



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**The Push for Family Engagement in Schools  
and the Challenge to Develop Benchmarks to Track Impact**

by

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## **Abstract**

Family Engagement as a practice in schools and communities has garnered much attention from government agencies such as the Department of Education and foundations such as the Kellogg Foundation. With restricted budgets and the understanding of how integral familial engagement is to a student's overall success, school sites within San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) have contracted nonprofit organizations to deliver the much needed service. In some cases, with the assistance of nonprofits, family engagement has given families the tools and resources needed to partake in their child's academic and social emotional development while learning how to become advocates for themselves and their families.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my incredible support system for supporting me through this challenging academic endeavor. I would also like to thank the families that I work with on a daily basis who remind me to keep my heart open and inspire me to fight the good fight as a nonprofit professional.

Este proyecto está dedicado a todas las familias que he conocido durante los últimos cinco años. Les prometo que siguiere luchando por ustedes. También, dedico este proyecto a mi mama por todo su esfuerzo. You sacrificed so much, so I could have it all.

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## **Section 1. Introduction**

Under resourced families in San Francisco rely on the vast network of nonprofits in the Bay Area to help them navigate and survive the rapidly changing socioeconomic climate in one of the most expensive cities in the United States. Despite the astronomical cost of living, San Francisco is still home to many families. With an increasingly challenging socioeconomic climate, the remaining families in San Francisco are in need of resource navigation assistance in order to thrive in a climate which can be hostile to families. In some of the direst, yet too common, circumstances resource navigation means the difference between having a place to live, enough food to feed one's family, or even an equitable education. With so many nonprofits existing in the Bay Area and plenty of social services offered by local government, getting the correct assistance for one's family can be a significant challenge.

This is where Bay Area nonprofits step in. Organizations such as the Mission YMCA, MEDA, and Coleman Advocates are providing families with meaningful support which links families to timely resources contributing to their overall wellbeing. As the following research shows, a family's overall wellbeing is directly correlated with a child's development into a successful adult. The practice of assisting families with resource navigation and empowering them to be advocates for themselves and their children is family engagement.

Family engagement is an integral practice which contributes positively to a student's academic and social emotional development. In a school setting, family engagement, is defined as goal-oriented relationships between staff and families that are ongoing and culturally responsive. This definition implies that families and staff members are a team in nurturing and sustaining a child's development and wellbeing. Under this definition, families and staff

members share responsibility and mutually support what is best for children all throughout their academic careers (Head Start, 2014).

It is understood that all families are not able to be equally involved at the same level and capacity due to working hours or limited resources. It is, however, integral to a student's successful transition into adulthood that their families be engaged in some capacity of their school lives. Many children spend more time at school than they do anywhere else through a combination of regular schooling and afterschool programming. In order for youth to develop and grow into adults which contribute positively to their communities, schools and organizations need to work towards empowering families to be advocates for themselves and their children. The collaboration between schools, families, and community is especially important in under resourced communities in which historically, systems have been put in place which perpetuate systemic inequality and injustices.

Family Engagement has not always been viewed with a high level of importance that it has for the last few decades. It was not until 1965, with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), that Family Engagement was recognized to be a component of social justice, equity, and quality education (Redding, Murphy, Sheley, 2011), proving to be essential to fortifying a positive trajectory for a youth. With 30% of students at risk of failure in school and life, schools district across the United States started to foster the idea of family engagement to better set their students up for success. San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is no exception. The notion to empower families as advocates to improve communities was not a foreign idea, it was just one that was not invested in.

In 2012, SFUSD published the Family Engagement and Partnership Plan to increase familial engagement based on the fact that family engagement strengthens youth, schools, and communities. With 64 elementary schools in San Francisco, SFUSD has the unique challenge of providing their primary stakeholders with equitable family engagement practices. With a budget of \$568 million for a total of 134 schools, with very different needs district-wide, it is challenging to develop consistent supports. Not only do schools have different needs, but they also have different budgets, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), and sizes. Often times, under resourced schools with struggling PTAs are forced to prioritize between essential roles such as paraprofessionals or social workers. With such an abundant network of nonprofits, the third sector has stepped in to fill in the gaps to provide support at school sites. Nonprofits such as the Mission YMCA have intervened in an impactful way to bring the Department of Education and SFUSD's vision of empowered families and youth into practice.

