



# SUPPORTING PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

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Parents and caregivers play a critical role in supporting students' academic, social, and emotional development. Over the past few years, parent and teacher relationships have become strained by school closures, remote learning, and current political discourse. Despite the challenges, parents and teachers are working together to support our nation's children and youth who are recovering from a pandemic that negatively affected their education, mental health, and social and emotional well-being.

Research indicates that establishing collaborative partnerships between educators and families and using complementary strategies to promote learning in school and at home create optimal conditions to promote student's academic, social, and emotional skill development ([Albright et al.](#), 2011). As reflected in the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\) framework](#) (n.d.a), families and caregivers are essential to the implementation of high-quality social and emotional learning.

Federal K-12 education law includes important provisions and resources to foster parent and family engagement in schools. To help support alignment between schools and families, this brief explores opportunities for how states and districts can leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to help strengthen family engagement in support of students' academic, social, and emotional learning.

This brief also makes key recommendations to states and districts to support and advance this crucial work, particularly using formula-funded ESSA programs. As students return to their fourth academic year since the initial impact of COVID-19 pandemic—which has had devastating impacts on every facet of student learning—it is imperative that educators and families continue to strengthen their relationships to support students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

## THE RESEARCH

Over the past two decades, studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of parent and caregiver engagement on students' academic achievement and social and emotional development ([Fan & Chen](#), 2001; [Fan](#), 2001; [Henderson & Mapp](#), 2002; [Jeynes](#), 2005; [Sheridan et al.](#), 2019). Positive outcomes of schools regularly engaging parents as partners in their children's education include improved academic performance, improved mental health, increased student engagement, and reduced school dropout rates ([Christenson & Reschly](#), 2010; [Garbacz et al.](#), 2015; [Sheridan et al.](#), 2019; [Wang & Sheikh-Khalil](#), 2014). In addition to being children's first teachers, family members also reinforce what children are learning at school and both model and support the development of important relationship and social skills ([Cripps & Zyromski](#), 2009; [Mishna & Muskat](#), 2004; and [Mendez](#), 2010). These findings demonstrate the ways in which effective teacher-parent communication and strong school-family partnerships are vital to student learning ([Epstein](#), 2018; [Garbacz et al.](#), 2015; [Patrikakou et al.](#), 2005).



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Research also suggests that evidence-based social and emotional learning programs become more powerful when they are embedded in a school-family partnership framework. Such frameworks reinforce the complementary roles of families and educators and extend opportunities for learning across the key developmental contexts of home and family ([Albright & Weissberg, 2010](#)). In other words, social, emotional, and academic skill sets are enhanced when they are mutually supported and reinforced at home and at school.

Informed by this understanding, the CASEL framework emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across four key settings: classrooms, schools, homes, and communities. Specifically, the CASEL “wheel” (see sidebar) features “authentic partnerships” with “families and caregivers” as a key aspect of implementing high-quality social and emotional learning. When families feel valued as partners in school, they more effectively support and build on schoolwide social and emotional learning practices in their homes ([CASEL, n.d.a](#)). When families and educators authentically collaborate, they also create opportunities to model and apply the very communication, behavior, and relationship skills they would like students to develop ([Albright et al., 2011](#)).

Not only does family engagement enhance social and emotional learning, high-quality social and emotional learning is also foundational to authentic school-family partnerships. As outlined in “[Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#),” released by the U.S. Department of Education in 2013 and updated by Dr. Karen Mapp in 2019, the hallmark of successful school-family partnerships is the creation of a trusting relationship between families and schools that recognizes and respects each other’s diverse backgrounds, skills, and strengths ([Mapp & Bergman, 2019](#); [Albright et al., 2011](#); [Bryk & Schneider, 2004](#)).

Authentic collaboration requires key social and emotional skills and core competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. In addition, through CASEL’s district, community, and research partnerships, partners have documented how social and emotional learning supports the cultivation of partnerships between schools and families. They found that engaging families as collaborators and sources of knowledge creates a positive school environment that supports student learning. Research has also shown that districts and schools that created family engagement strategies that were responsive to families’ racial/ethnic background and culture strengthened parent and family engagement ([Hughes & Kwok, 2007](#)).

Families across the country are interested in authentic family and parent engagement opportunities and are in support of social and emotional learning for their children. Data from a [2022 survey conducted by Learning Heroes](#) (in collaboration with UnidosUS, Univision, National PTA, and National Urban League) indicate that 89 percent of parents agree that it will be essential for families and teachers to work closely together to help address the pandemic’s impact on learning, and 84 percent of parents agree it is crucial that families and teachers trust each other in order to do so. [Data from Pew Research](#) shows that 93 percent of parents say it is important that schools teach children how to develop social and emotional skills (Horowitz, 2022). Similarly, [2022 polling by the National PTA](#) indicates that 88 percent of parents want their students to learn social and emotional skills like respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy.



