

# **Advancing Professional Development for Family, School and Community Engagement: A Conversation Regarding NAFSCE's Family Core Engagement Core Competencies**

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## **Introduction**

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education (JFDE) strives to provide timely and insightful content for readers and the broader education community. However, the typically lengthy research and publication process in academia can make it difficult to respond to topical issues in a timely manner. In response to this challenge, the JFDE is committed to facilitating periodic community conversations that seek to engage academic and community experts in dialogue pertaining to important issues.

What follows is a transcript of a conversation that was focused on the new family engagement core competency recommendations from the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE). While it is not new to see specific recommendations for family engagement emerge – generally, these recommendations tend to be prescriptive in nature, grounded in Euro-centric ideologies, and school-centered. NAFSCE, however, has created competencies that, instead of centering what parents and families ought to be doing, emphasize power sharing and the transformation of traditional family, school, and community engagement practices (See Table 1). In addition, NAFSCE's work has implications for *all* family-facing professionals, not just teachers and school administrators. Beyond the core competencies, we learn in our conversation more about how NAFSCE's work around family, school, and community engagement is grounded in social justice and equity. This is especially critical given the fast-moving anti-CRT and anti-LGBTQ policies being passed and proposed nationwide. We invite our readers to consider how we might leverage the work of NAFSCE to more authentically center families and communities within family, school, and community engagement.

The conversation took place on January 24, 2023 and was facilitated by the JFDE co-editors Michael Evans and Érica Fernández. Joining us on the call from NAFSCE were Dr. Margaret Caspe, Senior Research Consultant, and Dr. Reyna Hernandez, Senior Director for Research and Policy. Participants reviewed the transcript to ensure accuracy, and for our readers' convenience, we have embedded

hyperlinks and footnotes to various NAFSCE documents and resources throughout the manuscript. This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity. Throughout the interview “Framework” is used to refer to the Educator Preparation Framework for Family and Community Partnerships. Core Competencies is used to refer to the Family Engagement Core Competencies: A Body of Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Family-Facing Professionals. Both of these reports are free for download at: [www.nafsce.org/edprep](http://www.nafsce.org/edprep)

**Table 1. The Family Engagement Core Competencies by Domain**

Reflect	Connect	Collaborate	Lead Alongside Families
<p><b>1. Respect, Honor, and Value Families</b></p> <p>a. Examine, respect, and value the cultural and linguistic diversity of families and communities</p> <p>b. Explore, understand, and honor with families how children develop, grow, and change from birth through adulthood across settings, and how these changes affect families</p>	<p><b>3. Build Trusting Reciprocal Relationships with Families</b></p> <p>a. Cultivate mutual trust</p> <p>b. Communicate effectively</p> <p>c. Create welcoming environments</p> <p>d. Reach out actively to families, especially those who might be most underserved</p>	<p><b>5. Co-Construct Learning Opportunities with Families</b></p> <p>a. Build upon family knowledge as resources for learning</p> <p>b. Join together with families for planning, implementing, and evaluating learning opportunities and services</p>	<p><b>7. Take Part in Lifelong Learning</b></p> <p>a. Identify and participate as a member of the family engagement profession</p> <p>b. Engage in professional learning to grow family engagement knowledge and skills</p> <p>c. Use data to assess, evaluate, and improve family and community engagement</p>
<p><b>2. Embrace Equity Throughout Family Engagement</b></p> <p>a. Look inward to develop cultural humility, cognitive flexibility, and perspective-taking skills to practice anti-bias and equitable family and community engagement.</p> <p>b. Reflect on how history and social context influence family engagement systems and practices</p>	<p><b>4. Foster Community Partnerships for Learning and Family Wellbeing</b></p> <p>a. Build community partnerships to support children and families</p> <p>b. Establish systems to expand how families link to community resources</p> <p>c. Cultivate social support networks and connections among families</p>	<p><b>6. Link Family and Community Engagement to Learning and Development</b></p> <p>a. Develop data systems that are accessible to each and every family</p> <p>b. Create conversations around developmental and academic progress</p> <p>c. Expand on family learning in the home and community</p>	<p><b>8. Advocate for Systems Change</b></p> <p>a. Identify and examine new and existing policies and practices to further family and community engagement</p> <p>b. Champion equity as an essential element of family and community engagement and stand with families for equitable educational systems and outcomes</p> <p>c. Reframe the conversation around family and community engagement to expand public understanding</p>