This project aims to analyze the different methodologies practiced by the Mission YMCA which is currently working in two elementary schools in District 11 (Monroe Elementary, Hillcrest Elementary) and one Elementary school in District 10 (Visitacion Valley Elementary) of San Francisco to create and strengthen consistent family engagement. This project will look at how family engagement is being measured while schools, families, communities, and nonprofits work towards a more equitable San Francisco for youth. This project aims to expose consistencies and inconsistencies within the family engagement initiative in some school in SFUSD and nonprofit organizations contracted to deliver family engagement. The overall goal of this project is to develop consistent practices by creating benchmarks to track the impact of family engagement and develop measurable outcomes.

Creating consistent benchmarks for family engagement within San Francisco is important in two significant capacities. In its most recent Service Allocations Plan, the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF) estimated that it will have a total of \$117 million available annually for the 2018-2023 funding cycle. Of the \$117 million available annually, DCYF plans on allocating \$73 million towards direct grants and \$44 million to interdepartmental partnerships geared towards empowering families in San Francisco County. Family engagement initiatives fall under DCYF's Family Empowerment Service Area which totals to potential allocations granted to nonprofits ranging anywhere from \$5,660,000- \$6,250,000 over the course of the funding cycle (DCYF, 2017).

Nonprofits on the receiving end of this funding will be tasked to measure and quantify their impact of a practice in which success is typically measured through quality of relationships. Another traditional form of tracking family engagement success is through workshop and meeting attendance. This metric does not begin to measure the impact of work efficiently. In this model of tracking impact, life changing data is being lost and the work is being minimized. Through systems in which metrics are better tracked and creating consistent benchmarks, nonprofits have the capability to apply for funding through DCYF while vouching for the work that is already being done towards family engagement.

Additionally, benchmarking family engagement efforts is significant to making San Francisco a more equitable home for youth, children, and their families. Despite the exodus of families due to gentrification in recent years, there are still a significant number of children living in San Francisco. In 2016, it was estimated that there were a total of 125,168 children in San Francisco County. In 2014, it was

estimated that more than 50% of youth living in San Francisco lived more than 100% under the poverty line. Over half of students in SFUSD qualify for Free and Reduced Lunches, which means that a family of four's annual income totals anywhere from \$31,980- \$45, 5210 (DCYF, 2017). Is it not a secret that low-income families experience a plethora of challenges when learning how to navigate the convoluted educational system. Families struggle to keep up in a paperless system, while not having access to technology required for them to easily navigate their way through it. Challenges are only amplified when those families are newcomers. Not only do they struggle to navigate through the educational system, the language barriers they face require that they receive additional support (DCYF, 2017). One cannot begin to advocate for themselves or their children without a knowledge of the systems in place and the opportunities which are rightfully theirs. It is not only vital that family engagement is carried out in an effective and efficient way, but it is it equally necessary to secure sustainable funding for the work through measurable benchmarks.

This project is an analysis of family engagement practices within San Francisco, specifically looking at the practices proposed, in place, and practiced by the Mission YMCA, The Department Children, Youth, and their Families, and San Francisco Unified School District. Benchmarks will be presented based on consistent outcomes from the three listed organizations. This report will be broken down in the following order: literature review, methods and approaches, data analysis, recommendations, and conclusion. The literature review will define family engagement, review best practices, and expose any benchmarks or success indicators. The methods and approaches section will go over the methods and approaches used in this

project. The data analysis section will reveal implications of the research.

Recommendations will then be provided based on the literature review and data analysis.

## **Section 2: Literature Review**

### **What is Family Engagement?**

As a practice, family engagement was not always regarded with the importance that it is today. It was not until the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, that parent engagement was recognized to "...be a component of social justice, equity, and quality education" (Moles & Fege, 2011, pg. 5). Since the passing of the act, there has been a significant push to practice effective family engagement to better set children up for success. Family engagement is tied to a child's academic, social, emotional, and personal development. Families and caretakers have the right to advocate for their children.

Although the conversation around families as advocates surfaced with the ESEA in 1965, it did not amplify until almost a decade later in 1974. At the time, Senator Robert Kennedy was instrumental in continuing the dialogue around parent involvement in schools. He was a firm believer that under resourced families had the right to make decisions for their children in public schools. Kennedy believed that without assessment data and other valuable information, school districts would be able to get away with misuse of Title 1 funding (Moles & Fege, 2011), furthering the systemic imbalances in place in the educational system. Title I funding "...provides financial assistance to local educational agencies...and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (Department of Education, 2015). Without proper

watchdog committees in place, misuse of Title 1 funding would not be a farfetched scenario, but could unfortunately become a common practice within school districts.