## WHAT IS THE CASEL WHEEL?

CASEL's social and emotional learning framework, known to many as the "CASEL wheel," helps cultivate skills and environments that advance students' learning and development. Schools, districts, states, and others can use CASEL's Framework to: foster knowledge, skills, and attitudes across five areas of social and emotional competence; and establish equitable learning environments and coordinate practices across four key settings—classrooms, schools, homes and communities—that support students' social, emotional, and academic development.

[Learn more](#)



## WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

CASEL defines social and emotional learning as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. [Learn more](#)

## WHY IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPORTANT?

Social and emotional learning is critical for the academic and holistic success of all students. When students are supported in growing their social and emotional competence, they are more likely to experience academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers. This is particularly important now, in light of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students' academic achievement and well-being. To learn more about the research base on social and emotional learning, please visit the [CASEL website](#).



## PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Given the strong evidence and need for school, district, and state collaboration with families, it is critical to understand key federal legislation that supports this work. Passed by Congress on a bipartisan basis in 2015, the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, creates an important opportunity for states, districts, schools, and parents to work together as partners to meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

ESSA includes important parent and family engagement provisions to ensure parents and caregivers are meaningfully involved and consulted in student learning. It also calls for a focus on well-rounded education, which provides an opportunity for states and districts to work together with parents to decide how best to implement social and emotional learning as an evidence-based strategy based on local needs.

The sections that follow delve into how states and districts can leverage family engagement provisions within ESSA to support students' academic, social and emotional learning.

## IMPROVING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT (TITLE I)

Academic achievement in education has always been paramount, but particularly since the onset of the pandemic. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress have shown historic declines in student achievement in reading and math, as well as in civics and U.S. History ([National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), 2022; 2023). Additionally, the [U.S. Surgeon General](#) has noted the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth's social and emotional wellness (2021). With such increased academic, social, and emotional needs of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing parents and families to contribute to discussions on achievement goals can lead to trusting family and school relationships.

Such concerns may be addressed, in part by Title I-A. Under ESSA, Title I-A provides funding to schools with high percentages of low-income students to support their academic success and offers a critical opportunity for parents and caregivers to provide input on state and district goals for academic success, accountability, and school improvement. It also includes requirements to ensure states and districts meaningfully involve parents and family members in state and district education plans.

ESSA requires districts to use at least 1 percent of their Title I funds to support parent and family engagement. These funds can be used for numerous activities to strengthen school-family partnerships in support of student's social, emotional, and academic development such as the following:

- Supporting professional development of school and district staff on parent and family engagement strategies that center social and emotional learning;
- Distributing information on best practices to support parent and family engagement, which can include relationship-building strategies that promote social and emotional skill development;



- Supporting programs that reach families at home, in the community, and at school, such as “two-way communication” with families that help build understanding about social and emotional learning ([Strategies for Establishing School-Family Partnerships in Support of Social and Emotional Learning](#), 2019); and
- Developing parent and family engagement activities that focus on social and emotional skill development at home and in school.

Further, parents can become partners in supporting the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools as a lever to improve school climate and academic achievement. States and districts can include measures of social and emotional learning in their accountability systems to help parents understand whether schools are welcoming and culturally responsive spaces. This is crucial, given that when students feel a sense of belonging at school, they are more likely to be engaged in school and perform well academically ([Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest & American Institutes for Research](#), n.d.).

ESSA also requires the development of report cards, which provide important information to parents and the public about how schools are performing with regard to student attendance, achievement, graduation, school environment, among other useful information. As parents engage with these data and collaborate to develop report cards, they may reflect on the role of social and emotional learning in their children’s education and how schools are supporting the academic success and social and emotional well-being of students. It is also an opportunity for schools to encourage parents to develop social and emotional goals for students.

There are several other ways that ESSA’s funding under Title I-A can be used to support this work. For example, districts receiving Title I-A funds must develop a parent and family engagement policy with parents and family members. This presents an opportunity for districts to create family engagement policies that foster relationships between educators and caregivers, which is critical to reinforcing social and emotional skill development. In addition, ESSA requires Title I schools to conduct at least one annual family engagement meeting, which is an opportunity for schools to provide meaningful communication to parents about students’ academic achievement and social and emotional development.

