

A CROSS-SYSTEMS DEFINITION OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR WEST VIRGINIA:

“Family Engagement is a deliberate and strengths-based approach to partnering with families and youth to make decisions, set goals and achieve desired outcomes. It is a continuous, two-way process founded on honest and open communication—in which schools, service providers and other child-serving professionals create an environment of genuine warmth and empathy, reach out to families and youth in meaningful ways, and empower them to recognize their own needs, strengths and resources—and in which families actively support their child’s learning, development, safety and well-being.”

BENEFITS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

HOW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTS CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE:

- Builds family decision-making skills
- Increases the likelihood that family members (including caregivers) receive the services that best fit their needs
- Promotes better collaboration among the entities that work with families, resulting in less duplication of efforts
- Results in fewer subsequent reports of child maltreatment

HOW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTS JUVENILE JUSTICE & DELINQUENCY PREVENTION:

- Increases likelihood that families will obtain needed services, such as health/mental health treatment and effective educational responses to child's learning or other school-related needs
- Increases positive experiences and outcomes for youth and families

HOW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH:

- Strengthens role of family as the primary and the most influential system to which a child belongs
- Helps families enact changes in the home environment to reduce risks, set positive examples for their children, contribute to treatment planning, and build strengths
- Family involvement in mental health care has been linked to the reduction of stress on the family system

HOW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTS LEARNING:

- Meaningful family involvement leads to the development of children who are socially, emotionally, physically, and academically successful.
- It is the best way to create meaningful education reform.
- Students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO FAMILIES:

- You and your child are fully involved in making decisions, setting goals, and reaching results that are important to your child and family.
- Your service providers will better understand what you and your child do well, and what you still need in order for your child to do their best
- You will better understand what resources and tools are available in the community to help you and your child accomplish your goals.
- You and your child will achieve the goals we all share—to have the health, education and skills they need to be successful adults.

Composed by a team of 46 West Virginia stakeholders, including family members and child-serving professionals. Language for the draft definition came from the following sources: WV Department of Education "Parents 21," Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau/ACYF; Harvard Family Research Project (2011); and Cooper-Altman (2008), and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections.