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Evaluation Report

Lessons from the First Statewide Family Engagement Centers: Alignment with Federal Priorities and Factors Influencing Implementation

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Lessons from the First Statewide Family Engagement Centers: Alignment with Federal Priorities and Factors Influencing Implementation

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Family engagement in education is a long-standing policy priority as one important way to promote student success. However, families with low incomes may face a variety of barriers to involvement in some aspects of schooling, such as school activities or events. In 2018, Congress established the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program as a small but key federal investment to help address disparities in family engagement with schools. The law requires each SFEC grantee to partner with a state education agency, seek wide input on which services to deliver through an advisory committee of families and other representatives, and "serve areas in the state with high concentrations of disadvantaged students." By establishing priorities for each round of grant funding, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) can encourage topics or efforts it believes are important to the program's policy objectives. However, grantees can otherwise use their funds flexibly to implement family engagement activities directly with families, somewhat less directly by providing training and technical assistance to education agencies and staff to help them work with families, or by collecting and sharing information and resources that stakeholders can use in their own efforts to support family engagement. This report examines how the first set of SFEC grantees carried out their work, focusing on ways their activities aligned with the program's priorities at the time, and the factors that might have influenced this alignment, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Findings

- ***Reported implementation four years after the grants began mostly reflected the 2018 federal priorities, including an emphasis on providing direct services to families and schools, some use of other approaches and topics, and expected ways of collaborating with state education agencies.***

- ***The districts the SFEC grantees worked with largely had high concentrations of students who were disadvantaged, another priority specified in the law.***

- ***In determining how to implement their activities, more SFEC grantees appeared to value direct input from families and education leaders over program requirements such as special advisory committees.***

- ***Staffing issues, both related and unrelated to the pandemic, were challenges for SFEC implementation.***

How families engage in their children's education has long been linked to both parent satisfaction with school systems and student success.[1] Studies over the past 30 years suggest families that are more highly engaged in their children's education may reduce their children's behavior problems, raise their academic achievement in literacy and math, and improve their sense of school belonging and emotional well-being.[2] Despite this accumulating evidence, troubling gaps persist in the extent and manner of how families engage in their children's education. The most recent national data, from 2019, indicate that families in households with incomes below the poverty line participate less often in some school-related activities such as school events, parent-teacher association meetings, or school committees.[3] Further, these parents are less satisfied with their children's schools, teachers, or how school staff interact with them compared to parents with incomes above the poverty threshold.[4] Structural barriers and beliefs interfere with the ways families may engage with schools, including parent work schedules, language, and family perceptions of schools and educators.[5] The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated engagement gaps for families that were already dissatisfied with interactions with their children's school, increasing stress on families and schools and altering how families perceive school efforts to reach out.[6]
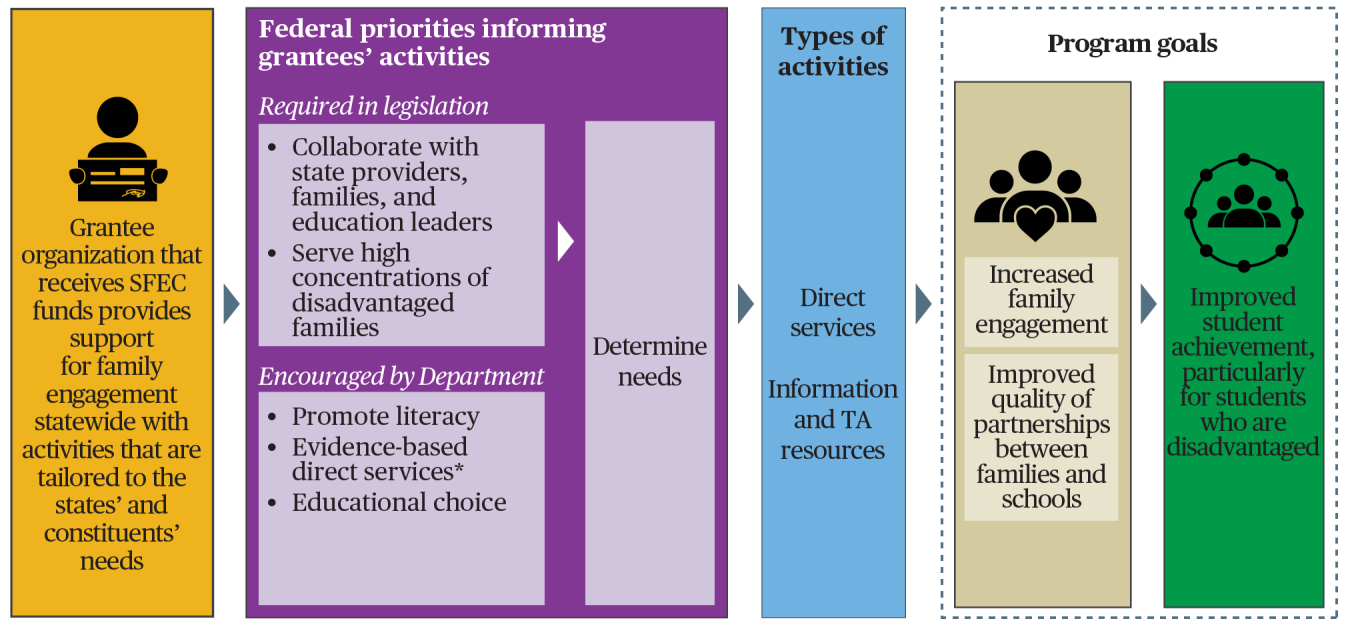
The **Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program**, established in 2018, is the Department's newest grant program specifically designed to promote greater family engagement[7] in schooling, especially for students that the legislation defined as disadvantaged.[8] The program's authorizing legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),[9] requires SFEC grantees to provide one or both of two types of activities:

1) Programs for families that educate them about, and engage them in, ways to participate in their child's schooling and academic development; and

2) Training and technical assistance to state agencies, districts, schools, and community organizations to build their capacity to engage and support families.[10]

These activities could involve the SFEC working directly with specific groups of identified families, agency officials, or educators (referred to here as *direct services*). The legislation also recognizes that some of the SFEC services may involve collecting, developing, and sharing information and technical assistance resources that might support direct services or be used by any stakeholder in its own efforts to learn about and improve family engagement (referred to here as *information and technical assistance [TA] resources*).[11] In changing the name of the federal program and delineating fewer activities related to information, ESSA appears to have shifted the SFEC mission beyond that of its predecessor program, the Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC), which primarily conducted development and broad dissemination of technical assistance resources. PIRCs were authorized in 1995 and most recently operated from 2006 through 2011.[12]

Taken together, the SFEC legislation and rules issued by the Department as part of the SFEC grant competition outline other specific features of how the program is expected to work and the priorities for carrying it out (Exhibit 1). The law specifies that SFEC grantees must be statewide public or private organizations[13] that work in partnership with at least one state and provide support for family engagement efforts tailored to the state's needs. To identify needs and prioritize services, each SFEC grantee must collaborate with at least one state education agency (SEA) and consult an advisory committee of primarily families but also of students and representatives from local elementary and secondary schools, local education agencies (LEA), state agencies, education professional associations, and community-based organizations. The law also requires SFEC grantees to focus their services on districts with high concentrations of disadvantaged students, creating a programmatic emphasis on closing equity gaps. In addition to meeting these statutory requirements, grantees have to be mindful of the Department's priorities for family engagement topics or approaches. Finally, though not an explicit priority, the Department calls for grantee efforts to increase family engagement and improve the quality of family and school partnerships in ways the program refers to as *dual capacity building*.[14] This overarching program objective seeks to develop families' and schools' ability to partner in a mutually respectful way for the purpose of ultimately improving student achievement, particularly for students who have historically faced academic difficulties.[15]

Exhibit 1. How the SFEC program for 2018 grantees intended to improve outcomes

Grantee organization that receives SFEC funds provides support for family engagement statewide with activities that are tailored to the states' and constituents' needs

Federal priorities informing grantees' activities

Required in legislation
- Collaborate with state providers, families, and education leaders
- Serve high concentrations of disadvantaged families

Encouraged by Department
- Promote literacy
- Evidence-based direct services*
- Educational choice

Determine needs

Types of activities

Direct services

Information and TA resources

Program goals

Increased family engagement

Improved quality of partnerships between families and schools

Improved student achievement, particularly for students who are disadvantaged

NOTES: Department-encouraged priorities were those awarded additional points in the Department application notice process and/or were required to be reported in annual reports submitted to the Department. The 2018 SFEC grant competition referred to *evidence-based direct services*; however, this report separates that priority into *services with evidence of promise** based on the way the Department defined "evidence-based" and *direct services* (both described in the next section) because direct services were emphasized by the Department both through the evidence-based direct service priority and in annual reporting. The Department's grant application notice defined educational choice as "the opportunity for a child or student (or a family member on their behalf) to create a high-quality personalized path for learning that is consistent with applicable Federal, State, and local laws; is in an educational setting that best meets the child's or student's needs; and, where possible, incorporates evidence-based activities, strategies, or interventions."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education Statewide Family Engagement Centers Notice Inviting Applications, 2018. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/06/28/2018-13913/applications-for-new-awards-statewide-family-engagement-centers.