From “Family Engagement Core Competencies: A Body of Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Family-Facing Professionals,” p. 10. Copyright 2022 by National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement. Reprinted with permission.

## A Community Conversation

**Michael Evans:** Thank you for speaking with us and the readers of JFDE today. I was hoping that each of you could share a little bit about yourself and how you came to this work and how you came to be working on this project for NAFSCE.

**Maggie Caspe:** I'm Maggie Caspe and I'm a Senior Research Consultant at NAFSCE, which is the National Association for Family School and Community Engagement. NAFSCE was founded in 2014 and has a mission to advance high-impact policies and practices for family, school, and community engagement to promote child development and improve student achievement. NAFSCE does this in a variety of ways; by promoting dialogue in the field and among its members; providing technical assistance and training to states as well as the federal government around their family and community engagement strategies; and also by taking on a number of special projects that are of importance to our members. One of those projects is thinking more critically about how we prepare educators for family and community engagement and the competencies that educators develop that make them effective. That's the project that Reyna and I are working on together and this project is close to my heart. I began my career as a kindergarten and first grade teacher and one of the areas I felt least prepared for was how to engage families and communities. So, a lot of my professional career has been about diving deep into and understanding family and community engagement, and what it looks like to prepare educators and professionals around this topic.

**Reyna Hernandez:** I am the Senior Director for Research and Policy at NAFSCE. As Maggie mentioned, NAFSCE is a very young organization and is truly doing a lot of really innovative work in thinking more deeply about these Core Competencies, to take a step beyond just saying what good family engagement looks like, but to really dig into it. We're in the business of people and what do the people working on the ground level, who are really trying to make a space welcoming and have two-way communication with families, what does it take for them to be able to do all of that?

I was drawn to the organization (NAFSCE) because it was thinking about systems and systemic conditions. It's not just that people need to do things differently, but that we need policies and systems to make sure that people are *able* to do things differently and that they're being supported. For me, my background is heavily in the space of social justice and community development. I started more on the community engagement side of the equation as a community partner collaborating with schools around youth enrichment and leadership. Just navigating school systems was challenging as an outsider, it wasn't really true partnership, it was like trying to push into the education space to do really great things for kids and really wrestling with it.

The first job that I had out of college was through a fellowship project at a Parent Information and Support Center. And it was funded by a school district, we were employees of the district, but at the same time there was the sense that we were outsiders because we weren't based at the school. We were perceived as being on the parents' side, and we thought, "No, there are NO sides here! We're all trying to do what's best for kids and families." At the time I didn't think of myself as a community engagement practitioner, but now that I'm in this field and see and hear experiences from different people, I realize that unfortunately, the challenges that I faced are not unusual.

Much of my career has also been working closely with the immigrant community, looking at things like language access, and supporting them in understanding and navigating systems that might be very

different. So much of this work is bridging and capacity building, building up things like confidence and understanding so that someone could show up and know that they have a seat at the table, even if no one was pulling out a chair for them. There's a lot of social justice in this work. I really do think that the work that we're doing is helping to build a pipeline of leadership and capacity building that extends far beyond just education into other civic spaces and across issues.

**Michael Evans:** Early on NAFSCE seemed to focus more on the provision of resources and technical work. The Family Engagement Core Competencies and the Educator Preparation Framework for Family and Community Partnerships seems a little bit more macro in terms of its approach. Could you tell us a little bit about why NAFSCE chose this moment in time to focus on this topic, and what inspired the pivot point from doing technical training toward focusing on the development of this broader Framework?

**Reyna Hernandez:** I think it's part of a natural evolution for us. In addition to some of that early work on resource development that you are referring to, we've had some work that hasn't necessarily been quite as prominent, but it included a lot of higher-level systems work, in particular working with state education agencies. Over the course of two cohorts in partnership with the Council for Chief State School Officers, we worked with 18 different states around the development of State Family Engagement Frameworks.<sup>1</sup> The frameworks all looked very different because they were all co-developed by local coalitions and stakeholders. It was really a challenge at the state level to think about, first of all, what does family and community engagement mean to them and then how do they advance and continue to support the field in doing that work? The states have continued to carry that work forward thinking about their professional training, thinking about how they support their grant programs that include family and community engagement. There was a lot of systemic work being done there, but it was done more quietly, in cohorts and learning communities and through what we called an opportunity canvas that actually assessed each state across different areas, including educator preparation and professional development.

We were looking at their state standards, we were looking at their requirements for ed prep and one of the pieces that sort of bridges our work was a report that we did entitled, State of the States<sup>2</sup>, that was looking at state licensure requirements, looking at these different components within state systems and what would support (or not) preparation around family and community engagement.

The development of a framework to try to move educator preparation on this topic was built into our DNA. It was part of the [strategic plan](#) from when NAFSCE was founded, so we knew from the start that at some point we'd be developing and ultimately piloting an educator preparation framework, and trying to move the needle on this, but we moved along that systems piece first. When we got to the development of the Framework, we did it with our [Family Engagement Consortium on Educator Preparation](#). 14 teams applied to be part of this consortium. We ultimately selected 7 state teams. Each one of those teams had to include that systemic piece, a state administrator, someone from an agency that was overseeing educator preparation, along with the educator preparation partner. We also worked with some very key partners at the nexus of educator preparation, teacher quality, equity,

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the State Consortium on Family Engagement and for links to the various state level frameworks please see the following website: <https://nafsce.org/page/StateFrameworks>

<sup>2</sup> NAFSCE (2019), The state of the states: Family, school and community engagement within state educator licensure requirements. Alexandria, VA, Retrieved from [https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/custompages/NAFSCE\\_States\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/custompages/NAFSCE_States_Report_FINAL_0.pdf)

and accreditation - The American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, the National Education Association, and MAEC, which was formerly the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium. The systemic piece has been a thread throughout, and there's a convergence here of policy, practice and research. We're not just advocating for policies we *think* make sense, these are ideas developed in partnership, on a body of research that comes from surveying the field and surveying higher education.

**Maggie Caspe:** To build on what Reyna was saying, NAFSCE had been working with states on their family and community engagement frameworks for several years. Simultaneously NAFSCE was also doing webinars and training for the field. And these big questions kept coming up in the field: What do family-facing professionals really need to know and be able to do to engage families meaningfully and equitably? What might a scope and a sequence of training look like for educators? If we have in our statewide frameworks a mandate to better prepare educators for family and community engagement, then HOW are we going to prepare educators for this work? What does it really mean to be a family-facing professional?

We did some looking around and this isn't a new question, but what we found was that a lot of the ideas were siloed, there wasn't just one place that the family engagement field could go for such information. There were a bunch of standards. You have the NPTA standards<sup>3</sup>, you have the Head Start relationship-based competencies<sup>4</sup>, which are all really great, but they are really calling on family and community engagement professionals who work within particular disciplines and domains at particular periods of time. What we wanted to do when developing the Family Engagement Core Competencies was to distill these ideas at an even higher level. We don't want to supplant any of those standards that are already out there, but rather we were trying to harness and unify them to have an agreed upon set of competencies that those in the field of family and community engagement do and aspire to.

**Reyna Hernandez:** There was already work out there, for example the Dual Capacity Framework<sup>5</sup> that said we need to build capacity, but then what is that capacity? What does it look like? When you looked at the states, they were all over the place, some of them didn't even mention relationships which of course is a very foundational concept. It was sort of a hodgepodge of ideas. There's also another body of research that we had done in partnership with The Frameworks Institute (a non-profit think tank) to really look at how people understand family and community engagement. It resulted in a report called Reframing the Conversation<sup>6</sup>, and one of the findings was that, in general, people tend to think that practitioners engage families if they care and if they don't engage families, it must mean they don't care. There's a similar idea that families will show up if they care, and families

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<sup>3</sup> National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Retrieved on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from <https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/family-school-partnerships>

<sup>4</sup> Head Start: Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (2022). Relationship Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement. Retrieved on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement>

<sup>5</sup> Mapp, K.L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2) Retrieved from [www.dualcapacity.org](http://www.dualcapacity.org).

<sup>6</sup> Pineau, M.G., L'Hôte, E., Davis, C. & Volmert, A. (2019). Beyond caring: Mapping the gaps between expert, public, practitioner, and policy maker understandings of family, school and community engagement. Washington, DC: Frameworks Institute. Retrieved from <https://famengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NAFSCE-Map-the-Gaps-Final-Ju.pdf>

will not show up if they don't care. And so we know that we need to move beyond that type of thinking and we need to build out an understanding not only in the family and community engagement field, but across education, across other spaces, to build an understanding that there are competencies, that there are knowledge, skills, dispositions involved in this work, and that it goes beyond simply caring. Of course, caring is important, but we can be proactive in helping prepare people to do this work.

**Érica Fernández:** And I think that's a really good transition to our next question, which is centered around equity. I think we've heard a lot about the obstacles, the barriers, these tensions that exist when we're thinking about family, community and school engagement, and how important it is to create bridges to authentic partnership and sharing power. As we're considering the larger dynamics of the domains and competencies, we're curious to know how NAFSCE thinks about the concept of equity. What does equity mean and look like, particularly within family and community engagement space?

**Maggie Caspe:** This is a question we think about a lot at NAFSCE. One of the things we talk about and that comes up in our reports is how family and community engagement itself is a matter of equity, because we know from the research that family and community engagement bears its greatest impact on those who are most underserved. From this perspective, equity IS family and community engagement, because it's working to reduce those disparities that exist in educational opportunities. So that's one take on it, but a second way we think about equity is that family engagement, as we just described, is about creating systems, conditions and policies that open access to families who have been most marginalized and underserved in our society. We know that there are norms, systems, policies and structures out there that advantage some and disadvantage others. If we start from a deep understanding of this historical marginalization and systemic exclusion, it requires that we create policies and conditions that open up opportunities for families and children to be, as Barton writes about, "a rightful presence"<sup>7</sup>. And I think our work in preparing educators for family and community engagement is one part of this, of creating these systems that change the structures that are out there. I think a third way that we're thinking about equity and family and community engagement is something that one of our team members, Eugenio Longoria Sáenz, talks about how equity is thinking and being conscious of people and places. This moves us away from equity being talked about as a zero-sum game, who has the power and who doesn't, and instead moves us toward a view of equity that is really bound up in the Core Competencies to reflect, connect, collaborate, and lead.

When we talk about *reflect*, we're talking about family-facing professionals who are constantly examining, respecting and valuing the cultural and linguistic diversity of families and communities and honoring this with families. Reflecting means looking inward to develop cultural humility and cognitive flexibility and perspective taking skills as well as reflecting on how history and social contexts impact systems, and influence family and community engagement. I think this is all a big part of equity and family and community engagement. We also talk about what family-facing professionals do as they *connect*. They connect and build trusting relationships with families, and they leverage the resources in a wider community to promote intergenerational family wellbeing, which is a big part of equity. What we mean by *collaborate* is that we're moving away from school-centric visions of what family and community engagement is, and I know that this is something that Ann Ishimaru's work points to.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Calabrese Barton, A., & Tan, E. (2020). Beyond equity as inclusion: A framework of "rightful presence" for guiding justice-oriented studies in teaching and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 49(6), 433-440.

<sup>8</sup> Ishimaru, A. M. (2022). Possible futures: Youth, families, and communities as educational leaders. *Kappan Online*. Retrieved from <https://kappanonline.org/possible-futures-youth-families-communities-leaders-ishimaru/>



We're trying to move away from this notion of “doing to and for families” towards thinking about how we are making the funds of knowledge that exist within families and communities visible to the education community. Even more, how we harness those funds of knowledge and create more equitable collaborations that promote curriculum, programs, services, that are not just the school telling families and communities what to do, but are co-constructed and focused on doing together and with. The last domain in the Core Competencies is to *lead* alongside families. This is such an essential element of family and community engagement, because what it means is we're creating places for families and family facing professionals to lead together.

NAFSCE has a parent Parent and Family Leaders Council, that's composed of a number of family leaders, and one leader told her story for our upcoming monograph about how parents in her community witnessed an injustice and went to the principal. And the principal listened, the principal reflected and said, "Let's make this change, but I can't do it alone, let's do it together, let's lead and make this policy change together". And they did. I think all of these elements are all interrelated when we think about equity.

**Érica Fernández:** I think it's really helpful to get a sense of how the domains and competencies are really centering families and community members, and really disrupting these traditional power dynamics that we see in schools, especially within family and community engagement and partnerships. And to your point, it's not really authentic engagement if we're not creating and establishing partnerships that work with and alongside families and community members. I think this is connected to the next question. Can you please tell us more about the *process* that resulted in the creation of these domains and competencies? We have already heard a little about the process, but we are curious if you'd want to share more about the inclusion of diverse voices of parents and families, were they a part of helping to construct these domains and competencies and if so, to what extent?

**Maggie Caspe:** They were actually a huge part. We developed these competencies through a six-phase process. In the first phase we convened a committee of family engagement experts and this included parent leaders, family liaisons, district and state leaders, research and community partners. And I think it is important to know that they were with us every step of the way in the development of the competencies, so this wasn't like we met in February of 2019 and then we said, “see you later”! This group was a constant partner throughout the creation of the document. In phase two and three, we did a lot of synthesizing from the themes and ideas that were emerging in conversations with this committee. And we conducted an extensive literature review, to make sure that everything that we were thinking about was grounded in an evidence base. In phase four, we actually did a comprehensive crosswalk of the national standards of 15 major national organizations, and this exists in the appendices in the Core Competencies, because we wanted to understand how other organizations are positioning, family engagement, knowledge, skills and dispositions. In the fifth phase, we conducted focus groups and individual interviews with over 60 community-focused members. We talked with educators, we talked with district leaders, we talked with librarians, after-school staff, more parent leaders, to say “this is how we're thinking about the Core Competencies, how do they sound to you?” We made a lot of changes based on the feedback that we heard. And then the last phase in our process was a national survey of over 600 family-facing professionals. And again, that included parent leaders, family liaisons, state leaders, Title I Coordinators, district staff, faculty, you name it, who were giving feedback like, "I feel really prepared on this competency, but I don't feel so prepared on this one. This is where I'd like more training, this one is really important if I could only focus on one." That gives an overview of the six-phase process, but just to emphasize, we never want this document to come across

as "NAFSCE says do this"! NAFSCE is about partnerships and bringing partners together so we see this as a document for the field, by the field and we are really proud of that.

**Reyna Hernandez:** As Maggie mentioned earlier, NAFSCE has a Parent and Family Leaders Council - what we call the PFLC - that is a standing committee for our board of directors. Over time we've now moved to having three members of the Parent and Family Leaders Council on our board of directors, so they are sitting board members, and they serve as a direct connection between the PFLC and that big picture part of our work. These are individuals who are primarily at the table as parent leaders, typically involved in parent leadership organizations, from local organizations to groups like the United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN) and the National PTA, so they are really representative of different types of parent leadership from different parts of the country. They are regularly engaged in everything that we do at NAFSCE. We have a range of other projects that we're working on, including a book that we're editing, and the PFLC authored one of those chapters, so they've been involved in so many different ways. It's something that for us is so important because it's a real way of trying to connect to what's happening on the ground and make sure that these voices are then elevated up.

**Michael Evans:** Our next question is centered on potential applications of the Core Competencies. I am personally involved in teacher preparation for family engagement and my work has certainly changed over the past four years, because the climate around public education and that nexus of families and communities has changed. John Rogers and some colleagues at UCLA have just released a report that principals are reporting higher levels of tension than have ever existed before.<sup>9</sup> Public schools are increasingly becoming a contentious space. We have Governor DeSantis seeking to not allow AP African-American History to be taught in Florida schools.<sup>10</sup> So how do you imagine that these Core Competencies or these domains might help inform educators who are trying to navigate these increasingly contentious spaces in public education?

**Reyna Hernandez:** I think everyone has been impacted by those shifts and feeling the climate change over time. While we were developing the Framework George Floyd was murdered and our Consortium felt strongly that we needed to respond. We wrote a blog around the role that ed prep has to play in the movement for racial and social justice.<sup>11</sup> You can't be exclusive in education. All the work that we're doing is really rooted in equity and inclusion.

When you look at the Family Engagement Core Competencies themselves, in a lot of ways they take our position for us in terms of what family and community engagement looks like. It is not one side that gets to choose, whether its parents win, or teachers win, or whose voice is most important; they are all important. As this wedge is being driven, we're saying in the third competency, that there has to be reciprocity and balance in relationships. In the second competency, we say that family-facing professionals must reflect on how history and social context influence family engagement systems and practices. That is essential professional practice, NOT optional. When we talk about co-construction,

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers, J. & Kahne, J. with Ishimoto, M., Kwako, A., Stern, S.C., Bingener, C., Raphael, L., Alkam, S., & Conde, Y. (2022). *Educating for a Diverse Democracy: The Chilling Role of Political Conflict in Blue, Purple, and Red Communities*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. Retrieved from <https://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/educating-for-a-diverse-democracy/>

<sup>10</sup> Natanson, H. (2023, February 20). As red states target Black history lessons, blue states embrace them. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/02/13/black-history-red-states-blue-states-teaching-lessons/>

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://nafsce.org/page/drivingbeliefs>



it is with the idea that people are reflecting on family, reflecting background, reflecting pedagogy, so we talk a lot about culturally responsive practice. This is how you start to create relevant education that people feel has some connection to the lives that they're living.

I think that the debates that are happening right now, they don't leave space open for us to create culturally relevant education that has connection to the lives that people are living because they speak to the preferences of what end up being only a handful of parental voices. We are *not* saying some parent voices matter and others don't. We are saying we have to recognize as professionals and practitioners that there's been an imbalance and it is our role and our duty to address this. We speak in one of the competencies that professionals have to champion equity as an essential element of family and community engagement, and stand with families for equitable educational systems and outcomes. What that means for us is that you may not agree with what families are saying, but part of our role is to open up spaces so that we can bring voices that may not feel welcome to the table, may not already be showing up, and create a more balanced dialogue and then use these other skills when not everyone agrees.

Vito Borrello, the Executive Director of NAFSCE always says this is hard work where people will disagree, but we have to get to the place of critical dialogue. So for NAFSCE, it's built into the practice of the competencies and as an association we felt we needed to take a stand and be clear on this. We put together a statement called "Healing the Growing Divide"<sup>12</sup>, and it essentially speaks very directly to what we see as being this growing divisiveness between families, educators, community members, history, context, and we've had about 24 organizations that have signed on to that statement, and we're trying to think of ways that we can then advance this perspective. When it's parents against teachers the kids lose. We really need to be coming together differently and we need to be inclusive, especially in public education, which is for everyone.

**Michael Evans:** How do you hope that these domains and competencies are going to shift the relationship or reshape the relationship between families and educators? We were hoping that you could speak specifically to the potential that you see for transformation of the relationship with BIPOC families and communities.

