VOICES from the field

2019-2020

A Snapshot of Ohio’s Regional Supports for Family-School Partnerships
Who We Are

The Ohio Family and Community Engagement (FCE) Network is a group of dedicated education professionals from across Ohio, comprised of representatives from each of Ohio’s regional State Support Teams (SSTs) along with organizations whose work supports families of diverse learners, including students with disabilities. The network collaboratively researches, develops, and supports the implementation of tools and strategies for regional teams and school districts to effectively engage and empower families and communities. Through the Network’s activities to support strong family-school partnerships, family and community needs and strengths are recognized and prioritized at every level, resulting in improved student and family outcomes and better school climates.
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State Support Team 1 partnered with their local urban district’s Community Outreach & Family Engagement Coordinator to create, implement and monitor a strategic partnership plan to guide their post-secondary transitions family engagement supports and measure its impact. To do this, the team utilized the evidence-based logic model framework from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). As highlighted in their purpose, NTACT “assists State Education Agencies, Local Education Agencies, State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, and VR service providers in implementing evidence-based and promising practices ensuring students with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, graduate prepared for success” (NTAC, 2019). Using the NTACT logic model in conjunction with Joyce’s Epstein’s “Key’s to Successful School-Family Community Partnerships,” the plan will strive to serve whole families and all families within the district.

The strategic partnership plan will allow the district to achieve their short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes associated with post-secondary transitions for students.

The completed plan and the process will be presented at the 2020 Ohio School Boards Association conference.

For more about Ohio’s Strategic Plan, visit https://bit.ly/3h4kt2t

To view NTAC’s resources, visit https://bit.ly/3949iUT

For more information on the National Network of Partnership Schools, visit https://bit.ly/2DRIVWR
Action

Since 2018, Perkins Local has been part of the first Cohort of districts in Ohio implementing *Partnerships for Literacy* (P4L), a program developed by the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center at The Ohio State University. State Support Team 2’s Family Engagement Consultant has provided training and coaching support to staff and families at two elementary schools. The schools have formed a team of school staff and families who are working together to plan family engagement strategies to support early literacy. Now more than ever, State Support Team 2 realizes the importance of family engagement in education and literacy development. Even the COVID-19 virus could not halt the progress of Perkins Local’s Furry Elementary and Meadowlawn Intermediate schools’ family engagement efforts. P4L teams continued to meet and implement their plan, adjusting for the new learning environment.

Impact

Based on their *Partnerships for Literacy* team’s action steps, Furry Elementary maintained a strong two-way communication with families using Bloomz parent communication app to share stories, assignments, projects, pictures, and the occasional bedtime story read by the Principal. Furry also continued to build an archive of family talents and gifts to be shared and utilized so the whole school community benefits from the amazing knowledge and skills of their families. Meadowlawn Intermediate developed a BINGO card of literacy “Games on the Go”. Teachers demonstrated literacy games at school, then students took home materials and instructions to play with their families and friends. The games were designed to use few materials and to be played almost anywhere. A challenge was proposed to all families: to try out the games at home and on the go. The games provided families with a tool to strengthen communication skills and relationships with their child while sharpening their literacy skills. The P4L team recognized the importance of keeping literacy supports at home fun and focused on family bonding! Strong leadership and the power of the P4L team helped the schools through what could have been a challenging time in education.
COACHING TOWARDS ENHANCED SYSTEMIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN GARFIELD HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Action

Just like Perkins Local in Region 2, Garfield Heights School District has also been part of the first Cohort of districts in Ohio implementing Partnerships for Literacy since 2018. This year, State Support Team 3’s Family Engagement Consultant continued to work with Maple Leaf Elementary School in Garfield Heights to strengthen home-school partnerships around Early Literacy. Beginning with the Partnerships for Literacy (P4L) Action Plan developed last year, a team of families and teachers focused on two main action steps:

1. Develop monthly a family literacy newsletter with general literacy information, grade level activities and descriptions of student progress terms, so families can access literacy information that pertains to their children.

2. Include every classroom teacher in sending home a bag of books for each student based on their literacy level to support learning at home. Students can return their books for more at any time.

