Family Engagement Policy

I. Purpose
To establish a uniform, county-wide standard for creating partnerships between families, the school district, individual schools, and the community for creating, implementing and supporting comprehensive family engagement practices for the purpose of student success.

II. Policy Statement
The Wicomico County Board of Education recognizes that engaging families in the educational process is essential for improved academic success for students. Families are their children’s first teachers and are asked to be partners in the education of their children. A child’s education is a shared responsibility between the school, the family and the community.

This policy is designed to ensure compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the Maryland State Department Bridge to Excellence Plan, and Maryland’s Achievement Matters Most Educational Plan. The policy underscores the importance of the participation of adult family and community members in students’ lives.

Title I of the ESSA is a federally funded educational program that is authorized by Congress to provide supplemental funds to school districts. These funds are to assist schools with the highest student concentrations of poverty to help them meet educational goals. The Wicomico County Public School System recognizes that schools that receive funds through the Title I federal program have specific criteria for parental involvement which are addressed in the Title I Plan for Family Involvement.

III. Definitions
Family engagement and parent involvement are phrases that speak to the variety of persons who are raising children and have a vested interest in their success. Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:
A. “Parent” - means a biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or guardian generally authorized to act as the child’s parent.
B. “Guardian” - means an individual acting in place of a biological or adoptive parent (grandparent, step-parent, or other relative) with whom the student lives or an individual who is legally responsible for the student’s welfare.
C. “Family” - means a student’s primary care-giving unit.
D. “Community” - means various constituents with a vested interest in the education of children inclusive of businesses, religious organizations, and community groups.
E. “Family engagement” – means a process that is based on, but not limited to, the National Standards for Family Involvement as espoused by the National PTA and the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships:
   1. Welcoming all families into the school community.
   2. Communicating frequently and effectively with families.
   3. Advocating for the well-being of children in terms of school facilities, budget, and teaching procedures.
   4. Providing opportunities for families to volunteer for their children, in and out of school.
   5. Collaborating with the community for the wellbeing of students.

F. “Family engagement teams” - means a small group of staff and parents who develop and oversee the work of reaching out to parents and engaging them for the academic and social success of their students; the team may be a subset of the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and/or Parent Advisory Committee.

IV. Procedures

Wicomico County Public Schools is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive community that welcomes, recruits, and nurtures the input of parents for supporting student achievement. Opportunities that encourage and promote effective family engagement will be supported throughout the district.

To build a strong family engagement process, the school system pledges to:

A. Provide a learning environment for school staff that enhances positive interactions with parents and families.

B. Promote district orientation and training for approved family volunteers in school buildings and outside of the school day.

C. Create opportunities at the district and school level to address families’ queries in regards to helping students be academically successful which may include, but are not limited to, family engagement conferences, academic events, and online resources.

D. Support family engagement activities by participating in the PIMA (Parent Involvement Matters Award) program, administered by the Maryland State Department of Education.

E. Guide schools in establishing a structure for family engagement, which may include, but is not limited to forming family engagement teams, creating a family engagement plan as part of the school’s ILT plan, and offering academic-related family engagement events each year.

F. Provide professional development for family engagement teams.

G. Develop and maintain regular communication between home and school through a variety of mediums including but not limited to newsletters, websites and a district-wide rapid notification telephone system.

H. Collaborate with the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) in each school and the Wicomico County Council of PTAs (WCCPTA).
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I. Include parents and family members on school and district committees such as the Instructional Leadership Teams, Family Leadership Council, Curriculum Advisory Committee, and Parent Advisory Councils [all Wicomico County Public School advisory committees must include non-employee parent representatives].

J. Provide information for families in multiple formats (print, video, and internet) and in multiple languages.

K. Inform stakeholders of available resources that support family engagement.

V. Responsibilities

A. The Superintendent of Schools, or designee, will ensure that staff and schools are provided appropriate resources to implement this policy. Staff persons at the district level will oversee this process.

B. Family Engagement Teams (FETs) will exist at the district level and in each school (as part of the Instructional Leadership Team and/or Parent Advisory Committee) for the express purpose of providing a venue for working with parents and supporting their commitment to the academic success of their children.

C. The school system will allot family engagement funds in the annual budget for each school. Title I funds earmarked for family engagement efforts, will be allotted and utilized in strict compliance to federal regulations.

Related Documents:

- BOE-GEN-PL-015, Board of Education Meeting with Parent Advisory Council Policy