. The National Education Association, a champion of the program, is currently supporting an effort to design a national evaluation and promote the program with its members. The program has also been expanded into high schools as part of an initiative to boost graduation rates; schools have reported positive attitudinal shifts among students and parents toward both school and the future, as well as positive behavioral changes associated with improved academic outcomes.

Iowa State Parent Information & Resource Center (PIRC): Fostering statewide leadership and infrastructure

One of the primary vehicles by which states, school districts, and schools can build their capacity to effectively engage families to promote student achievement is through the federal Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) located in each state and territory. The Iowa State PIRC has been particularly successful in creating an infrastructure for family engagement by providing leadership and guidance at the state level, and by helping to adapt an evidence-based model for family involvement that all Iowa schools can use.

The Iowa State PIRC has worked to ensure there is a system of quality and oversight across the state by leading efforts to integrate parent engagement into the standards for administrators and teachers, and by working closely with the Iowa Association of School Boards and the School Administrators of Iowa to align these standards with other learning standards and to include them in the assessment of school leaders. It also provides training and technical assistance to state Title I accreditation teams to help them monitor local compliance with Title I family engagement provisions. The Iowa State PIRC works to build capacity among schools through an evidence-based model for family engagement. Called Iowa's Sustaining Parent Involvement Network (iSPIN), the model is based on the Academic Development Institute's Solid Foundation program and enhanced with additional research-based best practices. iSPIN has created a structure for family engagement that the Iowa State PIRC believes is most likely to lead to better outcomes for schools, families, and youth. It does this by requiring a minimum set of commitments from participating schools, such as focusing on family engagement for at least two years. As part of iSPIN, the Iowa State PIRC provides ongoing technical assistance, networking opportunities, and scaffolding for family engagement to participating schools.

Outcomes: The Iowa State PIRC has demonstrated results for a range of different programmatic efforts. It is currently working to document the effects of iSPIN. Emerging outcomes include increased parent involvement both at home and at school, and attitudinal improvements among staff members regarding parent engagement. A 2004 experimental evaluation of the Solid Foundation program, from which iSPIN has been adapted, also showed increases in student achievement significantly higher than those of non-participating schools.

Evidence: Each PIRC has an external evaluator that helps guide assessment. Over the next two years, the Iowa State PIRC plans to conduct a quasi-experimental study of iSPIN sites using a descriptive matched comparison design.

Learning: The iSPIN process has helped schools change their culture around parent engagement. Because the changes are systemic in nature (e.g., policy development, teacher professional development, parent training, and education) and not one-time projects, subsequent parent engagement efforts are part of the basic fabric of the school.

Sustainability: The federal PIRC program requires that all PIRCs designate and meet a matching requirement, and the Iowa State PIRC supplements its federal PIRC funds with a variety of resources. Through its statewide efforts, it has also built an infrastructure more likely to sustain family engagement efforts over time.

Scalability: iSPIN is currently offered in 27 schools across the state and continues to receive requests for technical assistance from more schools. The Iowa State PIRC is working to meet this higher demand.

Teaching for Change Tellin' Stories Project, DC and MD: Galvanizing parent power to transform schools through community building and organizing

Tellin' Stories, a project of Teaching for Change, strengthens parent engagement in schools, with a focus on community building woven throughout. Training takes place through four stages: 1) *Community Building*: families connect with one another and to their school through the power of stories; 2) *Gathering Information and Developing Skills*: parents learn to analyze the school climate, the facilities, and the quality of teaching and learning at their school; 3) *Identifying and Prioritizing Concerns*: parents learn to ask the right questions (using Right Question Project, Inc. methodology) so they can prioritize their concerns and understand who has the power to address them most effectively; and 4) *Taking Action*: parents determine the action required to achieve desired results and work collectively to promote those actions.

Teaching for Change has piloted a new approach to *Taking Action* called Academic Classroom Visits. Parents form an academic achievement committee, which develops a classroom observation tool based on the committee's understanding of an effective classroom; the tool is shared with a teacher for feedback. Parents then use the tool in a classroom visit and develop and share a collective written observation with the teacher. Parent representatives from the academic achievement committees use the report to discuss the visit with the teacher and to ask how parents can directly support both teacher and students. The visits also provide parents with the information necessary to better support their children's learning at home and to make informed recommendations for school improvement.

Outcomes: Over the past three years, Teaching for Change has worked closely with over 300 parents in nearly two dozen schools throughout DC and Maryland. School communities that have implemented the Tellin' Stories approach have seen an increased number of parents participating in all school-family functions, parents advocating for reforms that directly impact student achievement, and better-informed parents ready to participate in parent-teacher conferences with improved understanding of grade-level standards and high-priority questions for their child's teacher.

Evidence: Teaching for Change conducts mid-year and end-of-year assessments at each school in which the project is located; assessments are generally done as structured interviews. Through one of its DC-based funders, Teaching for Change will begin using a Managing Information System (MIS) to export attendance and demographic reports from the 2010 school year activities.

