



NAFSCE Recommendations to the Biden-Harris Agency Review Transition Team

Background: On November 19, 2020, NAFSCE met with the Biden-Harris Agency Review Transition Team to discuss family and community engagement priorities under the Biden-Harris Administration (the Administration) and made the following recommendations. The Agency Review Team was also provided NAFSCE's [Public Policy Position Statements](#) developed by its Public Policy Committee, which give an overview of the policy areas that it believes most directly create the conditions for and reduce the barriers to family, school, and community engagement (FSCE).

Recommendations: NAFSCE believes family and community engagement must be a central and integrated strategy as the Administration addresses COVID-19, economic recovery, and racial equity. The Administration, and particularly the Department of Education, should establish an infrastructure that supports the conditions that foster equitable partnerships between families, schools and communities and reduces the barriers to those partnerships so that everyone has an opportunity to participate. In particular, the Administration can 1) set up its staff and structure to focus on engaging families, 2) elevate parent voices, and 3) support state work in FSCE.

- **Staff and Structure to Focus on Engaging Families:** FSCE is an essential strategy for child development, student achievement, school improvement, and equity that cuts across all educational programs and services. Having an FSCE infrastructure that provides dedicated staffing and resources, breaks down silos across offices, and enhances public understanding is a strategy for success at all educational levels. NAFSCE's work with State Education Agencies (SEAs) to build their internal capacity around FSCE could inform a federal approach. Such an approach would also support the Department of Education's statutory responsibility to "monitor parental and public participation . . . and encourage the involvement of parents, students, and the public in the development and implementation of departmental programs." [20 U.S.C. § 3412(e)(3)]. Therefore, NAFSCE recommends that the Administration:
 - Establish an **Office of Family and Community Engagement** at the Department of Education which can support SEAs and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the implementation of FSCE within federal programs.
 - Establish a **White House Commission on Family and Community Engagement** to lead and coordinate family-centered programs across the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Justice, Labor, and other key agencies.

- **Elevate Parent Voices:** NAFSCE’s approach to equitable family engagement is, at its core, aligned with the principles of racial and social justice. This approach empowers those most impacted to be agents of change; establishes trusting, reciprocal relationships with families; and engages families in ways that value their assets, build on their strengths, and meet them where they are. NAFSCE believes educational institutions also have a responsibility to foster the essential conditions for effective family-school partnerships and create opportunities for families to engage in multiple roles, including as leaders. In order to effectively understand the diverse experiences of families across the country and to craft responsive solutions, particularly in addressing the challenges of the pandemic, the Administration should:
 - Establish a nationally-representative **Family Cabinet** within the proposed Office of Family and Community Engagement to advise the Administration on issues impacting families.
- **Support State Work in FSCE:** As noted on the Department of Education [website](#), “education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States.” The Department of Education supports State and local agencies by “play(ing) a leadership role in the ongoing national dialogue over how to improve the results of our education system for all students” and through the “administration of programs that cover every area of education.” NAFSCE believes it is imperative for the Administration to support State and local FSCE efforts. Specifically, NAFSCE recommends that the Administration:
 - Provide federal resources that adequately fund [Statewide Family Engagement Centers](#) (SFECs) and continue to fund **Parent Training and Information Centers** to serve every state with a focus on the most marginalized and special needs children and parents.
 - Establish a federal [Comprehensive Content Center on Family and Community Engagement](#) to “provide capacity-building services to State educational agencies (SEAs), regional educational agencies (REAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools that improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction.”

In addition, NAFSCE identified three immediate FSCE funding priorities, based on some of the policy needs it [identified in light of the COVID-19 pandemic](#):

- **Infrastructure:** Funding the above infrastructure recommendations, including a staffed Office for Family and Community Engagement, a federal Comprehensive Center on Family and Community Engagement, Statewide Family Engagement Centers in every state, and research opportunities.
- **Educator Preparation:** Supporting the preparation of educators and administrators to engage families and communities through priorities within Title II in ESSA and in the Higher Education Act, as well as efforts in community colleges.
- **Digital Divide:** Appropriate funding, either via the E-Rate Program or a separate program, to assure that all students and families have affordable access to the devices, high-speed broadband, and digital literacy they need.