

FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS

June 2012

The *Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals (Fundamentals)* are the result of a multi-year collaborative process in defining guidelines and research-based practices for the engagement of families, schools, and communities in supporting equitable learning opportunities for students. This initiative was coordinated by the Parent and Community Education and Involvement (PCEI) Advisory Council of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Board (Board). It incorporates the voices, passion, shared purpose and collaboration of students, parents, families, educators, administrators, researchers, additional Board advisory councils, and community organization representatives.

Massachusetts is a leader in setting and supporting high expectations for students, educators, and schools. With the development of these *Fundamentals*, Massachusetts has a new tool to support high expectations for family, school, and community partnerships with the goal that coordinated, comprehensive, and systemic supports create opportunities for all students to achieve academic proficiency and beyond.

The *Fundamentals* acknowledge the important, necessary, and valuable role played by each student's family, community, and school in preparing students for success in the 21st century. Families, educators, and community members share both the responsibilities and the opportunities to promote learning and skill-building, varied educational experience, relationship-building, and enhancement of the health and well-being of all children and youth within each community.

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act defines family engagement as: [T]he participation of parents [family] in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that:

- Parents [family] play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- Parents [family] are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; and
- Parents [family] are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child [Title 1, Section 9101(32), ESEA.]

According to the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group Recommendations for Federal Policy: June 2009, family engagement is:

- A shared responsibility where schools and community organizations commit to engaging families in meaningful and culturally respectful ways and where families actively support their children's learning and development;
- Continuous across a student's life, beginning in infancy and extending through college and career preparation programs; and
- Carried out everywhere that children learn, including homes, early childhood education programs, schools, after-school programs, faith-based institutions, playgrounds, and community settings.

The *Fundamentals* recognize that family and community engagement involves everything parents and families do to support their children's learning at home and in the community. The *Fundamentals* support the creation of pathways to partnerships that honor the dynamic, multiple, and complementary ways children learn and grow. They apply to all stages of a child's educational career because parent and family support at every age significantly impacts a child's educational outcomes.

There are many ways that parents and families support their children's learning and development. To name a few, they provide home environments conducive to learning, guide children through complex school systems, advocate when problems arise, and collaborate with educators and community groups to achieve equitable learning opportunities for all students. Yet some families may need additional support to fully realize this potential. When schools and communities build on family strengths and knowledge and when parents participate in school activities and decision-making about their children's education, children achieve at higher levels. When parents are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve.

Each Fundamental is organized along a continuum of Levels of Development and Implementation for specific Indicators which reflect the responsibilities, opportunities, and expectations of families, schools, school districts, and communities in partnering together to support student performance and academic achievement. The *Fundamentals* serve as an invitation and expectation for active participation and collaboration of all stakeholders in self-assessment and action-planning on behalf of all students. The *Fundamentals* are inclusive of all families and the vast range of skills, talents, dynamics, resources, and stories they contribute to this partnership, in coordination with community and school-based contributions.

The *Massachusetts Family, School, and Community Partnership Fundamentals* are:

Fundamental 1: Welcoming All Stakeholders

Fundamental 2: Communicating Effectively

Fundamental 3: Supporting the Success of Children and Youth

Fundamental 4: Advocating for Each Child and Youth

Fundamental 5: Sharing Power and Responsibility

Fundamental 6: Partnering with the Community

Fundamental 1: Welcoming All Stakeholders^{† ††}

Schools create and ensure a welcoming culture and environment for all families, children and youth, school staff, and community members. Stakeholders are valued and connected to each other in support of high academic expectations, achievement, and healthy development.

