



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

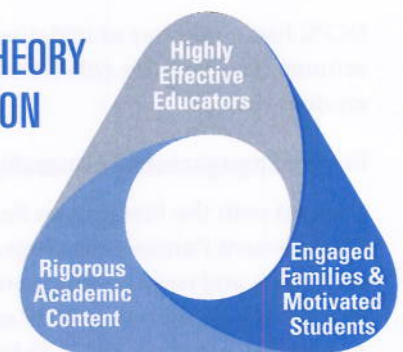
# Partnering for Student Success



## Family and Public Engagement at DCPS

At DC Public Schools (DCPS), family and public engagement is built into everything we do, at every level of our work. Engagement is a district-wide priority as well as an individual priority for every teacher, administrator, and staff member. We are proud to build relationships with families, community members, and strategic partners to accelerate achievement for all DCPS students.

### DCPS THEORY OF ACTION



In recent years, DCPS has focused on three levers of change to improve student achievement: highly effective educators, rigorous academic content, and engaged families and motivated students. As each element grows stronger, it supports growth in the other areas.

DCPS' efforts in these three areas—and the interactions among them—have made it the fastest-improving urban school district in the country.\*

\*Based on data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), DCPS has been the nation's fastest-improving urban school district since 2013.



# Partnering with Families to Support Student Learning

At DCPS, families are partners in everything we do. Our teachers, principals, and staff are dedicated to forming a team with families to improve student outcomes.

DCPS' starting point for working with families is clear: Families are the experts when it comes to their children. They have knowledge and experiences that can help us successfully deliver the exceptional education their children deserve.

DCPS has a number of initiatives that help teachers, schools, and families collaborate to ensure that every student thrives.

## Family Engagement Partnership Program

Created with the Flamboyant Foundation, the Family Engagement Partnership program gives teachers strategies and resources to partner with families on their students' learning. As of school year 2016–17, this program is active in 31 DC Public Schools.

At these schools, all teachers, support staff, and administrators participate in professional learning related to family partnerships. They also have access to curriculum and tools that support parent-teacher home visits and other practices that build relationships between families and educators.

To set students up for a successful year, home visits typically begin before the first day of classes. Teacher pairs visit families to learn about parents' hopes and dreams for their children as well as any concerns parents have about their student's academic or social progress. These visits open lines of communication and build trust early in the year, laying a foundation for teacher-family collaboration.

"I could not imagine my school experience with my children without having built that foundation with their teachers. I don't think I would feel invested. And now I'm invested not just in my own child's education. I'm invested in the school and its teachers."

— Patrice Dean, Parent, Powell Elementary School



# Home Visits Build Trusting Relationships

While some families are initially unsure of what to expect with a home visit, those who experience these visits report that they are productive and helpful.



**91%** of families who received a home visit said it helped them feel more confident about supporting their child academically.



**96%** said the experience was beneficial to their relationship with the school.

Home visits also have clear benefits for students. Students whose families received a home visit were less likely to be absent and more likely to read at or above grade level.



**24%** fewer absences for students who had a home visit, compared to similar students whose families did not receive a home visit.



**1.5** times more likely to read at or above grade level, compared with similar students who did not receive a home visit.

