

How to Grow a Framework:

Lessons From California

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Title I is among the largest funding streams to support family engagement activities in education. In 2011, the U.S. government appropriated more than \$14 billion through Title I, part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, what is now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).¹ According to the “set-aside” provision in Title I, Section 1118, school districts that receive more than \$500,000 from Title I are required to set aside at least 1% of their Title I allocation for family engagement activities (see text box). However, many districts lack an intentional strategy and the capacity to systemically embed or evaluate the variety of family engagement practices associated with Title I funding.² Moreover, Title I is just one of several federal programs that include family engagement, and districts are left to their own devices to manage the many components of the various programs and mandates. But a coordinated and coherent system of family engagement is possible. The California Department of Education (CDE) created the [Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts](#) (PDF) (the *Framework*), also available in [Spanish](#) (PDF), to facilitate school and district efforts implementing systemic family engagement across various federal and state funding streams.

Why create a framework? Frameworks are useful as a means to understand how different components of a system are connected. They can reduce a system’s complexity,³ highlighting what is important. Originally published in 2011 and updated in 2014, the CDE *Framework* is intended to guide districts in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their family engagement practices. It synthesizes research, best practices, and state and federal program requirements, such as those found in Title I, Title III, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), also known as Special Education. From the conceptualization and creation, to its dissemination and emphasis on coordination across programs and departments, the *Framework* is a model of collaborative effort, requiring stakeholder feedback and cooperation.

THE CREATION OF CALIFORNIA’S FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The *Framework*—the standards, concepts, and practices that support family and community engagement in education—was hardly a quick production. Rather, it evolved over a period of eight years, reflecting changes in research, policy, and practices. New legislation regarding school financing, dedicated champions who carried the framework to completion, and an inclusive, collaborative process all contributed to the CDE’s *Family Engagement Framework*.

One California school district, many uses of Title I funds to support family engagement



In 2014–2015, Coachella Valley Unified School District’s Title I “set-aside” funds were used in a variety of ways to support family engagement. The activities and efforts increased school and family capacity, and improved school infrastructure to support and promote family engagement beyond random, one-time events:

- Nine schools established a Parent Resource Center, managed by a part-time parent liaison.
- All schools had a Family Involvement Action Team (FIAT) teacher liaison, who received a stipend.
- Parent leaders were compensated for delivering parent workshops.
- All FIAT liaisons and parent leaders received updated training.

From the outset, the *Framework* was a collective endeavor that assigned an important role to the research community. Authoring and constructing the *Framework* began in 2003 and was initially conceived by the Family Area Network (FAN) Board, an informal working group of educators, family engagement practitioners, parent leaders, community organizations, and CDE staff. CDE contracted with WestEd, whose role was to synthesize the research for districts’ use in planning, implementing, and evaluating family engagement. The *Framework* was released in 2011.

In 2013, California enacted a new financing structure for schools, the [Local Control Funding Formula](#) (LCFF), which positions family involvement in education as a statewide educational priority, and requires that families and communities be included in the planning and implementation of LCFF activities. The LCFF shifted school funding decisions toward local control.⁴ Accordingly, the *Framework* was revised to reflect the LCFF requirements and rereleased in 2014. At this time, CDE again contracted with WestEd to create the updated 2014 version, which includes a Spanish translation (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Timeline of the *Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts*.

From the initial development of the *Framework* to its current iteration, the CDE has made a concerted effort to integrate multiple perspectives, with feedback cycles and input from a wide variety of people representing the diversity of children, programs, and families in California. Original drafts of the *Framework* were circulated for feedback among a broad array of individuals and groups, including parent wellness educators, the FAN Board, California Parent Training and Information Centers, the California State Parent Teacher Association, and groups involved in migrant education.