Indicators	Level 1: Initiating Basic level of development and implementation	Level 2: Progressing Functioning level of development and implementation	Level 3: Mastering Highly functioning level of development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Current Status Date _____
A. Creating a respectful atmosphere for stakeholders	The school maintains clear signage that is welcoming to parents and visitors in the main languages used by families in the district.	The school is a welcoming place with a designated space such as a family center where families can connect with each other and staff to address issues, share information, and plan family engagement activities.	The school and district share responsibility with stakeholders from all neighborhoods and backgrounds to identify and break down barriers to family engagement related to race, ethnicity, family structure, religion, physical and mental abilities, educational background, and socioeconomic status of families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
B. Developing personal relationships	The school offers opportunities for families to connect with school staff and visit classrooms.	Parents and community members volunteer to work in the school office to welcome visitors and provide information and support to families and students.	Family volunteers from diverse neighborhoods and backgrounds are trained to serve as mentors to help other families become more engaged in the school. Families are greeted in their home language by friendly front office staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
C. Providing opportunities for volunteering	The school invites families to volunteer in field trips, fundraising activities, and varied learning opportunities.	The school has a family engagement action team that organizes a formal volunteer program. Parent group members, other parents, and community members are welcome to volunteer their services in the school or individual classrooms.	The school volunteer program reaches out to families and community members across all neighborhoods and backgrounds, acknowledging unique experiences and skills, and offering varied volunteer opportunities at home, at school, and in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
D. Ensuring accessible programming by removing economic obstacles to participation	The school identifies external resources and after-school/enrichment programs that are free or low cost, and refers families to them.	Family and student activities and events are free. All stakeholders collaborate to cover the costs through the school budget, parent group fundraising, and contributions from community businesses and organizations.	The school and district share responsibility with stakeholders to plan and implement high quality family programs to be held at the school and in community locations such as libraries, community centers, faith-based centers, homes in different neighborhoods, and/or work sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

† Parents/guardians of English language learners (ELLs) have the right to be notified, in a language they can understand, that their child has been identified as having limited English proficiency, and to receive information about the program the school will provide and their right to apply for a waiver or to decline the ELL program. For more information about parent/guardian rights and involvement in ELL programs under state and federal law, see http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance_laws.html and <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sfgrp/nrgcomp.html#parent>.

†† Involving parents/guardians in the education of their children to improve student academic achievement is a cornerstone of Title I of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Detailed information about parent/guardian involvement and required policies in Title I districts and schools is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/titlei/parents.html>.

Fundamental 2: Communicating Effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful dialogue about learning, high academic expectations, achievement, and healthy development of students. Schools systematically share information and solicit input about school goals and initiatives with the broader community.

Indicators	Level 1: Initiating Basic level of development and implementation	Level 2: Progressing Functioning level of development and implementation	Level 3: Mastering Highly functioning level of development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Current Status Date _____
A. Using multiple communication paths †	School staff informs students and families of upcoming events using a variety of media and communication pathways, including regular print and electronic notices, person-to-person, phone messages, in the languages used by families and the community. As issues arise, a team of administrators, teachers, families, community members, and students, when appropriate, strategically look at developing trends, assessing the need for a school-wide, community supported response/ solution.	School staff collaborates with all families, the school council, parent groups, and family engagement staff/team to develop connections with families through multiple two-way communication tools in multiple languages. The school has a process for outreach to all school families and students, keeping them informed, when appropriate, of any pertinent changes, developing concerns and/or possible solutions in the school community.	Families, students, communities, and school staff communicate in interactive ways, both formally and informally, in language that the families and students can understand, using a range of interpersonal and community strategies, technology and media. The principal meets regularly with the school council, parent, and student government/ leadership groups, and keeps them informed of current school issues, concerns, and solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
B. Surveying families, students and community members to identify issues and concerns	The school conducts a family and student school climate survey that is translated into multiple languages and is implemented in multiple ways. It has a high return rate and the survey results are shared and discussed with parents and students, posted at the school, and on the school and district websites.	Survey data are collected annually and results are compared from year to year to assess progress. Results inform the development of family and student engagement programs and activities.	Survey results are reflected in the School Improvement Plan and are used to guide the development of the student engagement plan, family engagement programs, and other school activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

C. Providing access to school administration	The principal and other school administrators are welcoming and available for brief conversations regarding issues and concerns, and to meet with the school council or families by appointment at times that are convenient for families.	The principal and other school administrators have an open-door policy for families and share information about school-wide issues at school council meetings, with opportunities for individual follow-up discussion by appointment.	The principal and other school administrators' open-door policy extends equitably across the school community. They meet regularly with families in small groups, or one-on-one as needed, in school, and in different neighborhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3: Mastering Level 2: Progressing Level 1: Initiating Not here yet
D. Facilitating connections among families and students and community	The school and school council/parent groups provide opportunities for parents to get to know each other, i.e. social events for families, including other community members.	The school and school council/parent groups jointly develop programs honoring the diversity that families bring and encourage cross-cultural understanding.	The school and school council/parent groups take intentional steps to help parents build relationships and achieve greater cross-cultural understanding with those beyond their own neighborhood and culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3: Mastering Level 2: Progressing Level 1: Initiating Not here yet