Impact

Partnerships for Literacy represents an ongoing commitment to family and community engagement. Progress towards three areas of practice: Communication, Supporting Early Language and Literacy at Home, and Strategic Community Partnerships are measured by annual completion of the Family & Community Engagement for Early Literacy Inventory. A baseline was collected at the initial meeting, with families and school staff weighing in on the inventory ratings. Feedback was very positive regarding the work this team will do to support families and literacy. A schedule has been developed for next school year for this team to work on the school’s Action Plans. Districts implementing the Ohio Improvement Process form Building Leadership Teams in each school. One of the most important non-negotiables for this team is that there is a solid feedback loop between the Partnerships for Literacy Team and the Building Leadership Team.
Action

State Support Team 4 has partnered with Wickliffe City Schools’ over several years in the development of their district Family Resource Center (FRC). Located in Wickliffe High School, the FRC includes two fully equipped medical exam rooms, three counseling rooms, a student operated store where community members can pick up clothing, dry goods, toiletries, and specialty items, as well as a large group education space for meetings, programs, and community activities. State Support Team 4 has worked collaboratively with the district and outside organizations to provide professional development opportunities at the FRC for educators and community members in areas such as PBIS, Family Community Engagement, Transition Needs and Universal Design for Learning.

The FRC was made possible through grants, private donations, and the hard work of many partners. Services provided by these partners include the following: Alzheimer’s care programs, dementia programs, healthy eating and healthy living services, financial literacy programs, adult literacy, early literacy, tutoring, college preparation programs, mental health education programs, health screenings, physicals, vaccinations, transportation, services for women, infants, and children, and other specialized programs. To help strengthen the bonds between the school and community, students often provide services to the community in the form of childcare, mentoring, and the store.

Impact

The impact of the FRC has been noticeable during the pandemic. Since mid-March and the start of COVID-19 stay at home orders, the FRC has served meals and provided emergency food to over 2,000 families. In addition, the center has provided emergency supplies of hygiene products, clothing, bedding, housewares, pet food, gift certificates, and assorted other needs to another 1,000+ families. Volunteers have worked over 700 hours providing these services to community members in need. With the FRC in place, Wickliffe Schools were able to quickly and nimbly able to adapt to the changing needs of their families.
Action

In 2019-2020, State Support Team 5 focused on supporting families and educators as they assisted their students in becoming adults. The first focus was on training educators and family liaisons on:

• The positive impact of family engagement,
• Eight “P’s” of engagement (Praise, Personality, Public, Persistent, Purpose, Piece of cake, Personalize, Provide support; Heather Wolpert-Gawron, 2019),
• Creating welcoming school climates,
• Establishing effective two-way communication,
• Supporting learning at home,
• Engaging families in school planning and meaningful volunteer opportunities, and
• Connecting families to community resources.

The second focus was on increasing family capacity in the region for supporting their child’s post secondary transition. This opportunity engaged students and families in dialogues about their future, their strengths, self-advocacy, and goal setting. At the core of State Support Team 5’s approach were the words of Ann Landers, “it is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”

Impact

Educators, parent liaisons, and families valued the opportunity to learn, discuss, and plan for the important transition milestones in their students and children’s school to adult life transitions. Additional follow-up of targeted and intensive supports were facilitated based on the requested needs of the participants and their strong desire to continue developing school-to-home and home-to-school relationships and diving into improvements of family navigation of all vulnerable populations. The conversations and supports will continue and additional trainings are being created by State Support Team 5 based off of this series.
State Support Team 6 offered a facilitated book study to educators in the region in the fall and again in the spring. Participants received a free copy of “Engage Every Family” by Dr. Steven Constantino, and access to an online Edmodo group for peer collaboration and support (similar to Facebook, but for educators to use for classes).

The six-week book study included weekly reading assignments, discussion questions to answer, and the opportunity to reply to their peer’s posts to build a professional learning community. The project culminated with a one-hour webinar that provided the participants the opportunity to share a capstone project and next steps for family and community engagement.

Of the 26 individuals who participated, 15 completed 100% of the requirements of the book study. The participants included principals, general education teachers, intervention specialists, school psychologists, therapists, parent mentors, and guidance counselors. Participants represented preschool through high school levels.