Learning: Through its comprehensive, sequenced approach to family engagement, Teaching for Change is helping those who are traditionally excluded from school decision-making processes to become a central part of those processes. The classroom visits elevate the role of parents in improving teaching and learning.

Sustainability: The Teaching for Change Tellin' Stories project's work in Maryland is sponsored by the Maryland PIRC, and for its work in other school districts it receives funding from a combination of grants from local foundations, contracts, city governments, and small donations.

Scalability: In the 2009 academic year, Teaching for Change, sponsored by the Maryland PIRC, expanded to five new counties; in the coming year, it will expand to at least five new schools and one additional county in Maryland. Using a train-the-trainer model, Teaching for Change has trained 31 school and district leaders from 7 states to implement its Tellin' Stories approach to parent involvement in their own areas.

The Parent Academy, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL: Using family engagement to reform low-performing schools

Increasingly, school districts across the country are taking leadership to more systemically and comprehensively engage families in supporting learning at home and at school. The Miami-Dade County Public Schools' (MDCPS) Parent Academy seeks to educate parents about the importance of their role in their children's education. The program aims to empower parents to become active partners in their children's learning, unite families and schools behind the common goal of educational attainment for children, and inform parents of their rights and responsibilities as well as the educational opportunities available to them and their children. Launched in the summer of 2005, The Parent Academy has expanded from initially focusing on creating "demand parents"¹³ to becoming integral to a districtwide family engagement strategy, including coordinating professional development offerings for school staff with MDCPS's Office of Parent Involvement.

MDCPS has increasingly used The Parent Academy as a cornerstone of its reform initiative for low-performing schools, the Success Academy. In 2008 the district targeted nine of the lowest-performing schools for comprehensive reforms, including partnering with The Parent Academy to offer Saturday workshops for families to receive training (while their children attended extra classes) to help improve learning outcomes. Although it is difficult to tease out the effect of The Parent Academy from the effects of other interventions, district officials credit it as an important contributor to increased achievement in these schools.

Outcomes: In its first three years, The Parent Academy served over 100,000 parents through over 3,000 events. Attendees reported that they felt the Academy helped them to support their children's education, and district administrators reported that the Academy had a positive impact on parent attendance at school events, improved home-school communications, and increased parent advocacy.

Evidence: The district has conducted Year One and Year Two qualitative evaluations of The Parent Academy program using a combination of online and paper surveys, interviews, and document reviews to assess participants' and school administrators' perceptions of the program's impact. Over 1,000 parents and caregivers and close to 200 administrators responded to the Year Two evaluation surveys.

Learning: Despite initial skepticism from school staff in the Success Academy initiative who believed that parents would not show up for workshops and Saturday trainings (particularly in high schools), The Parent Academy has succeeded in attracting large and diverse groups of parents to Saturday workshops. District administrators credit the popularity of the Parent Academy to a focus on making schools more family friendly and helping to connect families to one another in a support group-style atmosphere.

Sustainability: The Parent Academy is supported entirely by private grants and individual donations, as well as in-kind resources from the private sector, higher education organizations, government entities, and community-based organizations.

Scalability: The district plans to increase the use of The Parent Academy in the Success Academy initiative in 35 schools. Across the country, similar parent training academies and universities, based on the Miami Parent Academy model, are under development in districts such as Houston, Boston, Philadelphia, and Prince George's County, Maryland.

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, Los Angeles, CA: Starting the pathway of Latino family engagement from cradle to career

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is a program developed for and by Latino parents to build parent capacity and confidence to be strong and powerful advocates in the lives of their children, and to ensure that Latino children enter school ready to learn. The program offers 10 sessions of parenting, leadership, and advocacy training for low-income, primarily Spanish-speaking parents of children aged 0-5. It is sponsored by Families in Schools, an organization in Los Angeles that educates families about literacy development, school transitions, college and career readiness, and family-school partnerships. Abriendo Puertas paves the way for continuous family engagement from a child's earliest years through high school.

Abriendo Puertas is an interactive, multimedia curriculum based on popular education; it draws on the real-life experiences and cultural strengths of Latino families, making the teachings personal and relevant. In a support group setting, approximately 20 parents participate in the program, which covers the most important aspects of child and family well-being, good health, social and emotional wellness, school readiness, and communication and advocacy. Participating parents are given a parent toolkit, books, resources (e.g., library cards), DVDs, contact numbers, referrals, and other information to reinforce the skills being developed. The program is enjoyed by all, as demonstrated by the fact that no parents dropped out during the piloting and testing phase. In fact, additional family members such as fathers and grandfathers joined in, and once the program was complete, the families asked for more.

Outcomes: An evaluation found that the program 1) develops parents' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities related to their child's education; 2) increases knowledge and confidence in parenting by setting and meeting family goals; 3) connects parents to resources and services that support healthy families; 4) shows parents how to navigate systems (e.g., health care, public schools); 5) prepares parents to advocate on behalf of their children; and 6) builds community support systems in neighborhoods.