† Special education state regulation at 603 CMR 28.07(8) requires districts to ensure communications and meetings with parents and students are in simple and commonly understood words in both English and the primary language of the home, if the primary language is not English. Where parents or students are unable to read in any language or are blind or deaf, communications shall be made orally in English or with the use of a foreign language interpreter, in Braille, in sign language, via TDD, or in writing.

Fundamental 3: Supporting the Success of Children and Youth

Families, schools, and community organizations focus their collaboration on supporting student learning and healthy development in all settings (including home, school, and community) and provide regular, meaningful opportunities for children and youth to strengthen the knowledge and skills needed to be effective 21st century citizens.

Indicators	Level 1: Initiating	Level 2: Progressing	Level 3: Mastering	Current Status
	Basic level of development and implementation	Functioning level of development and implementation	Highly functioning level of development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Date _____
A. Linking student work to learning standards which lead to college and career readiness for all students	Student work is displayed throughout the school in a way that shows how academic and vocational standards are being met.	The school explains to families what students are learning in the classroom throughout the year, and what proficient work looks like.	Families, school, and community representatives collaborate to align school events and community resources to learning standards, and to ensure that families and students understand how to connect the standards to their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3: Mastering Level 2: Progressing Level 1: Initiating Not here yet

<p>B. Using standardized test results and other data to inform decision-making about increasing student achievement</p>	<p>The school and district recognize the importance of analyzing student performance data to identify achievement gaps amongst and between groups of students. The school informs families, in a language they understand, about the results of standardized tests, and how their children performed on the tests. †</p>	<p>The school and district jointly analyze student performance data with constituent groups. The school, parent group, and community collaborate to disseminate information through various media and multiple venues to all families regarding how to interpret test data, how to help each child based on the child's performance scores, and what the test results indicate about the school.</p>	<p>The school and district jointly analyze student performance data with constituent groups and jointly develop strategies to identify and reduce achievement gaps amongst and between groups of students. Families, school personnel and community representatives participate in academic and curriculum committees to discuss how to raise expectations and achievement for every student on academic and vocational paths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
<p>C. Helping families support learning at home and at school</p>	<p>To help families understand how they can reinforce learning at home, the school has a clear home-school partnership and homework policy. The school helps families support their children's learning at home and provides resources for children to complete homework and other learning assignments.</p>	<p>The school, parent group, and community collaborate to offer opportunities through various media and multiple venues for families to learn how they can support their children's learning at home, at school and in the community.</p>	<p>The school, parent group and community collaborate to develop and implement ongoing, systemic strategies based on academic performance data and needs identified by families, to assist families in supporting their children's learning both at home and in school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
<p>D. Promoting out-of-school-time learning</p>	<p>The school informs all families and students, in a language they understand, of home, school, and community-based learning opportunities that are available outside school hours.</p>	<p>The school, parent group, and community offer home, school, and community-based learning opportunities in order to improve student achievement.</p>	<p>The school actively collaborates with diverse community organizations, local businesses, and families to provide learning opportunities. These programs are aligned with learning standards and contribute to measurable student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

† The Parent and Student Participation principle of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reinforces the belief that the education of children with disabilities is made more effective by strengthening the role of parents in the special education process. IDEA requires that parents and legal guardians of children with disabilities and students, as appropriate, participate in every step of the process. Parent involvement includes but is not limited to: equal partnership in the decision-making process; the right to participate in all special education planning and decision-making activities about their child's special education (e.g., the development of an individual education plan or IEP); the right to give consent for activities such as evaluations, placement, and changes in placement; the right to receive prior written notice each time the school proposes to take (or refuses to take) certain actions; and the release of information to others. Detailed information is available at www.doe.mass.edu/sped/parents.html and <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>.

Fundamental 4: Advocating for Each Child and Youth

Families, schools, and community respect and value the uniqueness of each child and youth and are empowered to advocate for all students to ensure that they are treated equitably and have access to high quality learning opportunities.