**Reyna Hernandez:** I think everything that we've talked about so far speaks to a massive shift in dynamic, which I think will very directly impact these relationships. In some of the Family Engagement Core Competencies we speak directly to historically marginalized communities, recognizing it's not anything that's implicit within particular groups of families, it's the way systems and history have brought us to this place. The question becomes, how do we adjust our practices? And how do we recognize this and adjust those systems because some of them may be exclusive by design and we need to remedy that.

In one of the early meetings when we were developing the Core Competencies we couldn't help but think about that social justice cry of "nothing about us without us." This really needs to be a project that we do together. To think about education in partnership and in collaboration with diverse communities. And that means that because some of these communities have been historically

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<sup>12</sup> See NAFSCE's Statement on Healing the Growing Divide through Equitable Family, School and Community Partnerships. Released on August 29th, 2022.

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/HGD\\_Statement\\_of\\_Support.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/HGD_Statement_of_Support.pdf)

marginalized, you're talking about a massive shift in the dynamics. Our vision is about universal family engagement, but in order for that to happen we know we have to have a laser-like focus on BIPOC families, on low-income families, on non-English dominant families who have been foreclosed from being able to access some of these systems in a very different way. We have a universal vision, but how we get there requires intentionality.

**Maggie Caspe:** Here is a very specific example. Just last week I was participating in a Friday Cafe, which is a group of family-facing professionals, who come together each month to talk about dilemmas of practice and share ideas and resources.<sup>13</sup> One of the themes that came up in this meeting was that as family-facing professionals, whether we are in libraries, after-school programs, or schools, we are often building programs and we're hoping people come! But what happens when you build a program or event and people don't come?! It's frustrating, but what emerged was a conversation about how we might use the Core Competencies to transform those feelings that emerge. That feeling of, "I spent so much time and only one person came, so I'm a terrible family-facing professional", or that even worse feeling of, "families didn't come so they don't care!" How can we develop our practice so that we use these pressure points as an opportunity to step back and reflect on a variety of questions, "How did I plan this event? Who was in the room with me? Who did I connect with about it? Was there an attempt to achieve consensus and collaboration? How did we co-create?"

That's the hardest part. From our survey, we found that these ideas surrounding co-creation are sometimes the hardest to implement, but we need to keep asking ourselves who was at the planning table, who was leading it? My hope is that the Core Competencies become a habit of mind through which we can constantly reflect on whether or not our family and community engagement practices are equitable and when we encounter dilemmas or when we encounter problems, we can reflect on questions like, how am I connecting or how am I collaborating? How am I leading *alongside* families? And maybe that will help to transform relationships among families, schools, and communities.

**Érica Fernández:** I think one of the things that keeps coming up is this idea of transformation. I often challenge folks to try to reimagine systems and structures, and that in and of itself can be an act of resistance and liberation. I'm curious from your work on this Framework, what would need to be reimaged within teacher preparation programs or other systems and structures for these humanizing and authentic relationships to exist between schools, families and communities?

**Reyna Hernandez:** We've been spending a lot of time thinking about what sort of changes are needed. Reimagining is actually one of the levers that we talk about as a major lever for change. Doing this work does require that high level reimagining and I think that that's one of the places where we start by saying, if we are going to reimagine teacher preparation, let's start with who is the "we"? Who should be part of that? Are we talking about a faculty meeting? Are we talking about the department head? Is it the Dean's vision that we need to be more focused on family engagement, so get it done?

From our perspective, we're really talking about a collective "we". Within the Framework, the "we" that is reimaged includes educator preparation programs and leaders, education faculty, it includes state agencies, regulators, and accreditors too. The "we" includes school partners, community-based partners, and those representing not only future employers of educators, but also potential authentic spaces where educators can have experiences as they're learning to engage with families and to engage

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<sup>13</sup> To learn more about the Friday Café you can visit their website at: <https://fridaycafe.org/about-friday-cafe/>

in community. And then families themselves, really thinking about what are different ways we can reimagine the role that families might play? When you look at the recommendations, how can we reimagine coursework in higher ed? First of all, let's make sure there is coursework! Because less than half of programs even offer a course! We're in this position where you're just talking about a single offering and it's usually not required. But this goes beyond having a course, what does this content look like when it's integrated throughout the curriculum? What could coursework look like when families' voices are a part of that, for example through a family as faculty model?