Parent involvement in schools and district decision making further strengthened with the establishment of Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) in 1974. The movement gained momentum in 1978 with the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendments. Under the amendments, local education agencies were required to involve the Parent Advisory Committees in Title 1 program planning and implementation to:

- assure the PAC's composition was representative of Title I parents
- assure that PACs had the information needed to make decisions and recommend programs to be addressed under Title I
- give parents information in their native languages
- evaluate parent and instructional programs
- develop procedures to address parent complaints and grievances,
- provide funding to the PACs
- provide parents the opportunity to approve or veto district Title I plan applications
- consider developing parent resource centers, liaison staff, and resources for home learning (FACE Handbook, 2011).

The 1978 amendments paved the way for active PACs and solidified the importance of having complete stakeholder buy in the public school system. By doing so, the amendments added an extra level of accountability in the public school systems. With PACs being a legal requirement in the public school system, the next challenge was creating strong and engages committees. This can pose a significant challenge in communities where there is a large newcomer population, is under resourced, or there is an existing disconnect between communities and schools.

Family involvement and engagement is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school. If families are able to create a home environment that encourages learning, communicate

high, yet reasonable expectations for achievement and future careers, and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community, youth have a high chance of becoming successful individuals in life (Decker & Decker 2003). Family engagement is not something that only happens in families and communities which are well off or have access to better resources. All communities are capable of organizing and advocating.

All literature gathered speaks to and confirms the importance of family engagement in communities. Decker and Decker (2003) argued that there are four main benefits to empowering families through familial engagement in a school setting. The four main benefits are: greater community support, better attendance rates, improved school climate, and an enhanced quality of community life. Greater community support, resources for educational programs, more positive interaction among diverse groups and improved atmosphere for communication only adds positive value to communities.

Although the literature in the field confirms the significance and importance of family engagement in a youth's life, some of the models demonstrating the different types of partnerships between schools, communities, and families are outdated. For example, Christenson and Reschly (2003) argued that communities that struggle with high poverty and social isolation are more likely to have a provider-receiver relationship, making teachers and families "natural enemies" creating the cooptation model. However, researchers have reportedly documented that parents with low income or limited education are just as likely to help children with their homework (Shumow, 2011). Outdated ideas who is and is not able to be involved in their child's life fail to see the importance of empowering all families and minimalizes the power that individual families have within the public school system. Any professionals working in

under resourced communities are able to vouch for the opposite. This type of model exposes the often times too real disconnect between researchers and communities. At times, the only obstacle standing in the way of proper family engagement is a language barrier or a complete understanding of their rights as families within the public school system.

Literature also suggests that as of late, there has been an increased interest in family engagement from well-known foundations such as the Bezos Family Foundation, W.K Kellogg Foundation, and the Kenneth Rainin Foundation based in Oakland, California. This renewed interest in family engagement is regarded as a step away from the traditional top-down approach typically seen on school settings. Family engagement is no longer limited to the traditional form and practice. It has expanded to encompass so much more. It now “...(means) organizing parents to push for system-level change or simply listening to what parents believe their kids need” [Reilly, C. (2018, March 01)].

### **Principals of Family Engagement**

The following section is a compilation of common practices, organizational principles, and outcomes of family engagement.

Although family engagement looks different in different communities some common practices of family engagement within a school setting include:

- Communicate importance of positive relationship between parents and children.
- Link parents and families to supportive programs and resources in the community.
- Reach out to all families, not just the ones that attend meetings.
- Establish policies that support & respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions & practices within the communities cultural and religious diversity.

- Provide an accessible parent/family information & resource center to support parents & families with training, resources, & other services.
- Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and their primary role in rearing children to become responsible adults.
- Seek & encourage parental participation in making decisions that affect students.
- Inform families of expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
- Provide information about how to foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, & give feedback to teachers.
- Regularly assign interactive homework that requires students to discuss with their parents or other family members what they're learning in class.
- Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist families understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet classroom expectations, & perform well on tests or other assignments.
- Involve families in setting annual student goals & planning for postsecondary education careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student with families as full planning partners.
- Provide opportunities for staff members to learn & share successful approaches to engaging families in children's education.
- Create opportunities for families to volunteer in engaging activities. (Decker & Decker 2003)

The Full Service Community Model, proposed by Stefanski, Vali, and Jacobson (2016) is among the most sustainable and inclusive family engagement model. In this model, families are viewed as valued partners rather than simply recipients of services. They are also encouraged to take part in greater decision-making. The Full Service community model democratizes schools by opening them up decision making to the community and by fully engaging parents in processes that create policies and allocate funding which directly affect their children.

### **Family Engagement Models**

The Joyce Epstein Model (2001) categorizes family engagement into six models.