All 15 participants completed a capstone project and shared with their peers during the wrap-up webinar in the hope that the project could be replicated in other districts in the region. Spring session participants were all educators in the field of special education. This provided a unique opportunity to discuss services for students with disabilities during this time of remote learning.
Braiding Family Engagement Through Professional Development for Transitions

Action

State Support Team 7 consultants set a goal to provide high-quality professional development and technical assistance that focuses on the value of families and the importance of providing families with knowledge and skills regarding transition education and services to establish them as essential transition team members who are involved in the entire transition planning process by May, 2020. To that end, they have braided Family Engagement into the fabric of their Diverse Learner Leader and Transition Network while partnering with their Ohio Transition Support Partners and district attendees to offer resources, fiscal supports, coaching, and technical assistance. They provided coaching for teams to work through the Family Engagement portion of the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) self-assessment tool, offered time at each Transition Network meeting to collaborate and network with colleagues, and had a focused section of their Annual Showcase for teams to give updates on their district plans to the region. They also braided their early partnership with a County Board of Developmental Disabilities to bring in an expert on supportive decision-making for their Family Engagement Recognition Night.

Impact

Their regional plan was to partner with one district-- and they now have six districts from four different counties working with them. Each district has created a team, worked to self-assess their current system through the NTACT Program Planning Tool and Kohler’s Taxonomy, and have drafted a plan with action steps to move forward in at least one area of Parent/Caregiver Preparation, Involvement, or Engagement. Some of the measurable outcomes from team’s goals include: development and delivery of resources, activities, and events; multiple means to access created supports and services; increased partnership in planning and collaboration; increased input regarding assessments and needs-based information regarding barriers to early warning system indicators.
State Support Team 8 offered a Transition Academy for Families of Middle/High School Students with Disabilities during the 2019-2020 school year. The Academy consisted of monthly 2.5-hour learning sessions in November, January, March, and April. Families learned about topics including: transition law, evidence-based predictors and practices, and transition pathways and planning. Families of younger children and transition age youth attended the events. Additionally, planning support and tools were provided to families so that students and families were better positioned to meet their goals by graduation.

In its third year, the Academy provided valuable information and strategies for families, along with connections to community agencies with transition resources thanks to partnership and presentations from the Summit County Educational Service Center, State Support Team 8, and various other regional Agencies including the Summit County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and Akron Children’s Hospital.

Impact

Approximately 25-30 families and students have attended the academy each year and their feedback has been positive—they want to see the Transition Academy continue. Partners and guest presenters were able to field difficult conversations about guardianship, hospital regulations and rules when students reach the age of emancipation, and considerations for families prior to the age of emancipation. State Support Team 8 is in the process of planning another Family Transition series for next school year.
Action

The Great Start for Great Futures Coalition is a countywide collective designed to implement initiatives to close the early learning opportunity gap in Stark County. State Support Team 9’s team continues to collaborate with members of the Great Start for Great Futures team through Talk First Stark, an initiative geared toward families with children from Prenatal to age 3, to encourage language nutrition as the foundation of healthy growth and brain development. This year, Talk First Stark engaged in community conversation with the support of the Medicine Center Pharmacy through a four-part live radio show series on WHBC 1480 AM entitled “Health Matters” that was also accessible via blog, podcast and Facebook. Talk First Stark was able to educate the community on the importance and impact of language nutrition and strategies for helping families and caregivers intentionally build language into their day to day interactions with children.

Impact

The Four episodes of the Health Matters Radio Show and Blog featuring SST 9 experts were recorded and can be accessed via the following links:

Episode #1 - Parents are their child’s first and most important teacher. Listen to "It Starts with You"
Produced 08/30/19: Facebook Live 1038 views, 47 podcast downloads, 44 website views.

Episode #2 - The brain is the only organ not fully developed at birth. Listen to "Brainology with Great Start for Great Futures" Produced 09/27/19: Facebook Live 233 views, 108 podcast downloads, 40 website views.

Episode #3 - Babies and young children need lots of loving words to grow healthy brains. Listen to "Helping Children Realize Their Potential for a Great Future" Produced 10/25/19: Facebook Live 249 views, 85 podcast downloads, 54 website views.