This report examines key aspects of the program model among the first set of SFEC grantees (Exhibit 2), including whether they conducted activities aligned with federal program priorities. The report also explores factors that might have influenced grantee activities and their alignment with priorities, such as the role of input, collaboration, and the challenges that SFEC grantees experienced, including those that began in spring 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted school systems. Although the program was first implemented during the onset of the pandemic, the data were collected four years into program implementation, reflecting post-pandemic operations. The report sheds light on SFEC grantee activities during the 2021-2022 school year, as schooling normalized. Learnings from the first set of grantees can help identify actionable lessons for ongoing improvement of the SFEC program and other Department programs that encourage family engagement. More about the SFEC grantees is included in Exhibit 2 and the study design and methods are detailed in Appendix A.

Exhibit 2. Characteristics of the 2018 SFEC grantees

SFEC grantee organization	State partner	First-year SFEC funding	Total expected five-year SFEC funding	Encouraged priorities addressed in each grant application
Capitol Region Education Council	Connecticut	$918,908	$4,594,540	Literacy, educational choice
EdVenture Group, Inc.	West Virginia	$959,682	$4,835,680	Educational choice
The Federation for Children with Special Needs	Massachusetts	$987,624	$4,911,621	None
Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium	Maryland and Pennsylvania	$991,006	$4,920,989	Literacy, educational choice
National Center for Families Learning	Arizona	$971,866	$4,647,940	Literacy, educational choice
National Center for Families Learning	Nebraska	$937,240	$4,647,940	Literacy, educational choice
Ohio State University	Ohio	$591,297	$4,186,429	Evidence-based direct services, educational choice
PACER Center, Inc.	Minnesota	$600,000	$3,000,000	Evidence-based direct services, educational choice
The Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence	Kentucky	$937,240	$4,680,630	Educational choice
University of Hawaii	Hawaii	$990,439	$4,843,968	Evidence-based direct services, literacy, educational choice
University of South Carolina	South Carolina	$917,985	$4,663,655	None
West River Foundation	South Dakota	$873,593	$4,481,613	Literacy, educational choice
Average funding	--	**$889,740**	**$4,528,739**	--

NOTES: Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium received its first year of funding in fiscal year (FY) 2019. All other grantees received their first year of funding in FY2018. The SFEC competition and the Department's grant application notice referred to *evidence-based direct services*; however, the remainder of this report uses the term *services with evidence of promise*. Encouraged priorities were those awarded additional points in the Department's grant application process.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education Statewide Family Engagement Center Awards. https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-birth-grade-12/school-community-improvement/statewide-family-engagement-centers-program.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Who participated?

- All 12 2018 SFEC grantees; 11 SFEC grantees worked with one SEA, and one worked with two SEAs.
- SFEC grantees included three universities and nine nonprofit organizations. Each SFEC was led by a director.

Which research questions did the study seek to address?

1. To what extent do SFEC grantee activities, topics, and state collaboration seem to reflect SFEC program objectives?
2. Do SFEC grantees appear to focus on serving disadvantaged populations as the program requires?
3. When deciding which activities to provide, what factors do SFEC grantees report as most important?
4. What are the SFEC grantees' key challenges and related experiences in meeting the objectives of the grant?

What data were collected?

In summer 2022, the study team administered surveys to the 12 SFEC directors and the representative each director identified as the key agency partner from the 13 SEAs. That fall, the study team conducted follow-up interviews with both sets of respondents to collect additional details and examples of grantee efforts. These semi-structured interviews asked the same set of questions of all interviewees but allowed respondents to volunteer specific details at their discretion.

- **SFEC director surveys and interviews** largely focused on self-reported implementation of the grant in fiscal years 2021 and 2022 (specifically, October 2020 through May 2022), roughly corresponding to those two school years, which represent the third and fourth years of the grant. Information was gathered on the estimated amount of grant funding for each fiscal year, the types of activities SFEC grantees provided with these funds, and the estimated percentage of fiscal year funds spent on these activities; the topics, approaches, and districts of focus; influences on decision making about activities to be provided; implementation challenges, including those during the pandemic; and lessons learned. All 12 SFEC directors responded. The percentage of funds allocated to activities the study defined as either "direct service" or "information and technical assistance resources" were summed and then averaged across the two years reported to smooth some of what might be more idiosyncratic spending in school year 2021 at the height of the pandemic.
- **SEA representative surveys and interviews** asked about representatives' views of SFEC services and collaboration over the grant period. The SEA representatives held different positions across states, such as family engagement state coordinators, Title I coordinators, and early childhood program specialists (Appendix A.2.1 provides more information on the SEA study participants). All 13 SEA representatives responded.

The study also used the following existing data sources:

- **SFEC grantee application materials (2018)** indicated whether SFEC grantees were awarded extra points for addressing specific Department priorities in their applications.
- **Annual performance reports (APRs) (2018–2021)** had three purposes. The 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 APRs submitted by SFEC grantees to the Department described the grantees' activities and were used to create response categories for the SFEC director and SEA surveys conducted by the study team. The

2020-2021 APRs were used to identify details on SFEC grantee activities that were discussed during interviews. Those APRs also listed the districts that SFEC grantees worked with intensively during the 2020-2021 school year.

- **_EDFacts (2020-2021)_** database, maintained by the Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Education Statistics, contains characteristics of districts and students, including those of the districts that SFEC grantees worked with. These characteristics include the numbers of students in Title I schools, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, children and youth experiencing homelessness, and students of migrant families. EDFacts data from the 2020-2021 school year, those most recently available, were used to determine whether the districts that SFEC grantees worked with that year served high concentrations of disadvantaged students and families. One variable—students with special needs—was not included in the EDFacts 2020-2021 data; for that variable, the study used 2019-2020 EDFacts data. To understand whether SFEC grantees were serving high concentrations of communities who were disadvantaged, the study first calculated the percent of students enrolled in each district that SFEC grantees worked with who were in one of the demographic groups that the Department defined as disadvantaged. Then these individual district percentages were averaged across all districts each SFEC grantee worked with intensively. These SFEC grantee averages were compared to the averages for each partner state.

How were the data analyzed and presented?

- Responses to survey questions were tabulated into descriptive statistics, such as counts, percentages, and frequencies.
- Responses from the structured interviews were coded by keyword to identify emergent themes across the SFEC grantees as well as examples illustrating the range of implementation strategies, activities, and experiences.

What are the limitations of this study?

- The study's analysis focuses on two years of a five-year grant. This focus was intended to reduce burden and increase data reliability by limiting the time over which SFEC directors or state representatives had to recall events or perspectives. However, these self-reported responses might not reflect the entirety of what occurred during the grant period and are potentially subject to recall bias and errors in precision.

REPORTED IMPLEMENTATION FOUR YEARS AFTER THE GRANTS BEGAN MOSTLY REFLECTED THE 2018 FEDERAL PRIORITIES, INCLUDING AN EMPHASIS ON PROVIDING DIRECT SERVICES TO FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS, SOME USE OF OTHER APPROACHES AND TOPICS THE DEPARTMENT PREFERRED, AND EXPECTED WAYS OF COLLABORATING WITH STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES.

Federal technical assistance programs are intended to respond to stakeholder needs, but policymakers often have broad preferences for how funds should be spent. They convey these preferences in both legislation and the features of specific grant competitions.[16] The Department expected the 2018 SFEC grantees to respond to program priorities conveyed in legislation. In addition, through grant priorities stated in the application notice, the Department also encouraged SFEC grantees to focus at least to some extent on specific approaches and topics in carrying out their planned activities (Exhibit 1). In the application notice, the Department signaled some expected focus on what this study called a **_direct service activity_**[17] rather than the dissemination of **_information and technical assistance resource activities._**[18] The Department also prioritized "high impact" family engagement activities, which at a minimum, seem to require some level of direct service to a clearly specified

group of individuals in a well-defined effort. For example, the Department application notice envisioned as high impact any initiatives that include working with key officials and groups on state and local policy development and implementation as well as "other direct support for parents, families, and the organizations that serve them." [19]
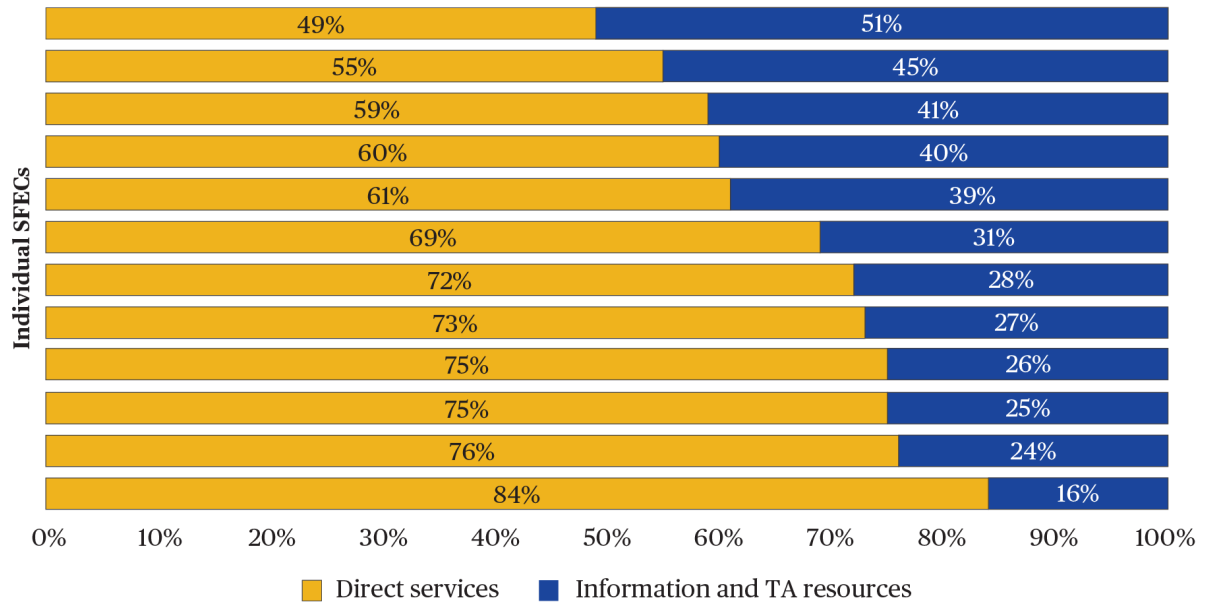
Given the Department's overlapping emphasis on direct service approaches and "high impact" activities, this study considers direct services a proxy for activities more likely to have a high impact on families and educators than would information and technical assistance resources. A grantee's direct service to families might be more likely to have high impact immediately, given that the key program objective is to help parents engage with their child's learning in ways that improve academic achievement. A grantee's direct service to state or local agency staff might also, in the longer term, build broader capacity or more sustainable efforts and therefore have a high impact for more families. Both forms of direct service—to families and to state or local agency staff—were clearly allowed.