The models include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

- Parenting: Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.
- Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home that are effective and reliable.
- Volunteering: Improve recruitment and training to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school. Provide meaningful work and flexible scheduling.
- Learning at Home: Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities.
- Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and other organizations.
- Collaborating with the Community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities.

The discussed models exemplify the effective practices of family engagement. The models stress the importance of inclusion and collaboration. Seeing families as partners by providing access to resources and rights is essential to transforming parent involvement into family engagement. It is not enough to include families in decisions made regarding their children's well-being. It is vital that they are encouraged to do so as well.

### **Section 3: Methods and Approaches**

As a family engagement practitioner, the nature and vastness of the work is completely understood. I have been working with families in San Francisco County for the past five years, mainly in resource navigation assistance. San Francisco county is rich in resources and social assistance making it difficult to differentiate and navigate through the plethora of services provided and organizations providing the services. The resources available to families vary. Services available, but are not limited to: from housing, afterschool care, nutrition, legal, educational, and healthcare. With the substantial network of resources available, resource navigation experts are vital. This is especially true in school settings where assistance with resource navigating can mean the difference between knowing what a child is legally entitled to and a child missing out on services which are necessary for their social emotional and academic development. Within SFSUD, a majority of the schools have roles such as parent liaisons and family engagement coordinators who facilitate assistance with resource navigation. A mixed research approach was taken to complete this project. The following methods were used: literature review, expert interviews, and data analysis.

#### **Literature Review**

To find consistent benchmarks and best practices within the field of family engagement, a literature review of 18 sources was conducted. The literature varied from best practice standards for family engagement as a whole to San Francisco County specific literature to better understand what benchmarks would be best for county and city that are so diverse. Similar end results for family engagement were found throughout the literature. Similar outcomes include: families as advocates, families as lifelong learners, families as leaders, and overall well-being of

families. Similar best practices to implement meaningful family engagement practices include: building relationships with families through face to face conversations, having materials in native languages to create inclusive communities, having on-site translator (if diverse site requires), and the education of families on school and community-wide practices, rights, and expectations.

### **Expert Interviews**

To get a better understanding of what is expected by family engagement coordinators, three experts in the field were interviewed. All three interviewees work in schools within SFSUD. Their combined experience with family engagement and community organizing total to 23 years and ranges anywhere from four to eleven years. The professionals interviewed for this report were all hired by the Mission YMCA based on their experience in the field to assist their pertaining school sites with the engagement of families to create a stronger, better resourced, and more knowledgeable communities. To gain a better understanding of what benchmarks are being providing and what dictates successful family engagement, each expert was given a questionnaire (See Appendix A).

The following table is a breakdown of community demographics by school site. The data provided was extracted from each school site's School Accountability Report Card located on SFUSD's website.

**Table 1: Demographics of Schools Served by Family Engagement Coordinators**

**For 2016-2017 School Year**

<b>School</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students</b>	<b>Breakup of Community by largest ethnicities</b>	<b>% of English Learners (ELs)</b>

Monroe Elementary	556	69.1%	Latino: 50.7% Asian: 32.2%	54.5%
Hillcrest Elementary	448	83.5%	Latino: 42.2 % Asian: 30.8% African American: 11%	56.7%
Visitation Valley Elementary	392	80.1%	Asian: 47.2% Latino: 15.3% African American: 13.5% Pacific Islander: 7.4% Filipino: 7.1%	46.4%

Going into the follow-up interviews, after the interviewees filled out the questionnaires, it was hypothesized that there the interviews would conclude without having any uniform benchmarks or data collection methods but similar goal to be reached.

Martiza DiCocco, has been officially practicing family engagement for at least 11 years. Before that, she ran a daycare where she assisted newcomers through not only providing the vital service of childcare but also helped families culturally orient themselves. Martiza has experience helping families navigating social services in both Oregon and California. As an immigrant herself, she understands and values the importance of the work that she does. Her role as a community helper in the Excelsior District of San Francisco inspired the Mission YMCA to develop a role based on the daily work she does.

At Hillcrest Elementary, Maritza embodies the complexity of the work encompassed by the title of family engagement coordinator. Some of her work includes but is not limited to: assistance with social service applications, language support, case management, and workshop facilitation. The work and impact that she has made in her community motivated the Mission YMCA to recreate her role in other communities serviced by the organization. When asked about the meaning of her work, DiCocco responded: “The communities we work with experience

a lot of trauma. If you can't process the trauma, you can't focus on the academic”

(DiCocco M. 4/30/2018). This quote highlights the complexity of her work. Not only does she assist with resource navigation within a school setting, she practices case management. The families she serves are diverse, have experienced trauma, and vary in resources needed.