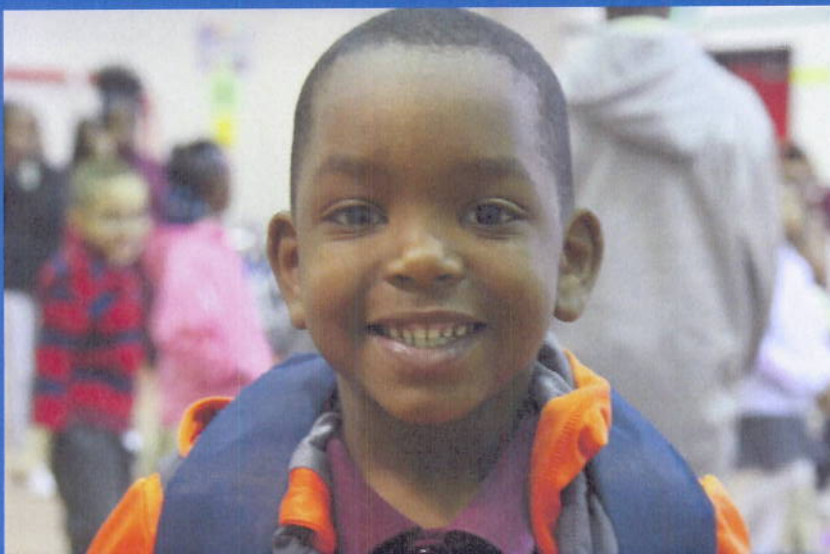
DCPS' commitment to home visits is evident in the increasing number of visits completed each year.

NEARLY

**9,200** families visited in school year 2014–15 by teachers and staff across all DCPS schools.

NEARLY

**12,000** families visited in school year 2015–16 by teachers and staff across all DCPS schools.



“Only a few states and cities have really mastered this important aspect of education. The most successful may be the District of Columbia.”

— *The Christian Science Monitor*  
Editorial, “Why Students Need  
Teacher Home Visits”  
June 14, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1tpiEEk>

## Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

Participating schools also build Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, which host regular meetings with groups of parents at school. At these gatherings, teachers explain what children will learn in upcoming units and provide activities to support learning at home. In addition, they review student-level data with parents and work with them to set personalized goals for their children's academic growth. Families and teachers report that these 90-minute meetings provide more meaningful and useful information than traditional parent-teacher conferences.

To establish trust and mutual support, teachers communicate regularly with families by email, phone, and text, sharing real-time details about their children's day-to-day classroom experience.

"It is constant communication, which is something I've never had before," says Natina Kiah, parent of a Stanton Elementary School student. "And it's not just negative. It's constant positive communication. One teacher will send me a text or send pictures [that show my daughter] having a wonderful day. I put trust in [the teacher] for doing that. I value her because she extended herself to me."

Kiah continues, "And then one day, [my daughter] had a bad day. The teacher called, and I didn't get defensive. I sat back, and I listened. The teacher and I worked together. I spoke with my daughter and told her that her teacher and I are a team."

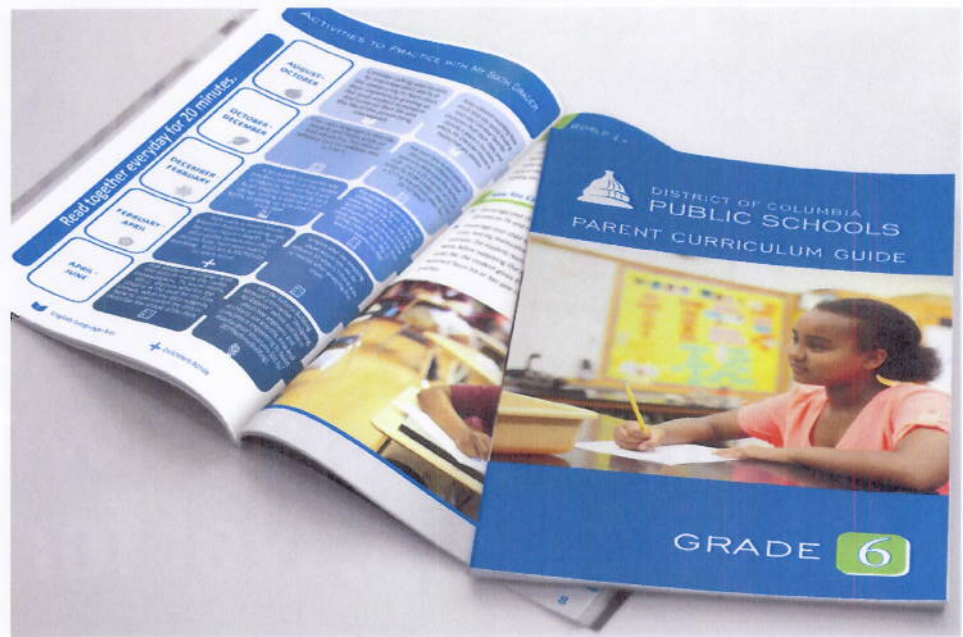


"DCPS honestly believes that parent input is as valuable a tool for helping children succeed as there is. I've seen a metamorphosis of trust and transparency at DCPS."