Indicators	Basic level of development and implementation	Functioning level of development and implementation	development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Date _____
A. Helping families understand how the school and district operates, as well as the rights and responsibilities of parents under federal and state laws [†]	The school distributes information to all families, in a language they understand, about their children's educational rights and how the school and district operates, including its mission, goals and organizational structure.	The school, parent group, and community jointly develop and disseminate information through various interpersonal strategies, media and multiple venues, to all families about the school, its policies and procedures as well as children's educational rights, parent involvement opportunities, and required mandates in state and federal programs.	The school, parent group, and community work together to organize parents to help other parents understand how the school operates and how to exercise their rights under state and federal education laws in order to ensure student learning and achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
B. Developing families' capacity to be effective advocates for their children and to engage in civic advocacy for student achievement	The school distributes information to all families, in a language they understand, about procedures for how families can get questions answered and concerns addressed regarding their children's education.	The school, parent group, and community collaborate to collect and disseminate information through interpersonal strategies, various media and multiple venues, to all families regarding advocacy strategies and techniques, political issues and local community concerns affecting education.	The school, parent group, and community work together to establish school policies and procedures that support and promote parents as advocates and active partners in decision-making at the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
C. Learning about resources to support student achievement leading to college and career readiness	The school distributes information to all families and students, in a language they understand, about academic, vocational, college and career readiness programs available in the school, such as tutoring programs, after school enrichment classes, Advanced Placement courses, summer programs, etc.	The school, parent group, and community collaborate to develop and disseminate information through interpersonal strategies, various media and multiple venues, to all families about available programs and resources, both in the school and in the community, for academic, vocational, college and career readiness support and enrichment.	The school, parent group, and community collaborate to create a family resource center that is accessible to all families and provides information about services that support achievement, makes referrals to academic, vocational, college and career readiness programs, and helps plan family, school, and community events and informational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
D. Helping students and families make smooth transitions and ensure that students are college and career ready ^{††}	The school offers information and resources to all families and students, in a language they understand, about transitions from one grade to the next and about educational options and post-secondary opportunities available in the school and community.	The school and parent group provide orientation programs to help students and families prepare for the next grade level or school. The school and parent group provide programs to help students and families make informed decisions that connect college and career interests with academic programs.	A comprehensive program is developed jointly by the school and parent group to help families stay connected and remain involved as their children progress through school. Partnerships are created between the school, local colleges and universities, and community businesses to expand opportunities for career exploration and preparation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

[†] G.L. c. 71, s. 1C and special education state regulation 603 CMR 28.03(1)(a)(4) require districts to conduct, in cooperation with the special education parent advisory council, at least one workshop annually within the school district on the rights of students and their parents and guardians under state and federal special education laws.

^{††} Federal special education regulations at 34 CFR sections 300.43 and 300.320(b) and state statute G.L. chapter 71B, section 2, require districts to provide transition planning and services to assist the student with disabilities to transition to community living, employment, and/or postsecondary education. Such planning in Massachusetts begins at age 14 or younger, if appropriate.

Fundamental 5: Sharing Power and Responsibility

Families, school staff, and community partners have equal access, voice and value in informing, influencing, and creating policies, practices, and programs affecting children, youth and families.

Indicators	Level 1: Initiating Basic level of development and implementation	Level 2: Progressing Functioning level of development and implementation	Level 3: Mastering Highly functioning level of development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Current Status Date _____
A. Developing effective parent engagement groups that represent all families [†]	Existing parent organizations identify the current status of parent engagement and identify under-represented, under-served, and/or isolated or disconnected students or families.	Under-represented, under-served, and/or isolated or disconnected families are encouraged and trained to become partners in the improvement of school performance.	Under-represented, under-served, and/or isolated or disconnected students and families are active participants in the improvement of school performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
B. Developing parent leadership	The school and district recognizes the need for informed and skilled parent leaders. The school utilizes the knowledge and skills of parent leaders.	The school and district provide leadership opportunities and train parents to become effective leaders.	Members of under-represented and under-served families are actively solicited, trained and supported to become effective parent leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
C. Ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice in all decisions that affect children	The school principal establishes and maintains an active school council, consisting of parents who are representative of all families, school staff, representatives from community groups, and, in high schools, students, to share in decision making about school improvement plans and budgetary, curricular, and policy issues.	The school council conducts a needs assessment to families, school staff, community representatives, and, in high schools, students and uses the results to inform school improvement plans and budgetary, curricular, and policy decisions.	The school council continues to use and monitor the responses of the needs assessments conducted with families, school staff, community representatives, and in high schools, students to inform its decision-making. The school council collaborates with the district's school committee to expand its responsibilities to include additional functions, such as hiring staff, educator evaluations, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
D. Connecting families and schools to local officials	Parent and community groups recognize the importance of developing close ties with local elected officials.	School administrators are encouraged to respond to concerns generated by parent and community groups regarding improved school performance.	Elected and appointed officials are personally invited to share their views and respond to concerns generated by parent and community groups regarding improved school performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