### [THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN \(ARP\) ACT’S ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND](#)

is one source of federal funding that presents additional opportunities to make investments in parent and family engagement to support students’ academic, social, and emotional learning. For more in-depth information on how states have used ARP ESSER funds to invest in FCE to support social and emotional learning, read CASEL’s [Social and Emotional Learning and ARP State Bright Spots brief entitled “Aligning Social and Emotional Learning Efforts Across Schools, Families, and Communities.”](#)



### SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION (TITLE II)

Effective parent and family engagement is only possible if adults in schools have the knowledge, will, and skill to participate in such engagement. Title II-A, Part A of ESSA provides the resources to help states, districts, and schools achieve that goal. It does so through funding to increase student achievement by supporting the preparation, recruitment, and professional development of educators, principals, and other school leaders. This funding can be used to provide training on parent and family engagement that centers social and emotional learning principles. Such trainings could connect to social and emotional learning by focusing professional learning on how to cultivate productive relationships with families, personalize connections and interactions with families, and collaborate and leverage cultural richness and diversity for effective engagement strategies ([Strategies for Establishing School-Family Partnerships in support of SEL](#), 2019, p. 2).

In addition, ESSA requires districts to meaningfully consult with parents when applying for Title II-A funds and to seek advice from parents about improving district use of funds. These requirements allow parents and families an opportunity to discuss the importance of using Title II-A funds to prepare teachers and principals to support students' academic, social, and emotional development.

### SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS (TITLE III)

Under Title III, ESSA provides funding that offers an opportunity for states and districts to build relationships with parents and families to learn about the unique experiences of English learners (ELs) and their communities to support their academic, social, and emotional development. States are required to develop Title III plans in consultation with parents, districts, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. States can also use their Title III reservation to provide professional development activities to educators and school leaders on social and emotional development to support EL instruction. In addition, districts receiving Title III funds must use funds to conduct parent and family engagement. Districts can leverage this requirement to develop strong school-family partnerships to learn how to create culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments to foster the academic, social, and emotional wellbeing of ELs.

### ADULT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The importance of preparing and training educators effectively for parent and family engagement ties in directly with the concept of "adult social and emotional learning," defined as cultivating "a community of adults who engage in their own social and emotional learning, collaborate on strategies for promoting social and emotional learning, and model social and emotional learning throughout the school" (CASEL, n.d.b). Supporting all educators' ongoing professional learning in their social and emotional development has been demonstrated as a critical need ([Jones and Kahn](#), 2018), and teachers' social and emotional competence and well-being has been affiliated with better teacher-student relationships, more effective classroom management, and successful social and emotional learning program implementation ([Jennings and Greenberg](#), 2009).



Indeed, the Department's 2016 Title III guidance acknowledges the connection between supporting ELs and social and emotional learning. The guidance states:

Long-term ELs may need unique supports to address both academic and non-academic factors, such as social [and] emotional skills development, that may impact the time it takes them to attain English language proficiency. Positive emotional well-being correlates with higher rates of academic engagement, a sense of belonging, and connectedness in school. LEAs and States can actively support skill development by creating safe learning environments where it is safe to express emotions and providing strategies for critical problem solving with emphasis on communication and relational skills ([U.S. Department of Education](#)).

### SUPPORTING 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS (TITLE IV)

Within Title IV, ESSA includes a variety of programs, including student supports, afterschool and summer learning programs, charter and magnet schools, family engagement centers, and full-service community schools that provide key opportunities for family engagement to support students' academic, social and emotional learning. Below we highlight opportunities to do this work within Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV-A), 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Title IV-B), and Statewide Family Engagement Centers (Title IV-E).

#### STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS (TITLE IV-A)

Under Title IV-A, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program provides funding to improve students' academic achievement by providing access to well-rounded educational opportunities, supporting safe and healthy programs, and improving use of technology.

Districts are required to develop their application for Title IV-A funds in consultation with parents and other key stakeholders and can use this as an opportunity to discuss with parents and families the role of social and emotional learning in providing safe and supportive learning environments and a well-rounded education. Parents and families can offer valuable input about the use of Title IV-A funds to implement social and emotional learning in schools.

ESSA requires that if districts use their Title IV-A funds for safe and healthy students, they must use a portion of their funds to promote parent and family engagement in the activity. Districts can leverage this opportunity to invite parents and families into a discussion about data on students' sense of belonging and safety in school as part of their efforts to support the safety and well-being of students.

In addition, states can leverage their reservation of Title IV-A funding to support districts to implement parent engagement activities that incorporate social and emotional learning to provide well-rounded educational experiences and foster safe and healthy learning environments to improve academic achievement.

### BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT (BSCA)

Through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), Congress authorized \$1 billion in formula funding under Title IV-A of ESSA to provide students with safe and healthy learning environments. The U.S. Department of Education emphasizes the importance of family engagement at the state and district level to help create safe and healthy schools. BSCA funds may be used to support schoolwide implementation of strategies to meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs. For more details, please refer to [U.S. ED's FAQ document](#).