The *Framework’s* evolution over time depended on champions within the CDE. Many credit Carol Dickson and her successor, Nancy Bodenhausen, from the CDE Title I office, with stewarding the construction and approval process of the original *Framework*, through to the 2014 revision. Of particular value was their pulling together the requisite people and programs, including more than 20 programs in the CDE alone.⁵ “Carol was our initial and persistent torchbearer. And Nancy really made sure we were getting to the right people for the update,” says Angela McGuire, senior program associate at WestEd; “there was a lot of shepherding throughout.”⁶

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THE FRAMEWORK

The *Framework* specifies 18 district principles to guide family engagement practice within five action areas: Build Capacity; Demonstrate Leadership; Resources: Fiscal and Other; Monitor Progress; and Access and Equity. The principles describe standards districts can follow to engage families (see Figure 2). Each principle represents an essential element for schools and districts to execute; for example, principle 1.05 specifies that schools and districts need to ensure staff and family have access to training in effective school, family, and community partnerships. All principles and activities have three levels of implementation: basic (just meeting the statute), progressive (going above and beyond the statute), and innovative (transcending the requirements in exceptional ways).

Throughout the *Framework*, the various federal and state programs that include family involvement are cited. In addition, principle 2.02 details how leadership can meet state and federal laws regarding family engagement, illustrating that family engagement can be implemented across programs. “It does cross all those silos and it does include all programs and all kinds of parent involvement,” says Angela McGuire of WestEd. “What’s unique about this framework is that it is very comprehensive.”⁷

District Principles

- 1. BUILD CAPACITY¹**
 - 1.01 Ensure that all principals understand and implement required and effective parental involvement practices at their schools [Title I, Part A, 1118 (a)(1)].
 - 1.02 Establish family-friendly volunteer policies to recruit and organize help and support from parents.
 - 1.03 Train parents to successfully participate in curricular and budgetary decision making.
 - 1.04 Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.
 - 1.05 Ensure staff and family access to training in effective school, family, and community partnerships.
 - 1.06 Train staff, with the assistance of parents, in how to reach out to and work with parents as equal partners in their children’s education [Title I, Part A, 1118 (e)(3)].
 - 1.07 Ensure that teachers and families have knowledge and tools to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities.
- 2. DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP²**
 - 2.01 Ensure that all schools have parent/family involvement programs (EC 11502 – 11504).
 - 2.02 Meet requirements of state and federal law regarding family involvement.
 - a. Ensure parent representation on district and school committees as required by law.
 - b. Establish district family involvement policies and programs [Title I, Part A, 1118 (a)(2); EC 11503 – 11504].
 - 2.03 Involve families in advisory bodies and training strategies.
- 3. RESOURCES: FISCAL AND OTHER³**
 - 3.01 Allocate resources and assign staff to implement the plan.
- 4. MONITOR PROGRESS⁴**
 - 4.01 Ensure all schools integrate parental involvement programs into the school’s Single Plan for Student Achievement [EC 11502(e), 11504].
 - 4.02 Provide oversight, support, and coordination of parent involvement activities among district schools and programs.
 - 4.03 Document progress of each school’s implementation of its parent involvement program [EC 11503(c)(d), refers specifically to Title I].
 - 4.04 Assess every principal’s effectiveness in establishing and maintaining school, family, and community partnerships at his or her school.
- 5. ACCESS AND EQUITY⁵**
 - 5.01 Ensure that critical parent information is readily available in accessible formats and languages spoken by families in the district [EC 48985].
 - 5.02 Ensure that parent representation on committees reflects the composition of the student body.
 - 5.03 Ensure that schools have a system in place with multiple strategies to facilitate two-way communication with parents and community members on a regular basis [EC 11502(c), EC 11503(b)(4)].

Figure 2. The five action areas include 18 district principles in the [Framework](#).

