The W.K. Kellogg Foundation believes that family engagement is an essential strategy for achieving learning outcomes for children from birth through age 8.

While traditional approaches to family engagement provide an important starting point for conversation, more needs to be done to empower families as partners and leaders in our communities. We believe an agreed-upon definition is necessary to achieve this goal.

WKKF defines transformative family engagement as a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities aimed at helping students learn and achieve. It is a continuous process from birth to third grade and beyond, and occurs across many settings where children learn — creating environments in which empowered parents and families are leaders.

Below are some important differences between traditional and transformative family engagement approaches:

### Traditional

**Deficit-based**
Many initiatives reinforce negative stereotypes that low-income families simply do not have the skills or interest in engaging in their children’s education.

**Individual responsibility**
Typically, parents are not seen as partners in learning.

**Fix the family**
Typical approaches have not honored the unique strengths families can bring to their children’s education, with an assumption that families need assistance in meeting their parenting responsibilities.

**Cultural hegemony**
There is an assumption that existing practices are good enough, but research shows that more needs to be done to truly achieve equitable outcomes for children through family engagement.

### Transformative

**Strength-based**
All parents and caregivers want to see their children succeed. They have tremendous strengths to bring to conversations and important decisions on their children’s education.

**Shared responsibility**
A growing body of research confirms that the best learning environments for children are ones where families, educators and community leaders share responsibility for student success.

**Build the capacity of partners**
Families, educators and community leaders are equal partners and have a shared voice in student learning.

**Open to learn from other cultures**
Truly transformative family engagement means schools remain open and committed to adapting to the needs, cultures and priorities of local families and communities.
The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

**THE CHALLENGE**

Lack of opportunities for School/Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

Lack of opportunities for Families to build the capacity for partnerships

**OPPORTUNITY CONDITIONS**

Process Conditions
- Linked to learning
- Relational
- Development vs. service orientation
- Collaborative
- Interactive

Organizational Conditions
- Systemic: across the organization
- Integrated: embedded in all programs
- Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

**POLICY AND PROGRAM GOALS**

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “4 C” areas:
- **Capabilities** (skills and knowledge)
- **Connections** (networks)
- **Cognition** (beliefs, values)
- **Confidence** (self-efficacy)

**FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES**

School and Program Staff who can
- Honor and recognize families’ funds of knowledge
- Connect family engagement to student learning
- Create welcoming, inviting cultures

Families who can negotiate multiple roles
- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Monitors
- Advocates
- Decision Makers
- Collaborators

**Effective Family–School Partnerships**

Supporting Student Achievement & School Improvement

Image courtesy of U.S. Department of Education
When parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across program foundations and program impact areas, family engagement outcomes are achieved, resulting in children who are healthy and ready for school. Parent and family engagement activities are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families.

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