### 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS (TITLE IV-B)

As the [Afterschool Alliance explains](#), “Together with families and schools, afterschool and summer learning programs can work to ensure that all children and youth are given the supports they need to build their social and emotional skills and competencies, paving a clear pathway to a healthy and fulfilling future” (2018, p. 8), achieved in part through “relationships [that] give youth the confidence to explore the world around them, discover their passions, and continue forming positive relationships with their peers and other adults ([Afterschool Alliance](#), 2018).

Title IV-B of ESSA, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, creates a grant program that helps address the possibilities described above by providing funding to support before-school, after-school, and summer learning programs. States have the flexibility to use their share of funding to provide training to districts to engage parents to support students’ academic, social, and emotional development. Funding can also support numerous activities, including well-rounded educational opportunities and parenting skills programs that promote parent involvement. Districts that receive funding can partner with parents to develop educational opportunities for families that enhance the social and emotional development and academic success of students.

### STATEWIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CENTERS (TITLE IV-E)

ESSA also provides funding for [Statewide Family Engagement Centers](#) (SFECs) under Title IV-E to help states and districts support family engagement in education programs. SFECs provide training and technical assistance to states, districts, and schools to support the implementation of parent and family engagement policies to improve student achievement. A 2021 review of SFECs found that they help states and districts increase the capacity of families to support student learning and development as well as family well-being ([National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement](#), 2021). These efforts include helping families build the knowledge to support students’ academic development, social and emotional well-being, attendance, and academic progress.

In addition, the report found that SFECs provide numerous resources and practical tools to help states and districts engage with families in support of students’ academic success and well-being, including social and emotional learning and mental health. States and districts can continue to leverage SFECs to strengthen school-family relationships and reduce barriers to these partnerships to support students’ academic, social, and emotional learning.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen parent and family engagement, in conjunction with meeting the requirements of and using federal funding from ESSA (as outlined in this brief), we encourage state, district, and school leaders to consider the following recommendations:

- **Leverage additional federal funding sources to strengthen school-family partnerships to support students' academic, social, and emotional learning.**

The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER)\* funds are a source of federal dollars that states, districts and schools can use to make investments in family engagement in support of students' academic, social, and emotional development.

- For more information on how states have used ARP ESSER funds to invest in FCE to support social and emotional learning, see CASEL's [Social and Emotional Learning and ARP State Bright Spots brief entitled "Aligning Social and Emotional Learning Efforts Across Schools, Families, and Communities"](#)

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections grant program\* funds are a source of federal dollars that states, districts and schools can use to create safe and healthy schools. Districts can collaborate with families in support of students' academic, social and emotional needs.

- For more on how BSCA funds can be used to do this important work, see [U.S. ED's FAQ document](#).

- **Take research-based, best practice-informed actions to build authentic school-family partnerships in support of students' academic, social, and emotional learning.**

CASEL's research and field work has found these four actions to be key in efforts to build authentic school-family partnerships ([Skoog-Hoffman, 2022](#)):

- Cultivate trusting relationships between educators and families.
- Build the confidence and social and emotional skills of both staff and caregivers.
- Reposition families' roles from spectators to collaborators.
- Involve families in interpreting data and posing solutions.

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\* Please note that when these funds expire, the activities that have begun using these funds can continue using other federal funding streams.



National PTA's [National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#), updated in 2022 and likewise rooted in research, best practices and stakeholder insights, are similarly aligned:

- Welcome All Families
- Communicate Effectively
- Support Student Success
- Speak up for Every Child
- Share Power
- Collaborate With the Community

### FURTHER RESOURCES

For more insights and strategies from CASEL's Caregiver Community work to create authentic partnerships between caregivers, educators, and school leaders to support social, emotional, and academic development, please read the following CASEL reports:

- **CASEL's October 2022 report [Insights from the Caregiver Community: Building Authentic School & Family Partnerships](#)**

Informed by CASEL's Pilot Social and Emotional Learning Dialogue Series for Caregiver-School Partnerships, this report surfaced four key insights and corresponding strategies for school leaders seeking to create authentic partnerships among caregivers, educators and school leaders.

- **CASEL and The National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention May 2011 report [School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth](#)**

This report provides educators with an overview of social and emotional learning and school-family partnerships (SFPs), a discussion of the important relationship of SFPs and social and emotional learning, and strategies to promote children's social, emotional, and academic development using school-family partnerships.

### CONCLUSION

Decades of research and practice leave no doubt: high-quality evidence-based parent and family engagement as well as social and emotional learning have wide-ranging positive impacts on students' academic performance, mental health, and many other factors. When combined thoughtfully with the provisions and requirements throughout ESSA, states and districts have an obligation and opportunity to powerfully affect student outcomes. Specifically, states and districts can leverage federal requirements for parent and family engagement to support students' academic, social, and emotional learning. As students continue to recover academically, socially, and emotionally from the COVID-19 pandemic, strong school-family partnerships can foster the learning environments that students need to succeed.



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