The other two expert interviewees chose not to be named in this study. Their experience in the field ranges from 4-8 years in family engagement and community organizing. The combined key take-aways from all three interviews include:

- Current benchmarks used for family engagement: event attendance, strength of relationships, parent outreach, financial community buy-in
- Successful family engagement: Consistent family turn out, financial buy-in, being able to communicate to families in their native tongue, parents actively engaged in conversations, positive shifts in dialogue, families being able to ask teachers and school administration the right questions, families as advocates for themselves and their children
- Methods used to track family engagement: Surveys, sign-in/out sheets, Student Action Plan, family questionnaires, workshop evaluation sheets, DCYF Contract Management System in which monthly workshop attendance is tracked as well as monthly narratives for family engagement work ( no feedback is given from narrative)
- Most significant challenge in family engagement practice: Consistent attendance of local groups, developing a good base of tools and resources to start a family off when first encountering them, funding, lack of structure, being pulled in many directions as a support staff

- Awareness of DCYF's Service Allocation Plan: Two out of the three interviewees were unaware of the Service Allocation Plan proposed by DCYF which outlines the desired outcomes of family engagement work in San Francisco
- Recommendations for family engagement benchmarks: Workshop evaluation, family activation, familiarity with school district policies, visibility in the community, consistent training, workshops specifically designed for community needs, amount of resources provided to community

The expert interviews in this report highlighted the diversity of the work in family engagement, the difference in the goal setting, benchmarking, and differences in tracking impact. The interviewees all had different methods of tracking their impact. Additionally, as pointed out by the key take aways from the interviews, two of the three experts were unaware of the Service Allocation plan proposed by DCYF. This the family engagement work at the three school sites are funded by DCYF.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this report is a mixed method approach. In order to gain a better understanding of the desired outcomes and best practices of family engagement the following reports were examined: San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families Final Services Allocation Plan 2018-2023 Funding Cycle, San Francisco Unified School District's Family Engagement Standards, and the Mission YMCA's family engagement goals. All reports analyzed were published from 2013-2018. Expert interviewees were first given a questionnaire which they filled out on their own. The questionnaire was then followed up with either an in-person conversation or telephone call to for further explanation and dialogue regarding responses.

## Section 4. Data Analysis

This project is a result of a mixed data analysis approach which consists of three expert interviews conducted between the months of March and May 2018, a literature review of several resources, and the review of the Service Allocation Plan proposed by DCYF, the Mission YMCA's desired outcomes for family engagement, and the desired family engagement goals proposed by SFUSD. As previously mentioned, all analyzed reports were published within the past five years (2013-2018).

The following table is a comparison of goals set by the three different organizations discussed in this project based on the Service Allocation Plan and other two sets of goals and desired outcomes proposed by: DCYF, Mission YMCA, and SFUSD.

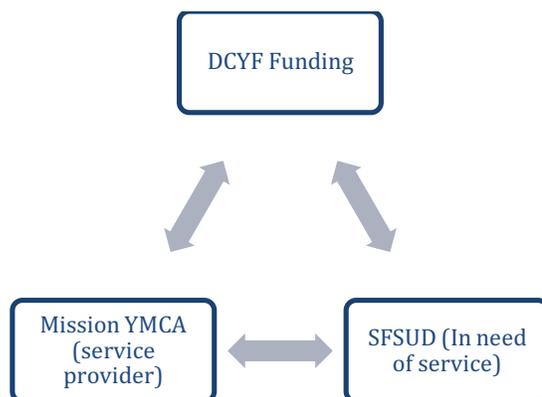
**Table 2: Family Engagement Goals – DCYF, Mission YMCA, SFUSD**

<b>DCYF Goals</b>	<b>Mission YMCA Goals</b>	<b>SFUSD Goals</b>
Children and youth supported by nurturing families	Connect parents, caregivers, and guardians to important resources	Access and Equity: Make social justice a reality by ensuring every student has access to high quality teaching and learning
Physically and emotionally healthy children and youth		Student Achievement: Create learning environments in all our schools that foster highly engaged and joyful learners and that support every student reaching her or his potential

<p>Youth who are ready for college, work and productive adulthood</p>		<p>Accountability: Keep our promises to students and families and enlist everyone in the community to join us in doing so</p>
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Table 2 is significant because DCYF funds the work of family engagement in the three sites where the Mission YMCA employs family engagement. This does not only hold true to the Hillcrest Elementary, Monroe Elementary, and Visitacion Valley Elementary, but also holds true to other nonprofits which are contracted to do conduct family engagement (see Table 3). Other organizations such as MEDA are working directly in school sites to step in where the district and individual school sites are not able to. This poses a challenge when each organization proposes different goals but are working, often times together, towards the same end result of effective familial engagement within the same communities.

**Table 3: Chart of relationship between DCYF, Mission YMCA, and SFUSD**



DCYF’s Service Allocation plan outlines the following suggested success indicators for family engagement and empowerment, which is not uniformly known by experts in the field.

**Table 4: Indicators of successful Family Engagement in San Francisco proposed****by the Department of Youth, Children, and their Families**

Indicators of successful Family Engagement in San Francisco proposed by the Department of Youth, Children, and their Families:
1. Percentage of San Francisco youth ages 10-18 involved in the Juvenile Justice System
2. Number of substantiated child maltreatment cases per 1,000 children
3. Percent of Youth ages 18-24 who are arrested or incarcerated
4. Percentage of families who feel engaged and connected to their communities
5. Percent of youth who report feeling engaged and connected in their communities
6. Percentage of Public School students who are at a healthy weight
7. Percentage of public school students who are physically fit
8. Percentage of SFUSD students with caring adult relationships in the school environment
9. Percentage of Kindergarteners who are ready for school
10. Percentage of public school 3 <sup>rd</sup> graders above or near state standards
11. Percentage of SFUSD who are chronically absent
12. Percentage of 8 <sup>th</sup> graders who graduate middle school and are ready for high school
13. Percentage of SFUSD students with positive results in the social emotional skills areas assessed by SFUSD
14. Percentage of students who have been suspended
15. Percent of SFUSD students who graduate high school within four years
16. Percentage of SFUSD high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary institution and complete within six years

17. Percent of San Francisco 18-24 year olds who are either enrolled in school or working

[Department of Youth, Children, and Their Families (2017/5/25) Service Allocation Plan. Retrieved from [www.dcyssf.org](http://www.dcyssf.org)]

The following are SFUSD's standards for engaging families:

1. Supporting strong relationships: Schools welcome and respect families, build community among diverse family populations, and actively engage family members to resolve conflicts and repair harm.
2. Facilitating two-way communication: Schools actively reach out to hear from families. Communication processes are clear to families and encourage a mutual exchange of information and perspectives.
3. Linking to learning: Families are encouraged and supported to be involved in their children's learning at home and at school.
4. Valuing diversity: Schools respect and affirm the value of students' diverse cultures, backgrounds and family structures. School site and district staff demonstrate and promote cultural competence.
5. Speaking up for every student: Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have equitable access to learning opportunities.
6. Sharing power and decision-making: Families are encouraged and empowered to participate in formal and informal structures for making decisions about their children, schools, and the district.
7. Connecting families to community resources: Schools help families access useful community resources and services [San Francisco Unified School District (2018/4/24) SFUSD's Standards for Engaging and Empowering Families. Retrieved from [www.sfusd.edu](http://www.sfusd.edu)]

There were not any benchmarks present in the literature review or the analysis of data. There are clear goals and outcomes for and of the work, but there is not a clear framework to get there that is being shared among the three collaborating organizations. This glimpse into a bigger issue which affects many nonprofits. Within the sector, it is easy to focus on a singular mission. More often than not, nonprofits are underfunded and short staffed which makes collaboration

between organization difficult and not frequent enough. The benchmarks that were reported in the expert interview section of this report are developed by the family engagement coordinators based on their own work in the field and the needs of their own communities.

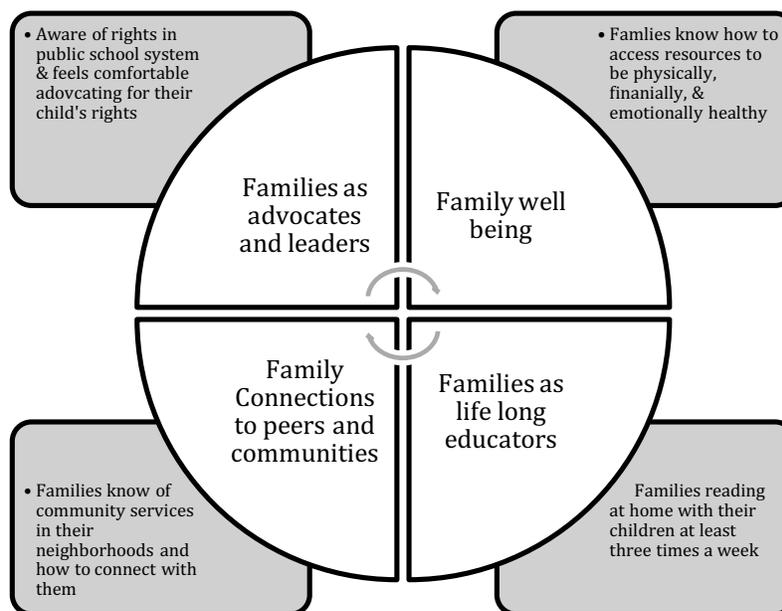
### **Section 5: Implications and Recommendations**