What does it look like when coursework is connected to the field experience? How can we reimagine field experiences in different ways, including thinking that education is not limited to school day hours. Could field experiences involve service learning? Could it involve a placement at a local community-based organization that has a different perspective? Could it involve mentoring from community ambassadors or cultural ambassadors? Could it involve workshops that are being offered by the library, or by a parent leadership group, or by someone else? There are just so many different ways that those field experiences can be more authentic, and this work can be embedded in educator prep. Just going to a community fair or a wellness fair is an experience that helps you understand the community where you might be placed in a very different way.

At the same time, we should emphasize that there IS work being done to reimagine educator preparation, and we included nearly 30 case studies in the Framework report to highlight this. For example, one of the programs that was part of our collaboration had a community advisory group that helped guide their program. That's pretty rare, but community voices can be a regular, structural, ongoing part of the shaping of educator preparation. We also know that there's a lot that can be done and that needs to be done at the various policy levels. Federally there are a lot of ways that different funds can be used to advance equity and address family and community engagement, but sometimes those programs are not explicit. We could strengthen how we talk about these things. At the state level, requirements for accreditation of educator preparation could be more explicit. Every state has some level of requirements for their prep programs, teaching standards, and admissions standards, right? All of these different spaces are places where there could be some embedding of these competencies, but it has to be done intentionally.

**Érica Fernández:** To wrap up our conversation, can you share with us what's next for NAFSCE when we're thinking about the implementation or the evaluation and refinement of these competencies and domains?

**Maggie Caspe:** One thing that we're really hoping for is a national credential for the field. I know that a lot of this conversation has focused on educator preparation, but there are many family-facing professionals who are constantly asking for more opportunities to grow and hone their skills. NAFSCE is committed to putting together a credential that would be based on these Core Competencies. We're also working with states like Maryland and Ohio, to really use these Core Competencies to develop rubrics and some small professional learning communities.

One thing that we've learned, with regard to your question about refinement, is that we've heard time and time again that although we talk about reflect, connect, collaborate and lead as these distinct domains and constructs, we know that, in fact, they are very much overlapping and interconnected.

Sometimes we can get into the weeds, for example, we'll have discussions about whether a situation or practice is best categorized as reflect, connect, collaborate, or lead? But really, they're all together.

For instructional and pedagogical purposes, it is helpful to disaggregate them because it helps give us something to latch on to cognitively as we try to think through dilemmas and what we're trying to do. But in truth, when we see a masterful, well prepared, family-facing professional, we're going to see them seamlessly weave the practice of reflecting, connecting, collaborating, and leading together. This is what we're aspiring to. As we refine this work we are definitely thinking more about these competencies, both independently and also in a more integrated way.

**Reyna Hernandez:** We also want to develop more training, not only by us, but by partners and others who can use the Core Competencies and be really intentional. Our partners, AACTE, NEA, CAEP, and MAEC, are all very interested in supporting the field, which they work very closely with, whether it's through creating learning groups or perhaps online training modules and toolkits. We're really exploring different ways right now of partnering with them to support higher education.

**Michael Evans:** I do like this idea of trying to reach a broader audience. I can imagine school board members, local PTA presidents, and other people who maybe don't have an official family-facing job, but who still play a significant role in terms of making connections with the community, using these competencies as a way to reflect on their engagement with their constituencies. Are they really reaching out and connecting with ALL the families that are in their district? It's great to hear that you're thinking about this more broadly than just teachers or principals. Maggie and Reyna, thank you so much for sharing your work with the readers of the JFDE. We are really grateful for your time!