The Department encouraged attention to other approaches and topics[20] by awarding extra points in the SFEC grant competition to applicants who said they would provide at least one related activity. In 2018, these approaches and topics included efforts to improve family literacy, assist families with educational choice, and provide evidence-based direct services to parents and families, which the Department defined as activities based on research suggesting they had evidence of promise even if the research could not conclusively determine the activities were effective.[21]

Grantees in federal programs often work to balance different objectives. Understanding whether the ways SFEC grantees carried out their activities matched federal priorities provides a signal of whether the program operated as originally intended.

- ***SFEC grantees allocated their funding and prioritized activities in ways that reflected an emphasis on directly serving families, districts, and schools.*** Virtually all (11 of 12) SFEC grantees spent more of their annual funds on direct services than on information and technical assistance resource activities. Between October 2020 and May 2022, the average share of grant funding spent on direct services ranged from 55 to 84 percent, whereas the share spent on information and technical assistance resources varied from 16 to 45 percent (Exhibit 3; Appendix Exhibit B.1). SFEC grantees also allocated similar shares of funding for direct services to educators and families. The average share of grant funding spent on direct services for educators was 35 percent, and the share spent on direct services to families was 34 percent (Appendix Exhibit B.1). Although four SFEC grantees had received funds under the earlier PIRC program—which placed less emphasis on direct services—these SFEC grantees also followed the pattern of spending more on direct services (Appendix Exhibit B.2).

Exhibit 3. SFEC grantee funding allocated to direct services and information and TA resource activities averaged across October 2020 through May 2022

	Direct services	Information and TA resources
	49%	51%
	55%	45%
	59%	41%
	60%	40%
	61%	39%
	69%	31%
	72%	28%
	73%	27%
	75%	26%
	75%	25%
	76%	24%
	84%	16%

Individual SFECs (y-axis) — 0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90%, 100% (x-axis)
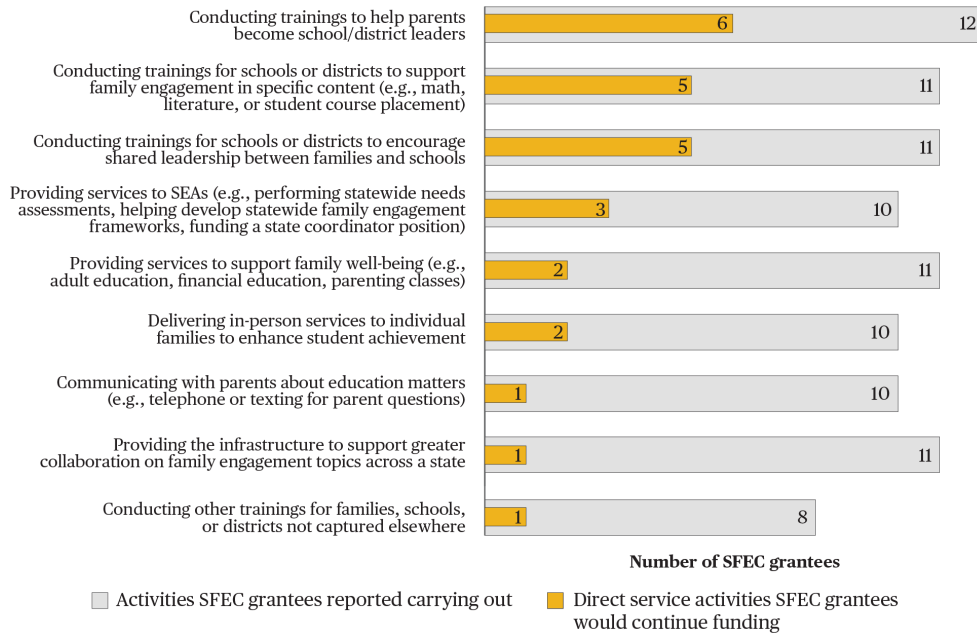
■ Direct services   ■ Information and TA resources

NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors. The study team characterized direct services by the intended recipient based on the recipient stated in the survey. SFEC grantees are not in the same order as in Exhibit 2. Each bar represents the share of an SFEC grantee's funding that was reportedly spent on direct services and information and TA resources, out of 100 percent. Not all responses summed to 100 percent. If reported percentages for direct services and information and TA resource activities did not sum to within one percentage point of 100 percent for a fiscal year, the study team proportionally rescaled the respective percentages to sum to 100 percent.

SOURCE: SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

These funding allocations for direct services versus information and technical assistance resources reflect a wide range of activities conducted by the SFEC grantees between October 2020 and May 2022, consistent with the intent of the program (Exhibit 4; Appendix Exhibits B.3 and B.4). Many types of both direct services and information and technical assistance resource activities were reported by at least 10 of the 12 SFEC grantees. This suggests that, at a high level, many ways of promoting family engagement were quite common across grantees though, as illustrated in Exhibit 5, the specific approaches to these common categories could be implemented differently on the ground.

Exhibit 4. Activities that SFEC grantees carried out between October 2020 and May 2022 and those that they would continue funding given a limited budget
Panel A: Direct service activities

Number of SFEC grantees

☐ Activities SFEC grantees reported carrying out ■ Direct service activities SFEC grantees would continue funding

Panel B: Information and TA resource activities

Number of SFEC grantees

☐ Activities SFEC grantees reported carrying out ■ Information and TA resource activities SFEC grantees would continue funding
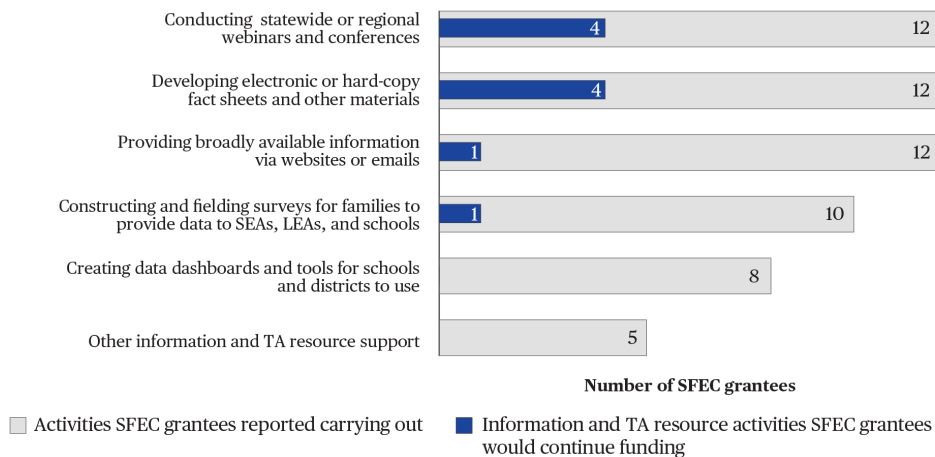
NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors. Numbers in gray bars represent the count of SFEC grantees that reported conducting the activity between October 2020 and May 2022 (Appendix Exhibits B.3 and B.4). Numbers in yellow and blue bars represent the count of SFEC grantees reporting the activities they would continue funding given a limited budget (Appendix Exhibit B.5). SFEC directors selected from a list of all direct services and information and TA resource activities up to three activities they would continue funding given a limited budget. *Conducting other trainings for families, schools, or districts not captured elsewhere* reported by SFEC directors included home visiting training (1 SFEC grantee), supports for cultural responsiveness to families (1 SFEC grantee), workshops for mental health and technology (1 SFEC grantee), GED and workforce development (1 SFEC grantee), and in-service teacher professional development (1 SFEC grantee). Three additional SFEC grantees selected other trainings but did not specify the nature of those supports. *Other information and TA resource support* reported by SFEC directors included participation in task force meetings (1 SFEC grantee), committee meetings (1 SFEC grantee), consultations with Head Start staff (1 SFEC grantee), developing a list of core competencies of family engagement (1 SFEC), and working with partners on sustainability efforts (1 SFEC grantee).

