

**Family Engagement: The CT WSCC Partnership On-Demand Webinar Series Transcript**

Welcome to the family engagement on-demand webinar. There are 10 webinars in this series, each corresponding with one domain of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. This webinar will focus on the family engagement domain. Each webinar will begin with an overview of the WSCC model and an introduction to our practice briefs before a deep dive into the WSCC domain of focus.

The CT WSCC Partnership is a joint collaboration between the University of Connecticut’s Collaboratory on School and Child Health and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge our funding partners and share that the content of this webinar does not necessarily reflect the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Our practice briefs draw on the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model, which is the CDC and ASCD’s framework for addressing health in schools. The model is student-centered and stresses the need to coordinate policy, processes, and practice across ten domains of student health and well-being to maximize student success. As can be seen in the outmost ring, the model is situated within the community, and emphasizes drawing upon community context and expertise to use the model in contextually-aligned ways. The model is not a prescriptive program. Instead, it is a framework for organizing a school or district’s efforts to support the whole child, facilitate high quality teaching, and maximize student learning and success.

Today's content comes from our WSCC Practice Brief series. These are freely available on our website at ctwscc.org. If you'd like to learn more about how these briefs were developed and our CDC-funded project, please watch our "Intro to the WSCC Webinar Series" video.

What is family engagement? Let’s listen to what one of our community partners has to say about the WSCC domain.

Family engagement is a collaborative partnership between our students, our families, our community, and our schools to help support our student’s learning and development. The practices that promote family engagement within our schools are creating more partnerships throughout our community, having the support from our community is very important for our students. Also, our home visits, we have staff that go out into homes and we’re building relationships with our families and we are doing it in the comfort of their own environment, their neighborhood, so we are getting to know them.

So, why is family engagement relevant to child outcomes?

Family engagement is important in schools for the family, the student, and the school. Students with families who are engaged in the school tend to have higher grades, higher attendance, higher graduation rates and less behavioral issues. For families, it helps them feel more connected to the schools so that they feel comfortable working with the educators, advocating for their child, and understanding how to navigate the education system and at the school level, it helps just create a better school climate for the teachers and for everyone in that environment.

Now that we know the why behind family engagement, let’s look at some evidence-based strategies that you can use in your practice.

We've organized the strategies by the required resource demand to help schools choose appropriate initiatives for their setting.

Starting with strategies that require a low resource demand, the first is to engage ongoing communication between schools and families because we know that regular contact between families and school staff is associated with better student attendance and achievement. Schools and families can use two-way communication to share important information about educational programs, health-related screenings and follow-up services, and student health needs. Examples of two-way communication include home-school notes and meetings in which families visit their child’s school to collaborate on supports for the child across settings.

A second low-resource strategy is to evaluate existing family engagement initiatives. Families may have different communication preferences or needs, so schools should employ a variety of methods, like mail, phone calls, or electronic communication, and evaluate the effectiveness of these methods. Work schedules, responsibilities, commitments, and cultural expectations also impact when and how families participate. Schools should evaluate policies and practices around what families are invited to do, when opportunities are offered, and how families can engage. Schools should seek input from families when evaluating existing initiatives, such as through a family survey, to learn family’s needs and preferences.

Now, we move into moderate resource demand strategies. The first recommendation is for schools to provide universal opportunities for ongoing family engagement. Schools can offer family engagement opportunities to all members of the school community like through school-based family resource centers. Schools can also offer consultation-based family-engagement interventions that can improve family attitudes towards school, home-based practices that support learning and positive behavior, and relationships between teachers and families. School-based interventions that seek to promote ongoing family engagement are associated with improvements in student mental health, behavior, and academic achievement over time.

The second moderate resource strategy is to strengthen family connection to the school environment. And there are several ways to do this…Schools can collaborate with families to share effective strategies for involvement at school – such as volunteering, communicating with school staff, and attending school events - and strategies for home, such as providing appropriate supervision and promoting reading by having books available. Schools can promote an inviting and welcoming physical school environment in partnership with families. Schools should also provide communications (announcements, resources, materials) to families in their native or preferred language and mode of communication.

Next, we transition to the most resources intensive strategies. The first high resource strategy is to prioritize family engagement in district and building level initiatives. Family engagement initiatives, such as developing partnerships with families, increasing the number of families who are consistently involved in the school system, and establishing a culture that considers family-school partnerships as integral to school or district practices, can improve student learning outcomes. Schools can prioritize family engagement in mission statements, policies, and practices like learning/wellness objectives, team meetings, and events to build capacity at all levels of the school system. Districts and schools can prioritize hiring school staff that reflect the school community and provide staff with ongoing professional learning on evidence-based family engagement.

 The second high-resource strategy is to invite families to take meaningful leadership roles in school and community. Families might help to plan school-based initiatives or draft a new policy. In addition, school teams might offer events that allow families to strengthen their skills in topics like child and adolescent development and navigating educational and social service systems that increase family literacy in the educational sector.

If you are interested in learning about additional resources related to the family engagement domain of the WSCC model, please see the full family engagement WSCC practice brief.

This brief, among the others, can be found on the Tools page of our website: ctwscc.org. After clicking on our tools, scroll down to Best WSCC practices. Here you will find our practice briefs.

Thank you for joining us! We hope you enjoyed today’s webinar. To view the other webinars in our WSCC on-demand webinar series, please visit our website at ctwscc.org. If you have any questions about the Connecticut WSCC Partnership, please feel free to contact us at ctwscc@uconn.edu.