Caregivers—including parents and grandparents—are vital to children’s learning and development. They’re often the first teachers in a child’s life. Research shows that students with caregivers who are involved in their schools are more likely to do well socially and perform better academically. In turn, communities thrive when children receive a quality education that is relevant to their culture and home life.

Family engagement in many schools advances though opportunities to volunteer, coordinate events, and attend meetings. But this arrangement creates meaningful disparities. Working-class and poor families—especially families of color—are routinely thwarted by inflexible work schedules, limited transportation and other resources, language differences and other barriers.

As the country becomes more diverse, schools that successfully engage all families will transform learning. That’s why the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) set out to support and create environments where teachers, families and community members share responsibility for student success.

**BRIDGING CULTURAL DIVIDES**

From 2014 to 2017, WKKF funded 30 projects in 17 states and tribal nations, as well as the District of Columbia, intentionally reaching acutely underserved communities in their Family Engagement initiatives. The goal was to inspire innovation and leadership among organizations, school administrators, teachers, civic leaders and policymakers to make positive changes in children’s lives.

Family Engagement prioritizes healthy relationships between families and teachers with a focus on student learning. When families are successfully engaged in their child’s education, they become culture-bearers, helping schools restore broken trust and evolve into places that families see as extensions of their homes.

**INCREASING ENGAGEMENT ACROSS AMERICA**

Each of the 30 projects found creative ways to build system capacity in schools by addressing power dynamics, involving caregivers as experts for their children and communicating openly with families. They also developed family leadership by incorporating caregivers’ feedback into decision-making and being more transparent about students’ rights.

“I’m not afraid to fight for my own rights, for my children’s rights, my family and for
those of my community,” said one parent with OneAmerica, the largest immigrant and refugee advocacy organization in Washington state.

Examples of projects include:

- **Tulsa, Oklahoma.** The Power of Families ran a summer camp designed to serve as a trial run for students entering pre-k and kindergarten, which helped to ease separation anxiety during this transition and welcomed parents into their children’s learning environment.

- **Clarkston, Georgia.** At least 60 languages are spoken in this community, a site for refugee settlement since the 1990s. The Indian Creek Community School Garden provided a space for families to plant produce from their home countries and share experiences with their children.

- **Miami Beach, Florida.** A contemporary art museum—which was challenging for some families to access—conducted a six-week outreach program in underserved communities where adults and children read, painted and learned about art in their native languages.

- **San Antonio, Texas.** The Intercultural Development Research Association formed a community council where people across the city were invited to discuss early childcare and the gaps in local preschools.

- **Chicago, Illinois.** The ChiS&E program provided year-round classes in STEM to African American and Latino students from poor and working-class families, with close involvement from parents.

- **East Oakland, California.** At a school that reported consistently low reading levels, the Parent Leadership Action Network created on-site workshops to help parent volunteers improve their understanding of early literacy.

**BOOSTING STUDENT SUCCESS**

In just three years, these cohorts made impressive strides in schools and communities. The outcomes represent a range of growth in confidence and capability.

- **Children** began to advocate for themselves in the classroom—including autistic and English Language Learner students who were often the targets of bias. Students felt more connected to their family history and culture and even took new pride in their schools. They experienced increases in both literacy and social well-being.

- **Teachers** built trust with families by keeping the lines of communication open. And schools reported increases in student attendance, parent-teacher conference participation and parent volunteerism—all indicators of stronger relationships between home and school.

- **Families** became more confident as they gained new skills and knowledge. They also became more informed of school policy at local, state and federal levels. Many immigrant families even spoke openly about challenges like fear of deportation. “I actually feel as though my input was heard and will make a difference,” said one parent involved in the K’e Early Childhood Initiative in Denver, Colorado.

WKKF continues to support initiatives that see families as leaders and experts to further encourage trust building and knowledge sharing. When families, teachers and communities share a passion for improving children’s lives, the challenges they face no longer hold them back.
Increasing Family Engagement, Improving Student Outcomes

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We gave out

**30 GRANTS**

In 17 states and tribal nations, as well as Washington, D.C.

For a total of **$13.7 MILLION**

In just 3 years, programs celebrated outstanding results

** CHILDREN **

- Advocated for themselves in the classroom
- Increased literacy levels
- Improved social well-being
- Felt more connected to their culture and history

** TEACHERS **

- Built trust with families
- Incorporated families’ feedback into curriculum
- Facilitated open communication across communities
- Recorded increases in student attendance

** FAMILIES **

- Became more aware of legislative policies affecting their children’s education
- Spoke openly about challenges
- Attended more meetings and conferences with teachers
- Volunteered at more school events
Teacher & Student Demographics Demonstrate the Need for Culturally Relevant Training

Only 20% of teachers are teachers of color at a time when students of color make up the majority of K-12 classrooms. Every state has more students of color than teachers of color—and over 40% of public schools have no teachers of color.

Demographic trends point to an increasingly diverse student population. By 2024:

- The white student population is projected to decrease by 5%.
- The black student population is projected to decrease by 1%.
- The proportion of Hispanic students is projected to increase by 5%.
- The proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander students is projected to increase by 1%.

Source: The U.S. Department of Education