There is significant literature in support of the practice of family engagement and the evolution towards purposeful interactions. The literature supports the work by proving that there is a strong correlation between familial involvement and a child's success. Schools and nonprofits are collaborating to create an environment in which families feel welcomed, supported, and empowered. While many family engagement goals are similar across the sector among organizations, the work itself remains difficult to measure. There is not a universal framework given to coordinators of family engagement for consistent service delivery.

Often times many stakeholders are involved with the process of family engagement. In the school sites which were examined, coordinators are not being given benchmarks or tools to properly track their successes. As a best practice, moving forward it is recommended that the Mission YMCA share the DCYF Service Allocation Plan with coordinators at the time of onboarding. Setting expectations for the work is not only helpful for the employees but also contributes to a greater pool of effective data collection.

The following are recommended benchmarks for nonprofits committed to practicing family engagement.

**Figure 1: Four Benchmarks for Desired Family Engagement Outcomes**



Additional benchmarks compiled and developed from the literature and research include:

**Families as advocates and leaders:**

- 1) Serve as representatives in school Parent Advisory Councils such as:
  - a) Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
  - b) English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC),
  - c) School Site Council (SSC)
- 2) Reach out to all families regardless of meeting attendance
- 3) Have parent information accessible: training & services
- 4) Include families & caregivers in school-wide decision making
- 5) Knowledge of Title 1 funding allocations
- 6) Give parents opportunity to lead and facilitate workshops
- 7) Empowering families to host social events
- 8) Educate parents on local government initiatives
- 9) If applicable, register families to vote
- 10) Facilitate parent-lead community forums

**Family well-being:**

- 1) Establish policies that support and respect family diversity

- diabetes)
- 2) Create health workshops tailored to community needs (i.e. effects of diabetes)
  - 3) Bring food bank to site connect
  - 4) Connect families to local fresh produce organization
  - 5) Educate families on the District's policy regarding healthy snacks allowed on campus during the school day
  - 6) If in a food desert, help families create petition to the city and local council men/women
  - 7) Make sure families know of resources available to their children within school site
  - 8) Local mental health professional's information readily available
  - 9) Implement walk/bike to school events
  - 10) Facilitate family health fair

### **Families as lifelong educators:**

- 1) Provide information and ideas for families to help students with homework
- 2) Provide library cards
- 3) Provide access to classroom curriculum
- 4) Provide families with meaningful workshops including extended education
- 5) Assign interactive homework so students are able to engage in dialogue regarding assignments at home
- 6) For families of English Learners: provide language support with communication with teachers & offer assistance
- 7) Empower families to ask meaningful questions during parent/teacher conferences (beyond behavior)
- 8) Assist with parent/teacher relationships
- 9) Provide extended learning workshops for families regarding
  - a) new math core curriculum
  - b) literacy
  - c) designated ELD time
  - d) integrated ELD time
- 10) Teach families how to read report cards
  - a) educate parents on literacy goals for each grade

### **Family connections to peers and community:**

- 1) Ensure personnel on site respects families and their role in raising children
- 2) Inform families of classroom and school-wide expectations
- 3) Create volunteer opportunities for families
- 4) Create job board for families
- 5) Host cultural events that celebrate the community's diversity

- 6) Create a family resource board
- 7) Host parent meeting meet & greets
- 8) Host book club for families (if site has multilingual pathways pick a book that is published in all languages spoken by community)
- 9) Have translators at all parent group meetings/workshops
- 10) Facilitate community garden days

Additionally, it is recommended that family engagement practitioners develop a consistent and effective case management system. Many professionals who are currently practicing family engagement already do so. Ideally, it is done by consistently checking in with clients and taking notes of their progress and documenting resources given. Consistent case management and use of intake forms would provide professionals with vital data and ultimately provide families with quality family engagement. School sites range in size, which adds another factor to the importance of documenting a family's resource navigation journey. As shown in this report, a school can vary in size by almost 200 students.