A Comprehensive Package

The *Framework* is more than a collection of action areas and principles. It is also a comprehensive package. In addition to the principles and rubrics, the following sections are included:

- ***Tools for Communicating With Families*** shows how districts can communicate with families, offer opportunities for engagement, and improve families' capacities to engage in their child's education and learning. Families are also offered suggestions on how they can take advantage of school invitations and opportunities, in and out of the school setting (see Figure 3).
- ***Appendix A: Matrix of Federal and State Parent Involvement Code and Regulations*** is a succinct compilation of all of the federal and state requirements that govern family engagement in education, across seven program dimensions: involvement, governance, funding, assessment and accountability, staffing and professional development, opportunity and equal access, and teaching and learning. Appendix A is a particular strength of the *Framework* package, as there are multiple federal and state programs that contain family engagement provisions or regulations, such as Title I, Title III, and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) (see text box on next page).
- ***Appendix B: Linking Parent Involvement to Student Achievement: A Review of Recent Literature*** provides a research foundation for the *Framework*, with contemporary peer-reviewed articles that link student achievement with specific family engagement activities.

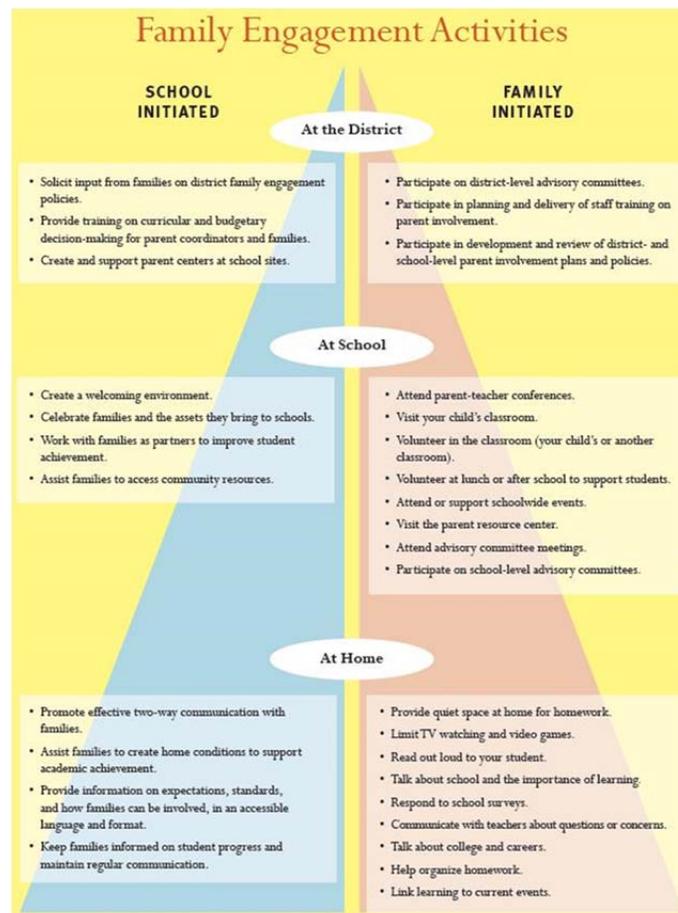


Figure 3. Family engagement is a shared responsibility. This [reproducible tool](#) illustrates that family engagement activities can be initiated by the school and the family, at the district, school, and home levels.

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

California is a large and diverse state, both geographically and demographically. More than 6 million students are educated in more than 10,000 schools⁸—more children than any other state.⁹ Almost 23% of all students in California are identified as English learners.¹⁰ About 16% of children in the state live in a high-poverty area, and 23% of all children in California are impoverished.¹¹ Additionally, there is a wide range in district size, from the Los Angeles Unified School District (650,000 students) to the 25 rural districts that enroll fewer than 20 students.¹² Thus, working efficiently across the state, coordinating among the educators and stakeholders, providing adequate technical support, and addressing the needs of this very diverse group of learners and their families are all ongoing challenges.

In this diverse state, the *Framework* provides a common language and set of standards for all districts, in all their variations. “We encourage staff in districts to work together; often different programs with family engagement requirements operate independently and may not even be aware of each other’s work,” says the CDE’s Bodenhausen.¹³ McGuire at WestEd says that the *Framework* is often used in parent trainings and parent leadership groups, including district English Learner Advisory Committees.