— Thomas Strike  
Parent, Stoddert Elementary School  
Chancellor's Parent Cabinet Member

## Parent Curriculum Guides

DCPS provides a Parent Curriculum Guide for each grade level so families know what their children are learning at school and how to support them. Each curriculum guide outlines the year's academic content with a month-by-month summary of what will happen in each subject as well as detailed descriptions of the year's Cornerstones (anchor assignments for each grade and subject). The guides also include tips to support learning at home and month-by-month family activities aligned to the year's curriculum.





# Making Decisions with Stakeholders, Not for Them

Throughout our work, DCPS sees families and community stakeholders as critical players in improving our school district. DCPS works to build the trust of our constituents by listening to and collaborating with our stakeholders, using their feedback to inform our work, and telling them how their feedback was used.

## Community Voices Influence Policy and Practice

When DCPS is considering a major initiative, we plan multiple opportunities for citywide public input. These may include ward-based and other community meetings, online engagement to share information, focus groups, and individual discussions with those most affected by the initiative. DCPS then considers all feedback before finalizing any proposed plans and shares with stakeholders how their input was used.

## DCPS Is Committed to Authentic Relationships

In addition to engaging the public more effectively, DCPS created two new platforms to bring community voices into DCPS policy and practice: the Community Action Team and the Chancellor’s Parent Cabinet.

**Community Action Team.** The four-person Community Action Team (CAT) is, for many families and community members, the face of DCPS. Each of the four CAT members supports two DC wards where they work to build strong community relationships.

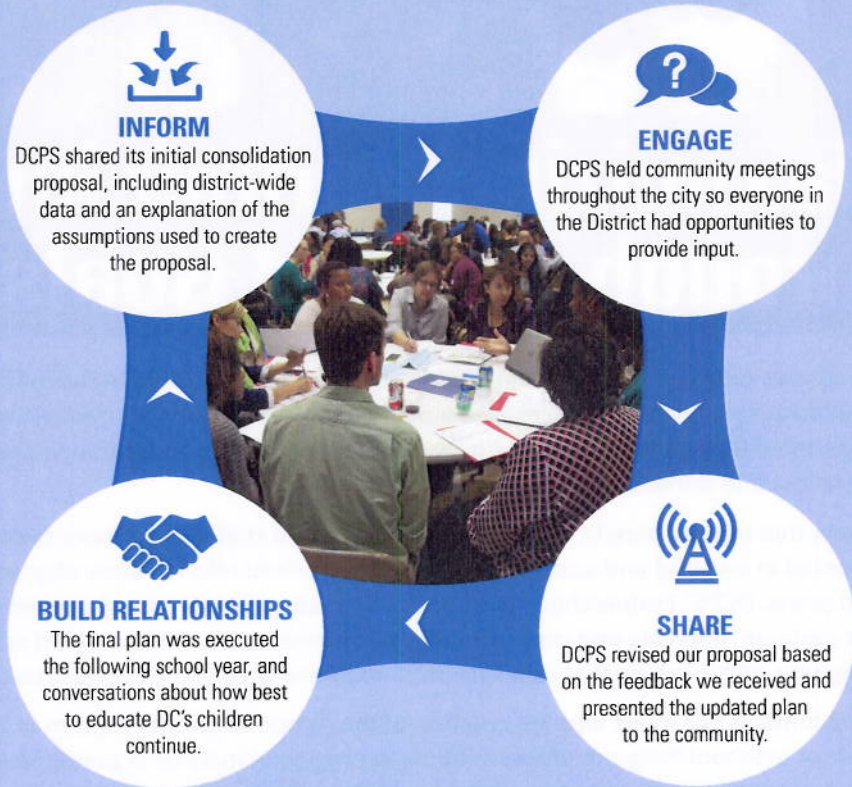
CAT members are District residents with ties to the communities they serve. Over time, they develop a rapport with their communities and build trust that helps them respond to questions, share information, and intervene to address concerns.