Currently, within some organizations, the case management is done mentally or not collected in a central location. Often, time spent on a client is not even documented. The following figure is an example of a simple tool to keep track of family engagement efforts. The column for time in/out is an easy way to track impact and calculate the average time which is being spent on clients by a family engagement coordinator. The time column also allows organizations to track trends in the academic calendar year in terms of when more assistance is needed (i.e. needs at the beginning of the school year versus needs at the end of the year).



This proposed table is simple to use and addresses the need for consistent case management in family engagement. It also assists with keeping track of needs and resources given to better track impact and collaborations between organizations. If organizations do not have access to a case management data base, the form shown above can be used in Google Docs, which is free to use. Using the Find option, a coordinator can easily locate the form pertaining to each family they are working with.

## **Section 6: Conclusions**

Family Engagement work is not new. It has been practiced for decades by community helpers in and out of school sites. With the professionalization of the sector, also comes the professionalization of practices within it. There has been a recent push to track the impact of family engagement practices within San Francisco Unified School District. The importance of tracking family engagement is twofold. Firstly, families benefit from consistent impact measurement through quality service and meaningful interactions. Secondly, tracking family engagement can lead to significant funding opportunities from the Department of Youth Children and Their Families. Under the most recent Service Allocation Plans, anywhere from \$5,660,000-\$6,250,000 is available to nonprofits practicing effective and trackable family engagement. With so much competition among nonprofits in the Bay Area for funding, it is crucial that nonprofits document their impact. Documentation and tracking could be the factor that sets one nonprofit apart from the other resulting in funding.

The main finding of this report are that there are not any benchmarks provided to family engagement coordinators within the Mission YMCA, offered by granter DCYF, or sites within SFUSD that were studied in this project. Based on the literature review, expert interviews, and

data analysis conducted in this report, ten benchmarks for successful family engagement in the following four areas: families as advocates and leaders, family well-being, family connections to peers and communities, and families as lifelong educators. These benchmarks will assist coordinators in engaging in meaningful and purposeful interactions with the families they serve.

Through the research gathered for this report, form was created to track inputs and impact. The form will assist in tracking families' journeys throughout the academic school year and empower coordinators to be better service providers. The benchmarks and form created through this project will move the professionalization of a practice that has existed for decades forward. The provided benchmarks comes at a time where tracking impact is as important as ever. As service providers, it is easy to get lost in the day to day hard work. To service providers, their work is clearly meaningful because they are able to see the impact and positive outcomes. Unfortunately, it is not as apparent to the outside world, especially funders. In order to continue the impactful work that is being done, impact needs to be proven.

### **Limitation of Research**

This research project took a look at three schools within San Francisco Unified School District in neighboring Districts 10 and 11. Research around this topic can be furthered by looking at more schools from different districts within SFUSD with different funding as well as other partnering nonprofits in San Francisco doing similar work. Additionally, to further understand desired benchmarking and grant the allocation process, it would add value to the research if someone from the Department of Youth, Children, and Their Families was consulted.

## **Application**

The recommendations in this work will be put into action effective immediately. As a professional who practices family engagement on a daily basis, the tools created will be used to track my work and the work of my colleagues. As the Mission YMCA expands the work of family engagement to new school sites, the benchmarks created will assist new professionals in outlining, defying, and tracking their work. The goal of the developed materials to assist in defining family engagement as a practice and provide useable benchmarks to commit to engaging families in a meaningful and purposeful way.

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## **Appendix A: Family Engagement Questionnaire**

### Family Engagement Questionnaire

1. How long have you been practicing family engagement?
2. Do you believe in the importance of family engagement? Why or why not?
3. Where do you get your family engagement goals?
4. Do you have benchmarks for family engagement?
5. What does successful family engagement look like for you?
6. What methods do you use to track your family engagement?
7. What are your most significant challenge as a family engagement coordinator?
8. Who collects your family engagement metrics? Do you get feedback on your metrics?
9. Are you aware of the Service Allocation Plan for Family Engagement proposed to by DCYF?
10. What do you think should be a benchmark in order to measure the impact of family engagement at a school site?
11. Do you connect with other family engagement coordinators/ parent liaisons in the district or within your area?

## **Author's Bio**

Karla Diaz is a passionate nonprofit professional working towards more equitable communities through her work in the sector. She has been working in the nonprofit field for five and a half years. In that time, she has worked in two of the most nationally recognized youth development nonprofits in the nation- Big Brothers Big Sisters and the YMCA. During her tenure in the nonprofit sector, Karla has worked to connect youth and their families to the vital resources needed in order to navigate the communities in which they live in for a more equitable future. In her time at both organizations, she has held a key role in developing innovative programming and strengthening organizational culture and morale.

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