The Center for Family, School, Community Engagement at the College of Education at San Diego State University uses the *Framework* in its trainings with educators across the state.¹⁴ Sometimes educators are not familiar with the requirements of all the federal programs, says Jeana Preston, director at the [Center for Family, School, Community Engagement](#). However, “if they take a cent of that money,” she says, “they also take the requirements.”¹⁵ The Coachella Valley Unified School District has used the *Framework* to train parents as a means of demonstrating to families the variety of ways families can be involved in their children’s education.¹⁶

It is not just state education departments that struggle with coordinating across programs. Families must also manage the various expectations and demands, as many students and families are involved in more than one program that includes family engagement. At the 2014 California Title I Conference, personnel from the CDE Title I, Special Education, and English Learner Support divisions discussed the overlap of programs, agreeing that families can participate in meaningful ways in the education of all of their children without trying to participate in a “myriad of program-related meetings and activities all at once,” which can be overwhelming, says Bodenhausen.¹⁷ “Parents and families can get confused if we are not communicating and coordinating our efforts. Opportunities for more efficient, collaborative work, and multi-funded activities may be missed.”¹⁸ Thus, the *Framework* is a resource that helps both practitioners and families plan and synchronize activities, efforts, and funding. The *Framework* is a tool

Education Programs and Initiatives Included in Appendix A¹⁹

- Adult Education
- Native American Education
- Basic and Compensatory Ed (Title I, Part A)
- Before and Afterschool Programs
- Child Development
- General Child Care & Development
- Family Child Care Home Networks
- Even Start (Title I, Part B)
- Pre-K/Family Literacy
- Educational Equity
- English Language Learners (Title III)—Limited English Proficient and Immigrant
- Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)
- HIV/AIDS Education
- Homeless Education (Title II, Part A)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Transition/Workability
- Family Empowerment Centers
- Special Education
- Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)
- Migrant Education
- Neglected, Delinquent or At-Risk (Title I, Part D)
- Reading First (Title I, Part B)
- 21st-Century Community Learning Centers (Title IV, Part B)

to help both families and educators navigate the complex system of programs that promote family engagement.

LESSONS LEARNED

Frameworks are valuable, as they help stakeholders identify important elements and how they are connected. The *Family Engagement Framework* helps families and educators navigate the complex and interconnected educational programs that promote family engagement, coordinating and prioritizing efforts, activities, and funding. Other states can learn from California’s experience about how to create a comprehensive framework to support systemic family engagement.

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*-Nancy Bodenhausen,
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Champions were essential to this effort, gathering and synthesizing the best, most relevant research and practices; steering the process among the various stakeholders; gaining consensus; and soliciting diverse feedback and viewpoints. The work of those committed to the *Framework* over the years, such as the FAN Board, and Carol Dickson and Nancy Bodenhausen at CDE, illustrate the need for such champions and the tenacity required of them. By involving an external organization, WestEd, additional expertise and capacity to synthesize and organize the large body of interests and information also contributed to the evolving *Framework*.

Frameworks are intended to be flexible and to adapt to change. Emerging research and an evolving policy environment contributed to the initial *Framework*; subsequent changes in state regulations, like the 2013 passing of the Local Control Funding Formula, contributed to an updated *Framework* in 2014.

Finally, the collaborative and cooperative nature of systemic family engagement is evident in the crafting and use of the *Framework*. Family engagement is a shared responsibility, and a wide range of people and groups that contributed to the creation and refinement of the *Framework* ultimately yielded a product that is used in a variety of ways with a variety of users. Additionally, the Spanish version of the *Framework* means that many more families in California can now access, understand, and act in relation to family engagement in the schools.

Collaboration and coordination can be arduous and time-consuming, and the needs and size of California pose unique challenges. Yet the crafting, vetting and approval, dissemination of the *Framework*, and the trainings that use it are testimony to how a cooperative approach that includes many stakeholders and coordinates across programs, most significantly Title I, can create a system of family engagement.

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<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/how-to-grow-a-framework-lessons-from-california>

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