Episode #4 - The language shared in the early years of a child’s life provides a strong foundation for both academic and social-emotional growth and learning. Listen to "From Surviving to Thriving: We ALL Have a Role" Produced 12/20/19: Facebook Views 765, 117 podcast downloads, 25 website views.
Regional Early Literacy Specialist Offers “Sit Together and Read” Training for Families

Action

State Support Team 10 supported implementation of Sit Together and Read at Home (STAR), a family engagement strategy created at The Ohio State University to actively involve the families of young readers in literacy instruction. A Regional Early Literacy Specialist from State Support Team 10 facilitated an afterschool family session on using the STAR books and journals at home in October 2019. The training included presenting and modeling “print referencing strategies.” Twenty-six families attended the session. Following this meeting, a book bag went home with families. Families and teachers communicated back and forth with a journal throughout the process. The Regional Early Literacy Specialist observed and provided feedback to teachers as they implemented STAR in the classroom. Though the culminating family event was cancelled due to COVID-19, the Regional Early Literacy Specialist created a Sit Together and Read lesson through video and prompted the preschool teachers to create their own videos. The students and families continued to hear the STAR books and see the print referencing strategies through a YouTube channel of videos created by the preschool teachers.

Impact

State Support Team 10 measured impact by the families’ participation and knowledge gained from the program. One parent shared in the family journal, "He is naming all uppercase letters. In lower case letters he has little confusion between letters b and d, u and n and h.” State Support Team 10 and the district literacy coach will continue to provide coaching support in 2020-2021. The Regional Early Literacy Specialist is planning for expanding the Sit Together and Read training to the region either through a live virtual format or directing participants to the Ohio State University online training.
**Making Connections**

**Developing a Website for Family Information and Resources**

**Action**

During the 2019-2020 school year, State Support Team 11 focused on outreach to families and agencies across the region to strengthen Family Engagement knowledge, supports, and resources. A Google site was developed for families/caregivers containing resources, tips, strategies, and agency information: [https://sites.google.com/escco.org/family-resourcescovid-19](https://sites.google.com/escco.org/family-resourcescovid-19)

The purpose of the site is to provide current, updated resources for families to build upon the natural learning opportunities that occur within children’s daily routines in the home. The resources provide encouragement and tools for families and caregivers to support literacy and numeracy development as well as health and well-being of children in their care.

In addition to the family resources site, State Support Team 11 has formed a collaboration with Nationwide Children’s Hospital to increase awareness about disabilities, and to assist medical professionals, teachers, and families with services, supports, strategies, and resources.

**Impact**

- 800+ families have accessed the Google site since it launched in early 2020 for resources and information about family engagement.

- The Regional Team has a growing relationship with Nationwide Children’s Hospital’s Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation units. This collaboration will result in ongoing support, legal and special education updates, as well as tools and resources to allow students and families to be equipped for the successful integration back to their home school setting.
Action

State Support Team 12 collaborated with Stanton Elementary and John Gregg Elementary in the Edison Local School District to implement *Partnerships for Literacy*, a research-based school improvement strategy developed by Ohio’s Statewide Family Engagement Center.

Regional consultants worked with groups of educators and families to facilitate a discussion of the current supports for family engagement in early literacy in the district and how family engagement could be improved in early literacy practices.

Impact

Coached by State Support Team 12 consultants, the district submitted a plan for the upcoming school year with a goal of creating an online forum for families to interact with the school’s literacy coach where they can ask questions on how to help their child at home using reading strategies. Also, within the district’s action steps they will create videos for families on the science of reading to help with reading strategies at home. The school district hopes that the videos and forum will allow for a greater connection between the schools and families.
Voices from the field

REGIONAL COLLABORATION WITH PARENT MENTORS TO EXPAND SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

Action

State Support Team 13 consultants and Parent Mentors from across Southwest Ohio have teamed up to provide ongoing support to families and professional learning throughout the year. The group gathered monthly, allowing the Parent Mentors and SST consultants to problem-solve ways to work together with the district and families to best support students. This year the Parent Mentors expanded their “Ask a Parent Mentor” program by providing times where parents could chat with a Parent Mentor about special education services. Region 13 Parent Mentors met daily during the COVID-19 pandemic period to not only support each other, but to ensure the health and wellness of the families they support. Also, State Support Team 13 brought in speakers from all areas to help meet the needs of each family they serve.

Guest speakers included presenters from the following organizations:

- Office for Exceptional Children at the Ohio Department of Education
- Easterseals of Greater Cincinnati
- Region 10 Autism and Low-Incidence Team
- Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children With Disabilities.