DCPS values community voices, and we work to build two-way communication with all of our stakeholders. The feedback loop helps DCPS listen to constituents and cultivate relationships.

THE FEEDBACK LOOP IN ACTION

In 2012, public meetings were integral to the process of making decisions about school consolidations. DCPS, applying lessons learned from the 2008 school closing process, made sure the process was transparent and inclusive.



**Chancellor's Parent Cabinet.** The Chancellor's Parent Cabinet is a group of 24 DCPS parents—three from each ward—who meet monthly with the Chancellor and senior staff. Collectively, they reflect the diversity of the DCPS community, and their direct interactions with the Chancellor provide immediate, unfiltered feedback on a range of issues including academic rigor, equity, and school resources.



"Being on the Cabinet has provided me with access to DCPS decisionmakers. I was able to provide my input (positive AND negative) and actually see it implemented in DCPS initiatives and policies. While there is still much room for progress, I feel well equipped to speak to other parents about the many opportunities DCPS has created for students."

— Shameka Stewart, Parent, Kelly Miller Middle School, Chancellor's Parent Cabinet Member

Public Engagement Is a Priority During Hiring

When hiring new teachers and principals, DCPS considers applicants' experiences and beliefs about engaging families and the school community. Every prospective teacher and principal is asked what role they believe parents and families should play in education, as well as how they would handle specific types of family engagement. Their answers help DCPS identify educators who prioritize public engagement and support DCPS' engagement strategy.

In addition, a community panel that includes parents, community members, teachers, and staff interviews finalists for principal positions. In most cases, DCPS selects the panel's recommended candidate.



# Maximizing Partner Impact Through Aligned Goals

DCPS creates opportunities for local organizations, businesses, and individuals to support schools in ways that accelerate student success. The DC community has demonstrated tremendous support for DCPS over the years, and schools welcome partnerships and donations.

We know that to truly benefit from partnerships, school staff and partners must be invested in creating and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships aligned to shared goals. DCPS' Partnerships Team works to ensure that all school connections reflect partners' interests and meet schools' expressed needs. They support schools in designing relationships that also maximize partners' involvement and resources.

One outcome of this effort was the creation of the Adopt-a-School Program in 2015. The Adopt-a-School Program allows schools to engage in long-term partnerships with organizations and businesses that benefit the school community.



## ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

## ADOPT-A-SCHOOL AND WARREN LODGE NO. 8

### SCHOOL PARTNER COMMITMENT

School partners host at least three school-based events and one donation drive for their school.

Each event's focus is based on the school's needs and the partner's interests or expertise.

Members of a partner organization might serve as mentors, participate in school improvement days, or offer job shadowing for students.

### WARREN LODGE NO. 8

Warren Lodge No. 8, a local fraternal organization, adopted Browne Education Campus, and the lodge's brothers actively participate in the school's monthly food distribution program. They also organize a winter coat drive and coordinate with a social worker to make sure the students who most need coats receive them.

The brothers build strong connections with students during these events, and these connections pay off as the students move through and beyond school. For example, the brothers chaperone students on college tours and fairs—and along the way, give students advice and encourage them to attend college.

"The beauty of this program is that you're developing a rapport with the staff, students, and their families, building something you can sustain for the long term. And that piece is why my members are very motivated about this partnership: You get to feel like you're really having an impact on the students' and their families' lives."

— Daryel Dunston Sr.  
Executive Director, Warren Lodge No. 8  
As told to the *Washington City Paper*, January 2016

Learn more about DCPS Family and Public Engagement and where to find us in your community.

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