[†] G.L. c. 71B, s. 3, and special education state regulation 603 CMR 28.07(4), require districts to create a district-wide special education parent advisory council offering membership to all parents of eligible students and other interested parties.

Fundamental 6: Partnering with the Community

Families and school staff collaborate with community partners to connect students and families to expanded learning opportunities and community services in order to support achievement and civic participation.

Indicators	Level 1: Initiating Basic level of development and implementation	Level 2: Progressing Functioning level of development and implementation	Level 3: Mastering Highly functioning level of development and implementation embedded throughout school practice	Current Status Date _____
A. Linking to community resources	School staff, organized parent group and/or school council collect and make available information for families about community resources.	School staff determines families' needs and work to identify community resources to match those needs. School staff share information with families.	School staff and school volunteers (and a paid parent liaison, if one is in place) use the school's family resource center as a place to inform families about services, make referrals to programs, and help with follow-up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
B. Partnering with community groups to strengthen families and support student success	The organized parent group and/or school council is aware of local community agencies and posts notices of their events and services in the school.	School staff and the parent group and/or the school council reach out to community organizations to explore service provision to some of the school's children and families. School staff also reaches out to businesses to solicit donations (of services or human resources) and/or sponsorship of events.	Community and business representatives work with school and parent leaders to assess the school community's needs. Partnerships and programs are developed to support student success and align with school and district priorities. Together, the school and its partners find creative solutions to funding and staffing needs. These relationships are formalized with memoranda of understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet
C. Turning the school into a hub of community life	The school and district make buildings open and available for use by outside groups in the evenings and weekends.	School facilities such as the computer lab, library/media center, classrooms, and gym are open year-round for broad community use. School families and the surrounding community members participate in the programming offered by outside agencies.	The school and district offers resources and activities for the whole community, drawing on community agencies, organizations, and other educational institutions. The school is open extended hours for use by outside groups to provide services and educational opportunities to the school's families and the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 3: Mastering • Level 2: Progressing • Level 1: Initiating • Not here yet

**Appendix A:
Glossary of Terms used in Fundamentals, Indicators and**

Levels of Implementation

Families and **parents** are used interchangeably to refer to adults who are responsible for a student.

Families from diverse neighborhoods and backgrounds and **diverse families** include families from all races, ethnicities, family structures, religions, and socioeconomic status, as well as families with varying physical and mental abilities and families without permanent homes.

Parent group refers to an organization which represents families and parents of students who attend the school, such as Parent Teacher Association or Parent Teacher Organizations, Title I Parent Advisory Council, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, English Language Learners Parent Advisory Council, etc.

School council is the advisory group at every public school required by Massachusetts education law, consisting of parents, school, staff, representatives from community groups, and, in high schools, students. School councils are led by the principal as co-chair and whose functions are to develop school improvement plans and participate in budgetary, curricular and policy decision making.

School staff is inclusive of all adults employed in a school, including educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, administrative support personnel, cafeteria workers, custodial staff, etc.

Stakeholders refers to groups of people interested in education, including but not limited to students, families, educators, school administrators, elected officials, community leaders, faith-based organizations, health care providers, businesses, and other community service providers.

Supporting children's learning at home and school refers to the ways families and educators can partner together to reinforce and enhance what children are learning. Multiple ways of learning and use of universal design (environments, activities and products accessible to all) are included in the strategies used by families and educators.