

Minutes
Task Force on Family Engagement in Learning
Thursday, December 10, 2020, at 3:37 PM

The Arkansas State Board of Education (State Board) Task Force on Family Engagement in Learning met on Thursday, December 9, 2020, in the ADE Auditorium at Four Capitol Mall, Little Rock, AR 72201.

Present: Charisse Dean, Chair; Dr. Fitz Hill; Deborah Coffman; Chelsey Moore; Dr. Kazandra Wilson; Freddie Scott; Shannon Green, Karen Bergh

Absent: n/a

Ms. Charisse Dean called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Consent Agenda

No prior meeting minutes

Action Agenda

1. Update from Core Team

- a. In August, a new Office of Engagement was established within Public School Accountability. This Office is now fully staffed with 4 advisors and a coordinator.

The unit anticipates involving various representatives and voices in co-creating a “family of processes” or modules that can be used to help districts engage families and effectively carry out the goals of their Family and Community Engagement plans.

- b. Engagement Plans were due August 1, and every plan has been reviewed and comments have been provided. This was earlier than any year prior. There are 17 plans still in revision.
- c. During a national institute facilitated by Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University, the advisors built a leadership action plan for partnerships.
- d. The Office of Engagement continues to meet monthly with the Engagement Advisory Group, which consists of coordinators and facilitators across the state. Engagement advisors are partnering with individual coordinators to elevate engagement across the state. The unit’s leadership plan that was developed with Dr. Epstein provides for strengthening relationships as well as working one-on-one with the partner districts. In the one-on-one sessions, Engagement unit advisors are offering “deep dives” to provide technical assistance and incorporating the principles of community engagement during the development of the partner plans. This can help coordinators involve members of the community and parents, for example, encourage greater diversity, and other important steps needed to build quality relationships that are needed to extend effectiveness beyond compliance, and into the greater community and in homes. The goal is to support districts “beyond compliance,” according to Deborah Coffman. The pandemic has helped heighten engagement activities, in

some cases. Dr. Hill said Covid-19 has shown the barriers related to parent engagement, in impoverished communities. Educators must understand the impact that poverty has on students, before they can help a child learn who lives in poverty, Dr. Hill said. “Missing parents” is a core issue that impacts support that students need. The discussion continued about the resources staff is directing people to, provided such initiatives as Engage Arkansas, which provides a “safety net” of resources for families in addition to educational coaching for low-show and no-show at-risk students. CityServe and other such community programs and churches also provide outreach services that help disadvantaged children and families, Dr. Hill explained. Ms. Moore broke down the way the one-on-one sessions with coordinators help collect and share district and school-level ideas, affirm the important principles of engagement that are happening.

The task force discussed the power that the monthly advisory meetings can bring to coordinators who are working hard in their communities to address similar challenges. Ms. Dean emphasized that “family” does not just mean parents, but by extension, can come in the form of involved church members and others invested in family successes. Basic needs such as food, safety, shelter must be met before learning can be addressed. Mr. Scott emphasized the importance of innovation, as an example of one of the “six essentials” in the framework that has been designed to support families.

Ms. Moore commented that this year, more than 1,073 family members are participating in their districts, as reported in the district Family and Community engagement plans. More than 157 were reported as participating in district reading initiatives. Ms. Dean mentioned the value of homeschool parents and homeschool support systems in helping parents who were challenged with teaching or assisting their children through virtual or at-home learning as a consequence of the pandemic. Can their best practices be shared with the FACE advisory committee and parent and family coordinators statewide?

1. Discuss Upcoming ADE Family and Community Engagement Work

a. Thoughts on moving the Essentials forward

Communications packages are being developed for major accountability initiatives through the lens of the Engagement essentials and our stakeholder relationships, including: Report card; Assessment, to start. More are being developed.

Ms. Dean mentioned Education Alliance’s feedback regarding parent confusion about the difference between “homeschooling” and “virtual learning.” Homeschooling involves a waiver where the parent takes full responsibility for their child’s education. Virtual learning or digital learning, and blended learning responsibilities involve parent participation but the schools are still responsible for the child’s learning. Ms. Dean said it would be

helpful to create communications that explain the differences, to clarify this for parents.

Dr. Hill recommended connecting district coordinators with the resources that CityServe provides through partner churches in their respective communities. Community partners like Amazon, Home Depot, and other major retailers have donated significant amounts of the products and comforts that families in need may get for free.

Ms. Moore emphasized how trust is built through relationships, and how research over many years demonstrates change has a ripple effect once trust is established. Ms. Dean recommended that the Engagement team encourage parent and family coordinators throughout the state to consider enlisting at least two churches to provide support to school-age children and their families, especially youth pastors and outreach pastors who can help make families aware of services and the things they need.

2. Outline Next Steps

Chelsey Moore will invite Ms. Dean and Dr. Hill to the Dec. 17, 2020 Engagement Coordinator advisory meeting.

Extend family resource/connection information (i.e. City Serve) to pastors, school board members, other community members - determine the best way to do this.

Investigate parent communications regarding the difference between at-home learning and virtual learning (what your roles and responsibilities are, as a parent, when you choose different options for your child's learning other than onsite methods).

Adjournment

Ms. Dean moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Karen Bergh.