SOURCE: SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

Despite similarity in the broad types of activities they conducted, grantees provided a somewhat different picture of what they most valued, as shown in Exhibit 4. When asked which three types of family engagement activities they would continue funding if grant funds were limited, no activity was noted by more than half of the SFEC directors. Of the top five activities directors prioritized, the first three were direct services. This is consistent with SFEC grantees' reported spending and policymakers' preferences.

Exhibit 5. Illustrative examples of a common activity conducted between October 2020 and May 2022: Trainings to help parents become school leaders

- One SFEC grantee co-created and tested a parent leadership program in collaboration with a university partner. Small groups of parents met monthly during the school year, with the university partner leading seven sessions on different aspects of parent leadership, such as finding leadership opportunities within schools or becoming a part of school boards or parent-teacher associations. At the end of the program, parents led independent "projects" of their choosing, such as organizing book drives to enhance home libraries for other families or creating tipsheets about how parents can proactively communicate with schools.

- Another SFEC supported its state's parent leadership fellowship program. The program (1) ran a series of webinars covering topics like helping families understand how the state allocated pandemic and recovery funds and how parents can raise questions to administrators about the state's biggest efforts to address learning loss; (2) encouraged parents to propose unique projects to address at their child's school; and (3) provided parents with networking opportunities to learn from other parents who had previously been a part of the fellowship program. The SFEC grantee assigned a staff member to develop content, deliver the program activities, and support the program's social media and marketing.

- Working alongside a partner agency, another SFEC grantee provided parent leadership training to families of children with disabilities. The partner agency organized roundtable discussions up to four times each year to help parents understand how to advocate for their children and navigate school policies. These discussions were conducted in English and Spanish and focused on topics such as available resources, how to understand special education laws, and creating opportunities for parents of children with special needs to connect with other parents.
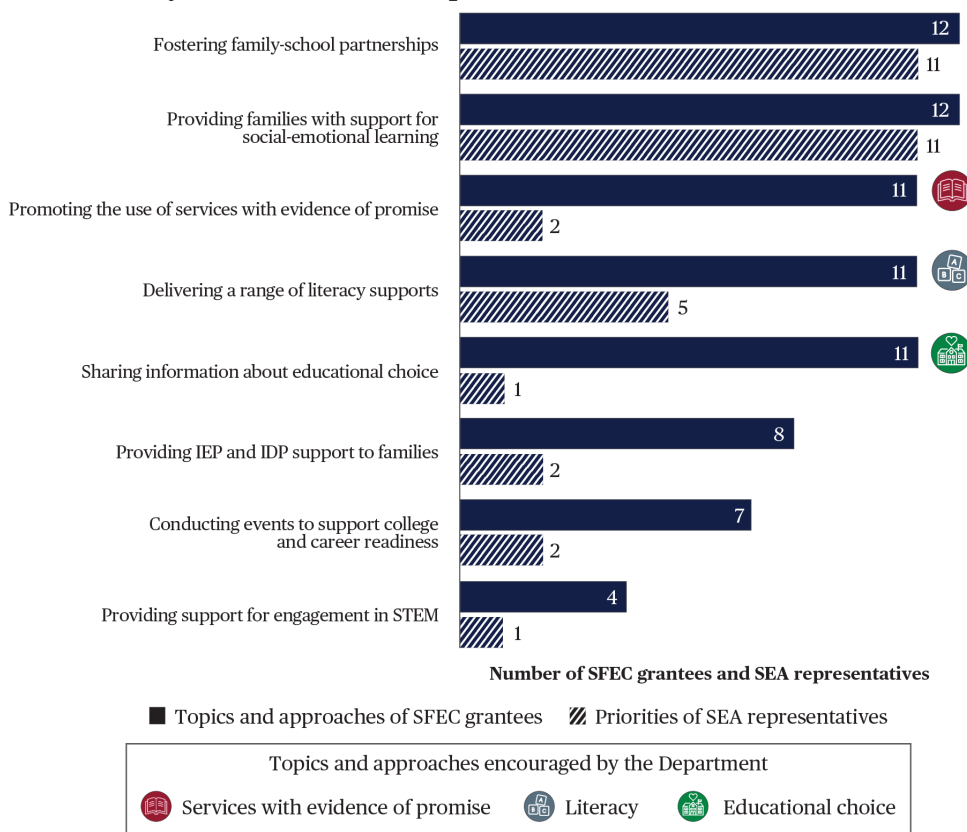
Source: SFEC director interview, summer 2022.

Notes: These examples are from the SFEC director interviews and were selected for illustrative purposes. The examples are not representative of all responses and are provided to show the variation behind high-level categories of direct services.

- ***The activities carried out by SFEC grantees reflected, at least to some extent, the Department's priorities for specific approaches and topics.*** Nearly all (11 of 12) grantees reported at least one activity that addressed each of the Department's 2018 topical or approach priorities, including literacy, delivering services with evidence of promise, and educational choice (Exhibit 6; Appendix Exhibit B.7). All 12 SFEC grantees reported activities that they believe contributed to the program's overarching objective of fostering or improving family-school partnerships (detailed in Appendix Exhibit B.8). However, SFEC grantees also addressed topics and approaches other than those prioritized by the Department in the grant competition.

- ***SFEC grantees that went beyond the federally-prioritized topics and approaches might have been trying to address their states' other pressing family engagement needs.*** Program flexibility allowed SFEC grantees to address topics that were important to SEAs even if they were not federal priorities. When asked in 2022, SEA representatives reported priorities that did not entirely align with the program's priorities established in 2018 and, notably, before the COVID pandemic (Exhibit 6; Appendix Exhibit B.10). One of the two most reported state priorities for family engagement in 2022, for example, was helping to build social-emotional learning, which was not an explicit Department priority for SFEC grantees in 2018. Social-emotional learning

became increasingly important when the pandemic limited students' connections with teachers and peers and restricted parents' visits to school buildings and face-to-face conferences with teachers.[22] During interviews, four SFEC directors volunteered that their SFEC pivoted to add a focus on social-emotional learning because it was an immediate need for families during the pandemic. SFEC grantees provided a variety of examples of the ways they implemented both federal and SEA priority approaches and topics (Exhibit 7; Appendix Exhibit B.7).

Exhibit 6. Reported SFEC grantee topics and approaches of activities conducted between October 2020 and May 2022 and 2022 SEA priorities

Topic/Approach	SFEC grantees	SEA representatives
Fostering family-school partnerships	12	11
Providing families with support for social-emotional learning	12	11
Promoting the use of services with evidence of promise	11	2
Delivering a range of literacy supports	11	5
Sharing information about educational choice	11	1
Providing IEP and IDP support to families	8	2
Conducting events to support college and career readiness	7	2
Providing support for engagement in STEM	4	1

Number of SFEC grantees and SEA representatives

■ Topics and approaches of SFEC grantees   ▨ Priorities of SEA representatives

Topics and approaches encouraged by the Department
🔴 Services with evidence of promise   ⬜ Literacy   🟢 Educational choice

NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors and 13 SEA representatives. SFEC directors indicated whether each approach and topic were a focus of any of their SFEC activities between October 2020 and May 2022 (Appendix Exhibit B.7). SFEC directors also reported whether any topics were a focus for multiple grade levels (Appendix B.6). SEA representatives selected five approaches or topics that they identified as their state's top priorities at the time of data collection (summer 2022) (Appendix Exhibit B.10).

IEP = Individualized education program

IDP = Individual development plan

STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

The exhibit shows the most common current SFEC grantee topics and approaches (represented by the top bar for each listed topic or approach) and the count of SEA representatives that selected that same topic or approach as a priority (represented by the bottom bars). The priorities encouraged by the Department are noted using the red, grey, and green icons. Note that the response options for the SFEC director survey and SEA survey were mostly the same, although SEAs were given several additional topics options, which are not included in this exhibit.

SOURCES: SEA representative survey and SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

Exhibit 7. Illustrative examples of how SFEC grantees implemented priority approaches and topic

Services with evidence of promise. SFEC grantees cited the provision of a range of services or activities that, to their thinking, met the Department's chosen definition of *evidence-based direct services*.[23] For example, these activities included approaches for academic parent-teacher teams and home visits.

- Academic parent-teacher teams are an approach to family engagement that intend to help families and teachers work together through group and individual family workshops.[24] Workshops are designed to focus on the progress that students are making across their academic subjects.
- Many SFEC grantees contracted with partners to support a variety of home visiting programs. One SFEC grantee implemented a national program that aims to improve school readiness.[25 26] Another SFEC grantee used a parent and teacher home visiting program, where they planned to identify coaches to conduct weekly home visits for families of preschool children. The program was designed to include a guided curriculum to support child language and social development.

Literacy. SFEC grantees reported wide-reaching literacy activities such as distributing books to families; creating newsletters and virtual resources to provide parents with information and strategies to support literacy; conducting training, coaching, or mentoring with teachers to help improve student literacy skills; and delivering webinars to families featuring strategies to support student literacy. Many SFEC grantees also implemented direct services to families focused on literacy, contracting with national models to provide services.

Educational choice. SFEC grantees reported a range of educational choice activities. One SFEC grantee provided families with information through websites and workshops to help them understand existing choice options in their district, such as open enrollment, charter schools, online public schools, private schools, and homeschooling. One SFEC grantee worked directly with groups of families to help them use their state's website to understand school quality. For example, this grantee provided direct trainings to families to make sure they understood factors such as language arts and math scores, student demographics, and grading systems to help parents make choices about education options. Another SFEC grantee hosted webinars to promote school choice resources that were developed by national organizations.

NOTES: These examples were chosen to illustrate a range of example activities implemented for each priority topic or approach. Inclusion of these illustrative examples does not imply endorsement by the Department of any of these approaches. Details on the number of SFEC grantees that implemented specific services with evidence of promise are contained in Appendix Exhibit B.9.

SOURCES: SFEC director survey and interviews with SFEC directors, summer 2022, and APRs, 2020-2021.

Most states reported a perception that their SFEC increased agency capacity to develop and carry out trainings related to family engagement (11 of 13 states), disseminate information or provide information and technical assistance resources related to family engagement (10 states), and identify pressing needs or priorities (10 states) (Exhibit 8; Appendix Exhibit B.11).

During interviews, SEA representatives volunteered specific ways that SFEC grantees supported them. For example, many SFEC grantees and SEAs reported using a national network that brings together state, district, and school staff for professional development workshops and ongoing training to create joint plans designed to support and engage families at school and home. Two SEAs stated that their SFECs worked on their state family engagement policy frameworks so they could be shared with all LEAs across their state. State representatives were largely satisfied with their partnership with their SFEC grantee at the time of

study data collection: 10 of the 13 SEA representatives reported that they were very satisfied, and the remaining three SEA representatives reported that they were somewhat satisfied with the partnership (Appendix Exhibit B.13).

Exhibit 8. SEA representative reports of the perceived areas where SFEC grantees increased capacity and knowledge at the state level as reported at the time of data collection in 2022
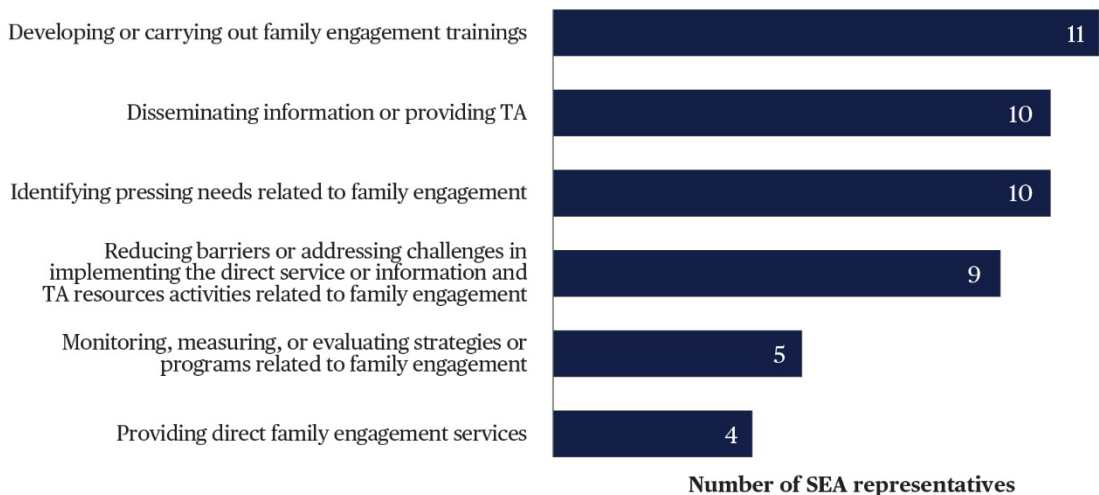
NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SEA representatives; one SEA did not respond to this question. SEA representatives indicated the areas in which the SFEC grantees increased their state capacity for family engagement as reported at the time of data collection in 2022 (Appendix Exhibit B.11).

SOURCE: SEA representative survey, summer 2022.

THE DISTRICTS THE SFEC GRANTEES WORKED WITH LARGELY HAD HIGH CONCENTRATIONS OF STUDENTS WHO WERE DISADVANTAGED, ANOTHER PRIORITY SPECIFIED IN THE LAW.

Federal education policies generally target resources and services to districts, schools, and students with significant need.[27] The SFEC program is consistent with those aims, emphasizing grantees' work with or on behalf of families from groups that have historically experienced disadvantage or hardship, such as those that may have been excluded from family engagement activities in the past. Specifically, the law[28] defines disadvantaged students as those who are English learners, students who are racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, children and youth experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, and students of migrant families. Building on the legislative language, the competition for grants in 2018 required applicants to describe the specific steps they would take to serve students from households with low incomes. SFEC grantees were required to allocate 65 percent or more of their funds to districts, schools, and community-based organizations that serve high concentrations of disadvantaged students and to report annually to the Department which districts and schools they worked directly with most intensively. This study did not collect information to verify that SFEC grantees spent 65 percent of their funds on districts, schools, and community-based organizations that serve high concentrations of disadvantaged students. However, the study did examine the characteristics of districts served. Whether the SFEC grantees met the priority of serving these student populations signals a first step toward addressing the program's overarching goal of reducing disparities in family engagement.

- ***The districts served by SFEC grantees had similar or higher proportions of disadvantaged students than did their respective states, with some exceptions.*** The program's authorizing statute requires grantees to serve districts with high concentrations of disadvantaged students. However, because states vary greatly in the composition of their students, the threshold for "high" could differ from state to state. Comparing the characteristics of students in the districts each SFEC reported working with to their statewide average based on EDFacts data provides a common indicator of whether grantees were meeting this program priority. Almost all states that SFEC grantees reported working with had districts with similar or higher proportions of students in Title I schools compared to statewide averages (Exhibit 9 Appendix Exhibits B.14 and B.15). Most SFEC grantees served districts with similar or higher proportions than statewide student subgroups defined as disadvantaged by ESSA, except for students from homeless or migrant families. Data were not available to assess districts' proportion of children or youth in foster care.

Exhibit 9. Number of states in which the districts that SFEC grantees reported serving had proportions of students from disadvantaged households that were higher than, similar to, or lower than statewide averages between 2020 and 2021
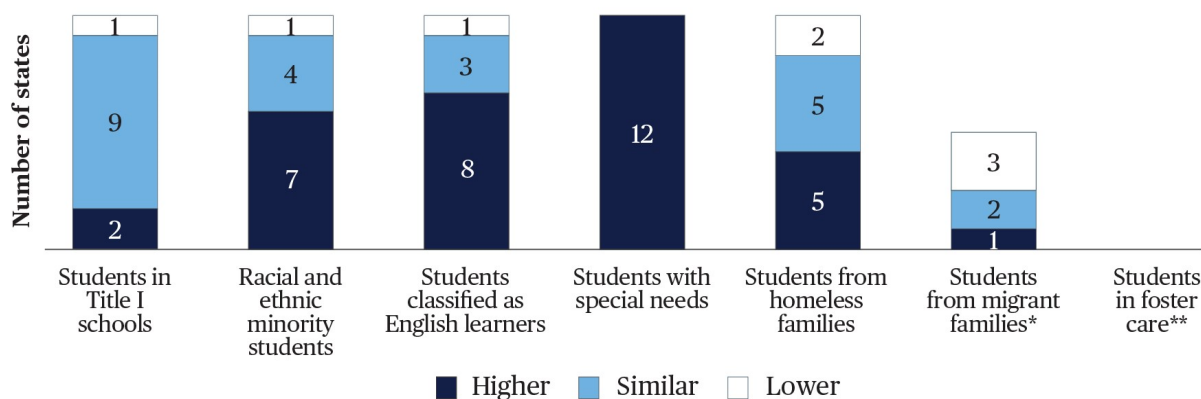
NOTES: Analysis based on data from 12 states and 11 SFEC grantees. Numbers represent the count of states in which districts served by SFEC grantees had higher, similar, or lower proportions of students from disadvantaged households than the statewide averages between 2020 and 2021 (Appendix Exhibit B.16). Data for students with special needs comes from the 2019-2020 EDFacts data, as the special needs variable is not present in the 2020-2021 data set. One state representing one SFEC is not included because the state accounts for only one district, making a comparison impossible, and two states represent one SFEC grantee that works with two states. The population names reported in this graph (for example, students in Title I schools, racial and ethnic minority students) differ slightly from those used in the Department application notice and other places in this report, including Exhibit 10. The reason is that Exhibit 9 uses student characteristics as reported in the EDFacts database. In comparing to statewide averages, relative differences of less than 20 percent are considered "similar" to the statewide average. Relative difference is calculated as the difference between the percentage across the districts that SFEC grantees work with and the statewide subgroup percentage, divided by the statewide subgroup percentage.

*Students from migrant family comparison includes only seven states because statewide numbers were not available in all states.

**Information about students in foster care was not available.

SOURCES: 2021 SFEC APRs and EDFacts 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

- ***Most SFEC grantees worked with fewer than 20 percent of all districts in the partner states in 2021.*** SFEC grants are intended to be statewide while focusing on serving disadvantaged communities and families.[29] Reconciling these objectives could be challenging. SFEC grantees reported that they worked directly with

districts representing an average of 17.6 percent of all districts and a median of 3 percent of all districts within their respective states in 2021 (Appendix Exhibit B.16). This indicates that although SFEC grantees largely concentrated efforts on districts with more disadvantaged students, they served a relatively small number of districts in their states. According to the list of districts submitted by grantees each year to the Department, SFEC grantees reported working with an average of 87.5 percent of the same districts from 2020 to 2021 (Appendix Exhibit B.16). This suggests that, at least for their more intensive direct services, the SFEC grantees chose to identify a modest but consistent set of districts and schools with which to forge relationships.

- ***SFEC grantees reported providing direct services intended to serve disadvantaged families defined by the program.*** In the study survey, the SFEC directors indicated whether each direct service offered by the SFEC grantee was intended for families with specific characteristics.[30] All SFEC grantees reported offering at least some activities intended specifically for families from households with low incomes, whether because the SFEC provided the service directly to families or less directly to districts and schools that, according to the SFEC's estimate, included students from these types of families (Exhibit 10; Appendix Exhibit B.17 and B.18). During interviews, SFEC grantees described how they attempted to directly serve families or schools meeting specific characteristics. For example, one SFEC grantee mentioned that they focused on locations where they might be able to engage multiple families with low incomes at once, such as apartment communities that were designated as affordable housing, dollar stores, food banks, libraries, and churches. Another SFEC grantee noted that in an attempt to reach disadvantaged families, all the schools they worked with were Title I schools because that was the criterion they used to identify schools serving students from households with low incomes. SFEC grantees also commonly reported offering direct services intended for families of students who were English learners, students from racial or ethnic minority groups, and students identified as having a disability. Fewer SFEC grantees noted activities directed to migrant families, families of students in foster care, and families of students experiencing homelessness.

Exhibit 10. SFEC grantees reporting that any of its activities was intended for specific disadvantaged populations or schools serving high numbers of these families between October 2020 and May 2022
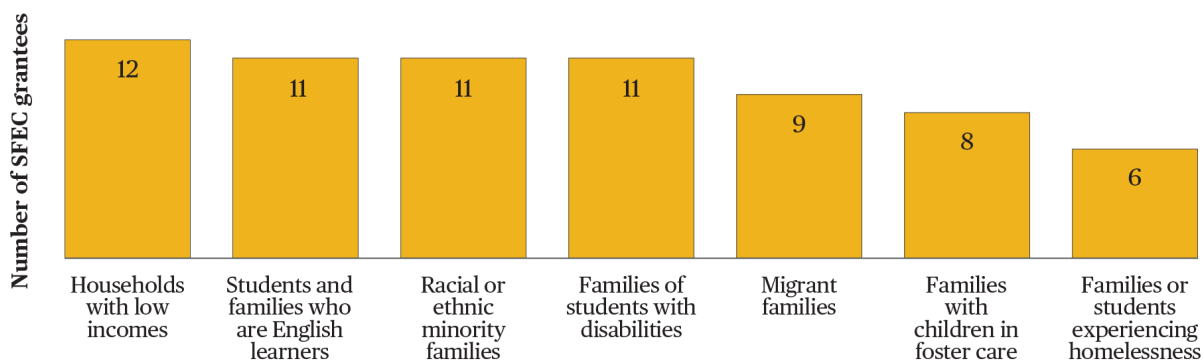
NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors. Numbers represent the count of SFEC grantees reporting the conduct of activities since October 2020 intended for families with the specific characteristics (or schools serving high numbers of families with the characteristics) denoted beneath each bar (Appendix Exhibit B.18).
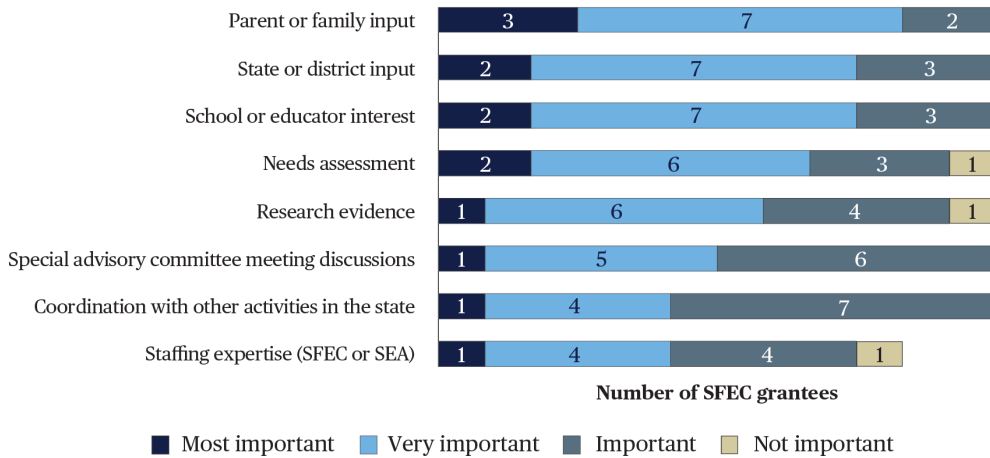
SOURCE: SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

IN DETERMINING HOW TO IMPLEMENT THEIR ACTIVITIES, MORE SFEC GRANTEES APPEARED TO VALUE DIRECT INPUT FROM FAMILIES AND EDUCATION LEADERS OVER PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS SUCH AS SPECIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES.

SFEC grantees had to make many decisions about how to deliver services in their states, including how resources would be allocated, the topics their activities would address and the approaches those activities would use, the recipients they intended to serve, and the development of new partnerships in their states. The legislation required SFEC grantees to make these decisions with input from a variety of sources, including their partner SEA and a special advisory committee. The committee had to be formed so that parents were the majority of participants but representatives of school districts, schools, and other organizations were included.[31] Understanding how the SFEC grantees balanced and prioritized these influences could help inform changes to the SFEC program in the future.

- ***SFEC grantees rated direct input from families and education leaders as very important influences on activities to offer.*** According to most SFEC directors, feedback from families was either a very important or the most important influence on deciding which activities to provide (Exhibit 11; Appendix Exhibit B.19). SFEC grantees reported using many mechanisms to obtain family input. In interviews, seven SFEC grantees volunteered that they obtained input from parents and families directly through special advisory committee meetings, as required, but also less directly through other committee members' direct consultations with families and through the SFEC's partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, one SFEC grantee stated that they sought direct input from families in rural and isolated areas by convening conversations with families across the state to understand rural family needs and ways to build stronger engagement with schools. One SFEC grantee organized a summit of more than 100 families and the state commissioner of education to obtain feedback on their proposed SFEC activities for the year. In addition to direct family input, SFEC directors also rated the views of other stakeholders–states, districts, schools, and other educators–as important in choosing what to implement.

- ***In general, special advisory committee meetings and research evidence appeared to be less consequential than other factors.*** Even though special advisory committee meetings and research evidence were required by legislation, neither of these factors was a very prominent influence on decision making, according to SFEC directors. The nature or extent of research evidence may not have emerged as the most important or common influence for two reasons. First, only some grantees (Exhibit 2) sought extra points in the 2018 grant competition for proposing to use services with evidence of promise. Second, SFEC grantees were only required to identify one family engagement activity as having evidence of promise based on research in order to receive those points.

Exhibit 11. SFEC grantees reported influences on decision making as reported in 2022

	Most important	Very important	Important	Not important
Parent or family input	3	7	2	
State or district input	2	7	3	
School or educator interest	2	7	3	
Needs assessment	2	6	3	1
Research evidence	1	6	4	1
Special advisory committee meeting discussions	1	5	6	
Coordination with other activities in the state	1	4	7	
Staffing expertise (SFEC or SEA)	1	4	4	1

Number of SFEC grantees

■ Most important ■ Very important ■ Important ☐ Not important

NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors. SFEC directors reported the importance of each source of input when making decisions about the activities and services offered by the SFEC grantees since October 2020. They first rated them as very important, important, or not important. Then, SFEC directors selected the most important factor when making decisions about services and activities to provide. Other factors reported by SFEC directors included staffing capacity (Appendix Exhibit B.19).

SOURCE: SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

STAFFING ISSUES, BOTH RELATED AND UNRELATED TO THE PANDEMIC, WERE CHALLENGES FOR SFEC IMPLEMENTATION.

Any grantee can face challenges that hinder their implementation efforts, including those aligned with various program requirements and priorities. In addition to the more typical difficulties grantees might encounter, the first SFEC grantees were confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic that began severely disrupting school operations and corresponding state and district actions in the second year of the grants. The pandemic heightened the need for family engagement services as schools pivoted to remote instruction, increasing the burden on parents and guardians to help with student learning.[32] Even though the extent of remote instruction had declined by the time the study collected data at the end of the 2021–2022 school year, lingering effects of the pandemic may have created barriers that affected the work of the first round of SFEC grants. Beyond the pandemic-related staffing issues, SFEC grantees faced other long-standing issues such as staff burnout, high turnover, and limited resources.[33] Understanding the nature of challenges that SFEC grantees faced can inform ongoing program support and improvement efforts, such as the assistance the Department offers to grantees.

- *Direct services generally posed more implementation challenges for SFEC grantees than information and technical assistance resource activities.* Close to half or more SFEC grantees reported that it was challenging to implement a majority of direct service activities, whereas one-quarter reported challenges with delivering information and technical assistance resource activities (Exhibit 12; Appendix Exhibit B.20). Moreover, among the seven activities that at least half of the SFEC grantees found challenging, six were direct service activities (Exhibit 12; Appendix Exhibit B.20).