Impact

Region 13 Parent Mentors pride themselves on keeping up to date on the rights of families and various special education and community supports that are available. By keeping themselves informed and having a strong support system in place, they have provided the greatest support to their families when navigating the complicated channels of special education.
**Action**

State Support Team 14’s Parent Advisory Council (PAC) created a Facebook Group this year in response to feedback from PAC members in 2018. The group is intended as a support for families of students with disabilities in the region. Guidelines were created to keep the Facebook Group positive and helpful. Some of the guidelines included:

- **Be positive** – this space is meant for positive and constructive discussion. Posts that are overly negative towards a district, person, or group will be removed.

- **Group Membership** – no one is allowed in this group except Region 14 PAC members.

- **Be Discreet** – while this group is closed, nothing you say on the internet is truly private. Do not say anything here that you would not mind having attributed to you publicly.

- **Only share within the group** – anything that someone posts here should stay here. Exceptions include: public resources, internet links, or images shared from other places.

**Impact**

Through this Facebook Group, members have found encouragement from one another and developed lasting friendships. The Covid-19 Pandemic has made the PAC Facebook Group even stronger.

PAC Members have shared valuable websites for online learning, resources for students with disabilities, and encouraging quotes. The group has given each member a way to connect with other families of students with disabilities facing the same struggles and uncertainties every day.
Action

During the 2018-2019 school year Western Primary formed a Partnerships for Literacy (P4L) team of administrators, teachers, parents, grandparents, and community partners. Using the P4L tools developed by The Ohio State University, the team analyzed the building’s current processes and effectiveness with family engagement in early literacy, completed the Family Engagement in Early Literacy Inventory, surveyed families to obtain feedback, and developed an action plan that was implemented during the 2019-2020 school year. State Support Team 15 continued to coach and facilitate planning meetings during this school year, and the team had two family engagement events that were well attended.

Impact

Although the team faced challenges, they persisted and shifted focus to providing families with tools and resources to support student learning at home. During the first family event, teachers prepared mini lessons and packets of resources to help with literacy activities in the home. They modeled how to complete these activities, gave parents opportunities to practice, and gave immediate feedback and encouragement to empower them to support their child by practicing at home. During their second event they had fun, interactive and engaging literacy activities that parents and students could complete together.
**Action**

State Support Team 16 implements family engagement through a multi-tiered system of support. At Tier-III, the most intensive tier, the team worked with Wellston City Schools to implement *Partnerships for Literacy*. In their second year of implementing *Partnerships for Literacy*, Wellston City Schools created a family survey based on the *Partnerships for Literacy* inventory of practices. The survey was sent to all families of preschool through third grade students.

At Tier-II, SST 16 hosted a one-day virtual training for all educators in the region introducing participants to the *National Network of Partnership Schools Model* from Johns Hopkins University. Participants examined their current work in relation to the Model and identified opportunities for improvement.

**Impact**

- 185 families completed the Family Survey. The results led the team to plan educational programming out in the community, but Covid-19 put the plans on hold. Data collected using the family survey indicated that families are comfortable with the work sent home. Families find the work sent home to be fun and engaging.

- Over 40 educators attended the National Network of Partnership Schools Training and drafted a plan for enhancing family engagement in their schools. Region 16’s family engagement consultants continue to provide support and coaching for each of the schools that participated.
The FCE Network’s PBIS Work Group developed an “Encouraging Positive Behaviors at Home” Chart for Families!

Available at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center website. The Chart is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Somali, and Nepali.

The FCE Network’s Early Literacy Work Group developed an Examples and Resources Document to accompany the Family Engagement for Early Literacy Rubric.

Available at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center website.

The FCE Network’s PBIS Work Group developed a video tutorial for school teams to understand and use the PBIS Family Engagement Tiered Rubrics.

Available at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center website.

Coming soon!

The FCE Network’s Great Meetings Work Group has been developing a new professional development for educators on how to have welcoming and engaging Individualized Education Program meetings with families. This training will be available in the coming year.
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ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN THE NETWORK

Ohio Department of Education
Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center at The Ohio State University
Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities
Lau Resource Center for English Learners
Ohio’s Head Start Collaboration Office
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