Evidence: Abriendo Puertas has been independently evaluated by leading researchers from the University of California, Berkeley. The evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data collected through pre- and post-surveys with 109 out of 199 participants. Data collection included questionnaires, field notes, and focus groups at the beginning and end of the program.¹⁴

Learning: The evaluation findings suggest the value of capitalizing on the strengths of a community, including its cultural norms and social services.

Sustainability: Anonymous donors have supported the program. Its modest cost, potentially large audience, and positive early results are likely to appeal to public and private funders.

Scalability: To date, over 500 parents in 8 California counties have been trained, and the goal is to disseminate the program throughout the U.S. Employing a train-the-trainers model, Abriendo Puertas engages community leaders in a 3-day training program so that they can confidently deliver the program in their community. It costs approximately \$40,000 to provide training and materials to 20 people who then become trainers.

Project EAGLE, Kansas City, KS: Supporting school readiness by providing families with data on young children’s development and activities

Project EAGLE Community Programs of the University of Kansas Medical Center provide families with children aged 0–4 with answers to their two most important questions: Is my child developing normally? What can I do to help her/him become more school-ready? Routine child screening and parent engagement to promote healthy child development is a key tenet of all the programs run by Project EAGLE. From the Early Head Start program (serving pregnant women and children aged 0–4), to Healthy Start (for pregnant women and new families), to Project Hope (a program for pregnant and parenting teens), to Healthy Families (a program for Spanish-speaking pregnant women and families with children), all families who come into contact with Project EAGLE receive rapid feedback on child assessments and specific guidance about how they can support their child’s development. Staff members regularly assess children using brief, repeatable formative assessments that are sensitive to short-term learning (e.g., Early Communication Indicator), plot the findings, and share the results with parents. For example, parents see a graph reflecting the growth of their child’s vocabulary and use of multiple words, and intentionally work with their child to make progress.

Outcomes: Project EAGLE uses a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to early identification and support of children with learning and behavior needs. Research shows that in other programs, RTI has been effective for identifying children at risk of developing learning disabilities and for providing specialized interventions, either to ameliorate or to prevent the occurrence of learning disabilities.

Evidence: A research synthesis of RTI conducted on 14 studies concluded that there is an emerging body of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of RTI.¹⁵

Learning: Parents are eager to receive ongoing data that track their child’s learning and development and to make use of the activities and interventions provided so that they can play an active role in supporting their child’s learning. This is much more successful than passive learning through traditional parenting education programs.

Sustainability: Project EAGLE combines public and private dollars to fully implement and sustain quality programming. Now in its twenty-first year, Project EAGLE has just been designated an Educare site.

Scalability: The RTI has been implemented in early childhood as well as K–12 settings all over the country. Project EAGLE is an example of a countywide adoption of this approach.

Appendix A: Program Contact Information

Families and Schools Together, Inc.

<http://www.fastnational.org>

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Madison, WI 53704-3151

Math and Parent Partners (MAPPS)

<http://mapps.math.arizona.edu>

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Director: Mary Schumacher
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Email: dgay@math.arizona.edu
schuma@math.arizona.edu
Address: Department of Mathematics,
University of Arizona
617 N. Santa Rita Ave.
Tucson, AZ 85721

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

<http://www.piqe.org>

V.P. of Program Development: Patricia Mayer-Ochoa
Phone: (619) 884-7926
Email: pmayer@piqe.org
Address: 22 W. 35th St., Ste. 201
National City, CA 91950

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence – Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL)

<http://www.prichardcommittee.org/CIPL.tabid/31491/Default.aspx>

Director: Beverly Raimondo
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Lexington, KY 40588

Grow Your Own Illinois

<http://www.growyourownteachers.org>

Director: Anne Hallett
Phone: (773) 209-8134
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Chicago, IL 60613

New Visions for Public Schools

<http://www.newvisions.org/>

Director of Community Engagement: Barbara Taveras
Phone: (212) 645-5110
Email: btaveras@newvisions.org
Address: 320 W. 13th St., 6th Floor
New York, NY 10014

Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Program

<http://www.pthvp.org>

Executive Director: Carrie Rose
Phone: (916) 448-5290
Email: home-visits@sbcglobal.net
Address: 3065 Freeport Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95818

Iowa State Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC)

<http://www.iowaparents.org>

Director: Edward Redalen
Phone: (641) 751-4010
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Address: 12199 Stratford Dr.
Clive, IA 50325

Teaching for Change – Tellin' Stories

<http://www.teachingforchange.org>

Program Manager: Christopher Rehling
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Address: P.O. Box 73038
Washington, DC 20056

The Parent Academy

<http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net>

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1450 NE 2nd Ave.
Miami, FL 33132

Families in Schools – Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors

<http://www.familiesinschools.org/site>

National Director: Sandra Gutierrez
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Project EAGLE

<http://www.projecteagle.org>

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400 State Ave.
Kansas City, KS 66101

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