- *The pandemic-related other staffing issues were the most commonly reported source of these challenges in carrying out key family engagement activities.* Eight SFEC grantees reported that the COVID-19

pandemic-related or other staffing concerns at schools, districts, and SEAs were a source of the challenges they faced in implementing direct services or information and technical assistance resource activities, with nearly all grantees (11) reporting at least one of these reasons (Appendix Exhibit B.21). SFEC grantees reported that some strategies adopted to overcome those pandemic-related challenges were worth continuing, such as using a variety of communication modes to reach families and offering services remotely (Appendix Exhibit B.22).

Exhibit 12. Activities SFEC grantees reported carrying out, by number finding each challenging between October 2020 and May 2022
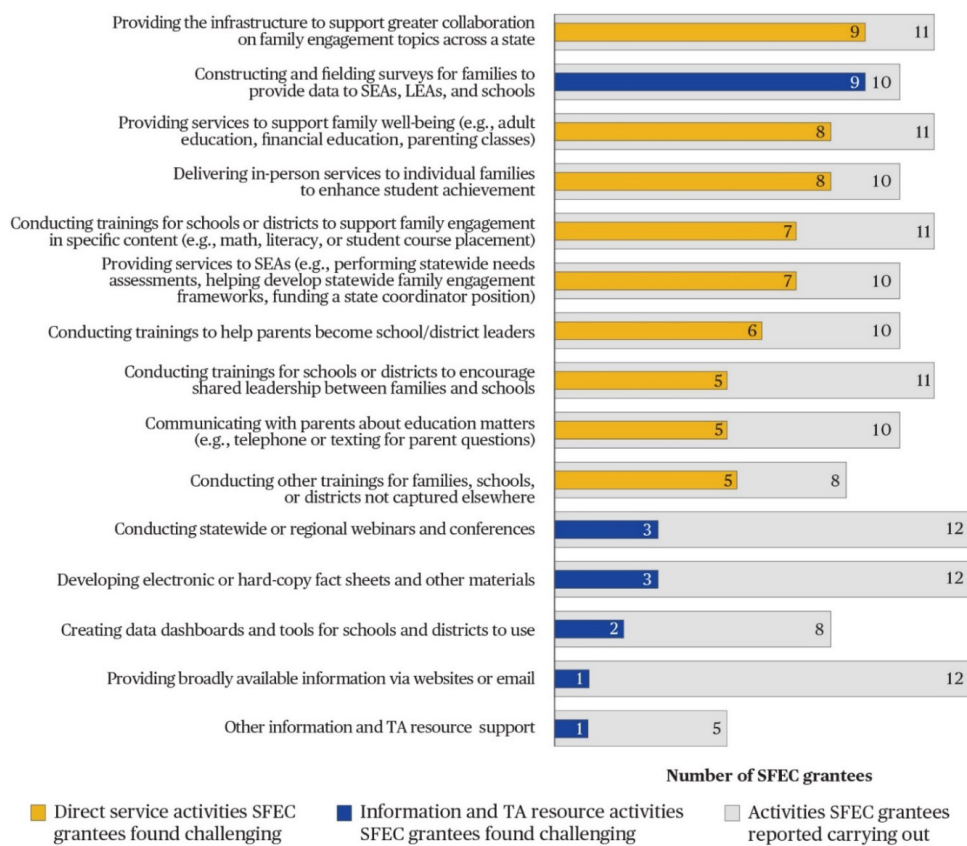
NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors. This list of activities is the same as the list presented in Exhibit 5. The numbers in the gray bars represent the count of SFEC grantees reporting that they conducted the activity since October 2020; the numbers in the yellow bars represent the count of SFEC grantees reporting direct service activities as very or moderately challenging to carry out since October 2020. The numbers in the blue bars represent the count of SFEC grantees reporting technical assistance activities as very or moderately challenging to carry out since October 2020 (Appendix Exhibit B.20). The graphic is ordered by the activities that were most commonly reported by the SFEC grantees as very or moderately challenging. "Other technical assistance support" activities reported by grantees included Parent Leadership Training, Pre-service Family Engagement project, Core Competencies for Family Engagement, Supporting Institutes of Higher Education, and Statewide District Survey.

SOURCE: SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

- ***Staffing and time constraints were concerns not only for overall implementation efforts but also for collaboration between SFEC grantees and their SEA partners, though there were also other challenges to making the partnership work.*** Most SFEC directors and SEA representatives noted SEA staffing and time constraints as issues (Exhibit 13; Appendix Exhibits B.23 and B.24). For example, during interviews, one SEA

representative elaborated on how a change in state leadership led to the new officials wanting to spend more time to identify distinct roles for the SFEC and the state. Five SEA representatives volunteered that changes in their leadership and a lack of dedicated family engagement offices were aspects of persistent staffing challenges. There were also other staffing issues. For example, three SFEC grantees reported issues such as SEAs' few, dedicated family engagement staff and insufficient time for existing SEA staff to focus on family engagement. Among potential difficulties of collaboration both SFECs and SEAs were asked about, only a handful cited other concerns such as the way the communication was handled or the level of engagement from SEA staff.

Exhibit 13. SFEC grantees and SEA representative perspectives on challenges to collaboration, 2022

Panel A: Common challenges to collaboration for SFEC directors and SEA representatives
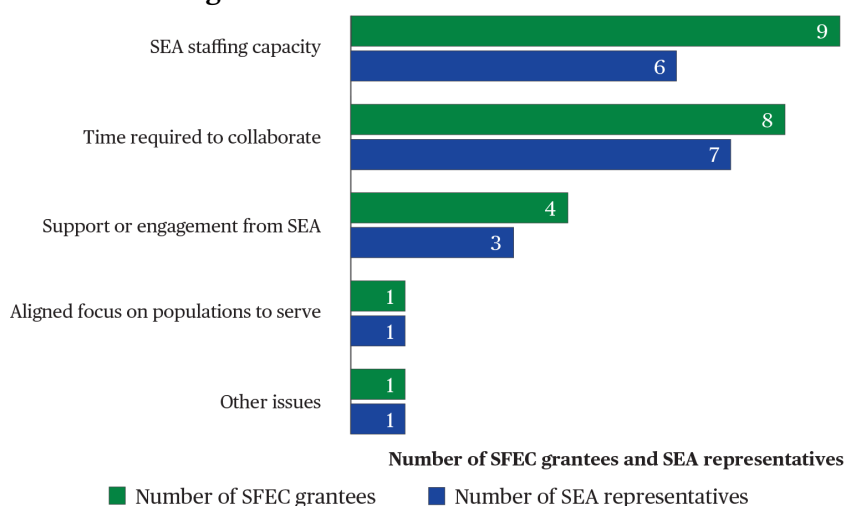
Panel B: Unique challenges to collaboration for SFEC directors or SEA representatives
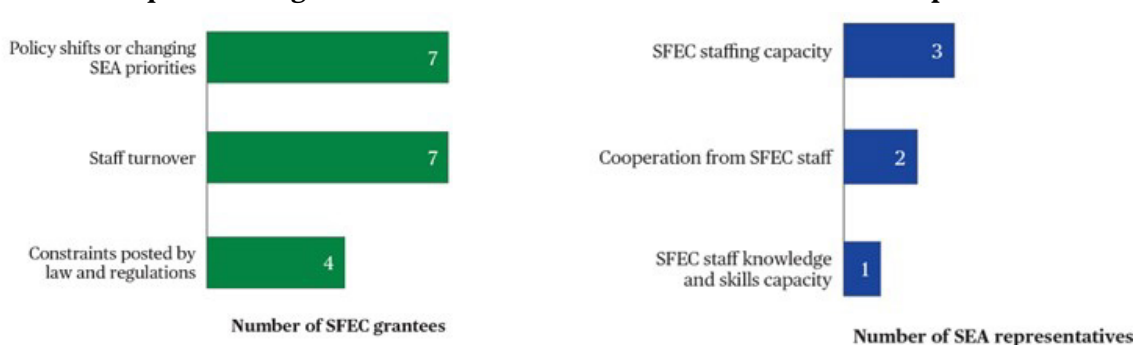
NOTES: Analysis based on responses from 12 SFEC directors and 13 SEA representatives. Numbers represent the count of SFEC grantee and SEA representative responses to topics reported as largely and somewhat challenging when asked about the extent to which the topics listed were largely challenging, somewhat challenging, or not at all challenging in their collaboration with their SFEC-SEA partner, as reported at the time of data collection in 2022 (Appendix Exhibits B.23 and B.24). Note that across the two surveys most of the response options for the SFEC and SEA surveys were the same, and these are shown in Panel A. Each survey also contained several response options that differed in order to collect information specific to that entity, which are shown in Panel B. In Panel A, "Other issues" reported by SFEC directors included bureaucratic processes and hiring of new state superintendents; one "Other issue" reported by an SEA representative was transparency related to a partner.

SOURCES: SEA representative survey and SFEC director survey, summer 2022.

LOOKING AHEAD

Efforts to improve family engagement are likely to grow as the nation seeks to recover more fully from the pandemic and its lingering effects on education systems and children. The SFEC program is one key way the Department supports such efforts, with grants to over 20 states as of 2024.[34] Should federal policymakers or program leaders want to refine SFEC program goals and objectives in the future, they may want to consider the experiences of the initial set of SFEC grantees and questions raised by this report's results about program scope and operations.

