

Executive Summary



Since 2010, 39 states and DC passed laws compelling family engagement policies (Mapp, 5). The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that Title I schools reach out to families to improve student learning. 50 years of research unequivocally links robust family involvement to student achievement including, “student grades, achievement test scores, lower dropout rates, students’ sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning and students’ beliefs about the importance of education” (Mapp, 5). However, Hawai’i currently does not have laws establishing standards nor providing support for family engagement --- moreover, very little transparency exists about what actually happens on campuses.

Project Design

This project attempted to identify best practices for family engagement in Hawai’i DOE schools. The study started with analyzing parent response rates to the School Quality Survey (SQS), which gauges parent satisfaction --- we used this starting point since DOE schools did not share many common data indicators for family engagement given the absence of settled expectations on data collection and accountability. After picking several schools primarily across Oahu, striving for diversity in our selections, we choose fourteen schools to interview as well as participate in their parent meetings. We preserved transcripts of all interviews and gathered further data on aspects such as parent attendance, fundraising and student performance during the site visits.

Nanakuli Elementary

Ewa Makai Middle

Ewa Beach Elementary

Palisades Elementary

Linapuni Elementary

Waikiki Elementary

Niu Valley Middle

Aina Haina Elementary

Castle High School

Kaneohe Elementary

Kainalu Elementary

Kapa’a High School (Kauai)

Kailua Intermediate

Ka’elepulu Elementary

***Bold text indicates case study**

Findings

We arrived at six conclusions based upon our observations. We chose Palisades Elementary, Waikiki Elementary and Kapa'a High School as case studies to exemplify these findings, but we found them at every school.

- 1) The SQS does not capture everything, and parent response rates are decreasing.
- 2) No consensus on key definitions or concepts such as family engagement, PCNC facilitator responsibilities, success and tracking mechanisms.
- 3) Human capital matters --- from the administrators to the PCNC facilitators to the teachers. Nonetheless, staff rarely receive training on family engagement and lack the requisite skills, knowledge and belief systems to adequately execute family engagement strategies.
- 4) Communication must be clear, consistent, constant and mutual. Both parties provide feedback to each other, and all major policies get communicated.
- 5) Successful schools commit to reducing or completely eliminating economic obstacles to participation with the emphasis on equity --- they think about those least likely to participate because of their socioeconomic status or language barrier and create access points.
- 6) The engagement is culturally responsive. Schools deliver content in a way that relates to the families, and they make sure the resources schools offer align with their needs.