- **How much of a role should the Department's priorities play in a family engagement program intended to be responsive to stakeholder needs?** SFEC grantees reported that they addressed the Department's priorities to at least some extent, but both SFEC grantees and SEA representatives had additional priorities for family engagement. Some of these other priorities may have been prompted by the unique situation presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the activities carried out to address social-emotional learning. In other cases, the grantees or their partners hardly emphasized certain federal priorities–for instance, increasing family engagement in or through education choice. Clearly, SFEC grantees felt that they had the flexibility to carry out activities beyond the topics and approaches and other efforts the Department sought to encourage. The study's findings on the limited influence of certain federal priorities may either align with policymakers' intent to guide but not significantly influence grantee activities or suggest that other mechanisms are needed to ensure that the priorities have more impact on grantee efforts.

- **Can the program avoid burdening already stretched SEA offices and staff?** SEAs are important partners with SFEC grantees, yet both sides of the partnership report constraints on state staff time and capacity.[35] [36] Even though the program's direct service emphasis may result in SFEC grantees conducting activities with districts, schools, and families that would otherwise fall to SEA staff, the SFEC program nevertheless does require time from SEA staff. For example, the SEA is expected to provide information about needs, co-plan services, and participate in technical assistance and capacity building around family engagement. The apparent tension between trying to increase SEA capacity for sustainable family engagement and limited SEA staff time amid competing job responsibilities may pose a continual challenge that the program may need to consider how to address.

- **To what extent is the program trading intensity for reach?** In prioritizing direct service activities and disadvantaged communities, policymakers may have aimed to maximize the program's impact on a relatively small set of recipients. But there are also signals indicating that SFEC grantees are expected to support family engagement across the state, including the titling of the program as Statewide Family Engagement Centers. All SFEC grantees tried to balance these objectives, providing resource-intensive direct service activities for some schools and districts as well as lighter-touch informational activities with the potential to reach a wider set of recipients. Little is known yet about the consequences of these trade-offs or whether any of these program activities are producing the desired effect on family or student outcomes. Should particular services appear promising, the Department may consider rigorously evaluating them on a larger scale and in contexts beyond grantees to determine the return on investment in SFEC program efforts as an important area of education improvement.

ENDNOTES

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[3] Hanson, R., & Pugliese, C. (2020). *Parent and family involvement in education: 2019* (NCES 2020-076). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

[4] Hanson, R., & Pugliese, C. (2020). *Parent and family involvement in education: 2019* (NCES 2020-076). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

[5] Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review, 4,* 80-102.

[6] Backer-Hicks, A., Goodman, J., & Mulhern, C. (2021). Inequality in household adaptation to schooling shocks: Covid-induced online learning engagement in real time. *Journal of Public Economics, 193,* 104345-104361.

Herold, B. (2020, April 10). The disparities in remote learning under coronavirus (in charts). *EducationWeek.* https://www.edweek.org/technology/the-disparities-in-remote-learning-under-coronavirus-in-charts/2020/04

Sharma Rani, R. (2020, April 22). Imagine online school in a language you don't understand. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/us/coronavirus-immigrants-school.html

[7] This report uses the term family engagement, where *family* is inclusive of parents, caregivers, and other guardians that may support students.

[8] The law authorizing the SFEC program, the Every Student Succeeds Act, uses the term "disadvantaged students" to describe whom the program intends to serve. The law defines "disadvantaged" students to includes those who are "English learners, minorities, students with disabilities, homeless children and youth, children and youth in foster care, and migrant students Sec. 4503(b)(4)." The law also makes reference to providing services to students who have low incomes. This report uses the term "disadvantaged students" to maintain the same intent as the law and encompass all of these dimensions of disadvantage.

[9] Every Student Succeeds Act, 20, U.S.C. § 6301. (2015). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf. See also the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) for the Statewide Family Engagement Program at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-06-28/pdf/FR-2018-06-28.pdf

[10] Specifically, the law says that grants are to "establish statewide family engagement centers that– (1) carry out parent education, and family engagement in education, programs; or (2) provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to State educational agencies, local educational agencies, schools identified by State

educational agencies and local educational agencies, organizations that support family-school partnerships, and other organizations that carry out such programs (Sec. 4502(a)).

[11] For example, the law requires applicants to describe their "demonstrated experience in providing training, information, and support" (Sec. 4503(b)(4)). The study defines information and technical assistance resource activities as those that require the recipients of SFEC services to decide themselves to reach out to access assistance rather than being actively recruited to participate.

[12] The Department application notice for the PIRC program places an emphasis on information dissemination in the performance requirements. Specifically, the notice stated that a PIRC performance target was to increase the number of parents that received information from PIRC projects by 5 percent each year. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2003-06-03/pdf/03-13837.pdf

[13] The law states, "the Secretary is authorized to award grants for each fiscal year to statewide organizations (or consortia of such organizations), to establish statewide family engagement centers." The types of organizations that applied for funding are described in the Overview of the Study.

[14] This report uses the term family-school partnerships in place of dual capacity-building.

[15] Mapp, K. L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2). Retrieved from: www.dualcapacity.org.

[16] These include application requirements, absolute priorities (which grantees must address), competitive preference priorities (optional priorities that, if addressed, yield extra points for applicants), and application selection criteria.

[17] Direct service activities require that SFEC grantees actively recruit participants to deliver services to and that recipients (families, schools, local education agencies, and SEAs) choose to be involved. Examples include providing home visiting services to families, forming and supporting parent and teacher teams in schools, or providing trainings to families or school leaders.

[18] Information and technical assistance resource activities require the recipients of SFEC services to decide themselves to reach out to access assistance rather than being actively recruited to participate. In general, these services are broadly disseminated to an unlimited number of potential recipients. They include activities such as developing tip sheets, websites, and newsletters and making them universally available to anyone interested.

[19] The Department application notice stated that "high impact family engagement envisioned in SFEC requires a focus on State and local policy, as well as initiatives designed to promote parental involvement...and other direct support for parents, families, and the organizations that serve them." https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-06-28/pdf/2018-13913.pdf

[20] Topics are content areas that may have been or are intended to be the focus of specific SFEC activities, for example, literacy, social and emotional learning, and STEM. Approaches represent processes that can help promote family engagement, such as providing services with evidence of promise and direct services with the potential to be high-impact.

[21] Although there was a 2018 preferential priority for *evidence-based direct services*, the Department chose to define broadly what constitutes evidence. The definition for "promising evidence," as described in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), includes types of research, such as correlational studies, from which it is not possible to draw reliable conclusions about a strategy's effectiveness but may suggest some potential for or

promise of effectiveness. In addition, there was no independent verification by the Department or study team to determine whether the services or approaches proposed by applicants or reportedly implemented by grantees in this category met the definition of *evidence-based* from the 2018 Department application notice. To signal appropriately some uncertainty about the strength of the evidence, this report uses the term "services with evidence of promise," but such designation should not be taken as conclusive evidence of effectiveness.

[22] Zieher, A., Cipriano, C., Meyer, J. L., & Strambler, M. J. (2021). Educators' implementation and use of social and emotional learning early in the COVID-19 pandemic. School Psychology, 36(5), 388-397.

[23] The study team did not analyze the evidence of promise for these strategies as that was not a goal of this study.

[24] Paredes, M. (2010). Parent involvement as an instructional strategy: academic parent-teacher teams. [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University].

[25] Drotar, D., Robinson, J., Jeavons, L., & Lester Kirchner, H. (2009). A randomized, controlled evaluation of early intervention: The Born to Learn curriculum. *Child: Care, Health & Development, 35*(5), 643-649.

[26] Wagner, M. & Clayton, S. (1999). The Parents as Teachers program: Results from two demonstrations. *The Future of Children, 9*(1), 91-115.

[27] See, for example, this discussion of federal education policies and legislation at https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10551.

[28] Every Student Succeeds Act, 20, U.S.C. § 6301. (2015). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf, 216-220; also see the Department application notice (Notice Inviting Applications) at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-06-28/pdf/2018-13913.pdf

[29] SFECs needed to operate a statewide family engagement center of sufficient size, scope, and quality to ensure that the center is adequate to serve the State educational agency, local educational agencies, and community-based organizations; (Sec 4503(b)(6)(C)).

[30] SFEC grantees were not asked to distinguish whether a service was primarily directed toward families or schools. They were asked to determine whether any of their activities were intended for families with these characteristics or schools serving high numbers of these families.

[31] Every Student Succeeds Act, 20, U.S.C. § 6301. (2015). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf, 217-219

[32] Bhamani, S., Makhdoom, A., Bharuchi, V., Ali, N., Jafri, S., & Ahmad, D. (2020). Home learning in times of COVID: Experiences of parents. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 7(9), 9-26.

[33] Farrell, C. C., Coburn, C. E., & Chong, S. (2019). Under What Conditions Do School Districts Learn From External Partners? The Role of Absorptive Capacity. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(3), 955-994.

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[34] Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

[35] Brown, C., Hess, F. M., Lautzenheiser, D. K., & Owen, I. (2011). *State education agencies as agents of change*. Center for American Progress.

[36] Jochim, A., & Murphy, P. (2013). *The capacity challenge: What it takes for state education agencies to support school improvement*. Center on Reinventing Public Education.