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# PROJECT NARRATIVE

## INTRODUCTION

The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) submits this response to the U.S. Department of Education's call for applications for new grants under the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) Program. Through this response, CREC proposes the implementation of Connecticut's Family-School Partnerships, A Network for Education *Plus* (CFSP+).

CFSP+ will leverage the work of CREC's existing CFSP program, funded through an SFEC grant that was awarded in 2018. That CFSP program was driven by contemporary work that was happening in the state related to family engagement. Earlier in 2018, the Connecticut State Department of Education, working with a wide range of stakeholders, produced a common definition, framework, and set of guiding principles for advancing state and local family engagement efforts. The 2018 SFEC grant cycle afforded an ideal opportunity to advance that work.

CFSP+ will expand on the successes of the 2018 grant. Its goals are to (1) employ a new regionalized approach to service delivery in order to (2) build capacity among targeted high-need districts and schools to engage in high-impact family engagement and (3) deliver evidence-based professional development to support that capacity building. The regional approach expands the reach of CFSP+ to build capacity among targeted high-needs districts and schools, create leadership opportunities for parents, and connect with community agencies.

## COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITIES

This proposal will address each of the four Competitive Preference Priorities outlined in the application notice for the SFEC Program. A summary of the CFSP+ approach to each priority follows, and each priority will be parenthetically referenced throughout the proposal.

- **Competitive Preference Priority 1 (CPP1):** The models that inform the CFSP+ conceptual framework are evidence-based, as are the main programs that are included in service delivery. Examples of the evidence base are cited throughout the proposal. The Evidence Form is attached as required.
- **Competitive Preference Priority 2 (CPP2):** CFSP+ will address the impact of COVID-19 on students, educators, and faculty by directing appropriate services (such as the LEAP program) to schools and students, especially those in Connecticut's Alliance Districts (the state's lowest-performing schools).
- **Competitive Preference Priority 3 (CPP3):** CFSP+ will promote equity in student access to educational resources by targeting Connecticut's Alliance Districts, by providing training to empower stakeholders from all backgrounds, and by partnering with organizations that prioritize equity.
- **Competitive Preference Priority 4 (CPP4):** CFSP+ will strengthen cross-agency coordination and community engagement to advance systemic change by adopting a regional approach that invites coordination and collaboration among Connecticut's state agencies, regional educational service centers, and community-based organizations in multiple aspects of program delivery, from the delivery of trainings

to the management of the program through participation in the Advisory Board or other governing bodies.

## **A. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN**

### **(1) Conceptual Framework**

Decades of research point to the benefits of family engagement on students' social emotional and academic achievement (School Community Journal, 2012, Vol. 22, No 1). Greater family engagement is associated with improved social skills, and behavior, decreased drug use and decreased violence and antisocial behavior. The benefits are true regardless of a student's socioeconomic status, ethnic, racial background or parents' educational level (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Understanding these profound impacts of family engagement, CFSP+ is designed from the ground up to empower stakeholders at all levels to support efforts to engage families throughout Connecticut. See Attachment 1 for the research that has informed the CFSP+ proposal.

CFSP+ is informed by two frameworks: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement (CT Framework) and the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, Version 2 (DCBF2).

**Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement (The CT Framework):**  
In 2018, the Connecticut State Department of Education published a new vision for family engagement. Titled *Full and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement*, the document (Attachment 2) was produced in collaboration with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, the Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative, and parents, educators, and communities throughout Connecticut.

The stakeholders established the following shared definition for family engagement:  
*“Family engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development from birth through college and career.”*

The framework goes on to outline seven guiding principles: (1) build collaborative, trusting relationships focused on learning; (2) listen to what families say about their children’s interests and challenges; (3) model high-quality learning practices; (4) communicate about how children are doing in school; (5) talk with students about how they want teachers and families to support their learning; (6) co-develop cultural competence among staff and families; and (7) support parents to become effective leaders and advocates for children.

**Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, Version 2 (DCBF2):**  
In 2013, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, in association with the U.S. Department of Education, published *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*. Created by Dr. Karen Mapp, with support from Paul Kuttner (2013), the Dual Capacity-Building Framework was informed by decades of research (**CPPI**) indicating that strong family-school partnerships can significantly improve learning and long-term educational outcomes for students.

Mapp (2019) subsequently released an updated version (Version 2), offering research-based guidance to cultivate and sustain partnerships. DCBF2 articulates a continuum that traces the framework’s evolution from the challenges that inspired its creation through the essential conditions that the approach demands to be successful and then the policy and program goals that will ultimately result in the desired capacity outcomes. For this proposal, the essential conditions merit further review. For the DCBF2 to be successful the process and organizational

conditions in which it operates must be: (1) relational: built on mutual trust; (2) linked to learning and development; (3) asset-based; (4) culturally responsive and respectful; (5) collaborative; (6) interactive; (7) systemic, meaning embraced by leadership across the organization; (8) integrated, meaning embedded in all strategies; and (8) sustained, meaning with sufficient resources and infrastructure.

CFSP+ was born of the juxtaposition of the CT Framework and the DCBF2. Looking at the objectives of CFSP+, it is clear to see how they were influenced and informed by the guiding principles of the CT Frameworks and the essential conditions of the DCBF2. The objectives of CFSP+ are:

1. Implement a regional approach (**CPP4**) to reinforce the Dual Capacity Framework and Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement.
2. Build the capacity of the SEA, schools, districts, community organizations and state agencies to understand and use evidence-based family engagement practices (**CPP1**).
3. Train families to understand school practices, district policy and state education (**CPP3**) policy as it relates to their children's education.
4. Train families to become leaders in their schools, districts, state, and federal level to advocate for practices and policies that support high quality public education for all (**CPP3**).
5. Establish cross-agency partnerships representative of state, local and community stakeholders (**CPP4**).

## **(2) Services to be provided**

CFSP leadership considered multiple models and programs to ensure CFSP+ achieves the above objectives. Chief among the models selected, and the one that will provide a context for all other service delivery, is the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS).

## **National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS):**

Established at Johns Hopkins University in 1996 and based on over thirty years of research, NNPS invites schools, districts, states, and organizations to join together and use research-based approaches to organize and sustain excellent programs (**CPP1**) of family and community involvement that will increase student success in school. The NNPS Model is based on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which holds that students succeed when their families, school, and the community have shared goals and responsibilities for learning and development.

The NNPS Model was selected both because of its strong evidence base and because of its tiered approach to service delivery. NNPS organizes its model along different levels: schools, districts, state departments of education, and organizations. Operators at each level receive support, guidance, and resources that help create a systemic and responsive approach to family engagement.

- **Organizational State Model:** NNPS guides organizations that assist districts and schools with their work on partnerships. The NNPS approaches help improve knowledge, skills, policies, and plans for more effective family and community involvement. NNPS supports organizations and university leaders by providing professional development and on-going technical assistance to help organize work on partnerships and to improve the programs of the districts and schools assisted by special projects.
- **District Model:** NNPS supports district leaders for partnerships by providing professional development and on-going technical assistance to help them organize

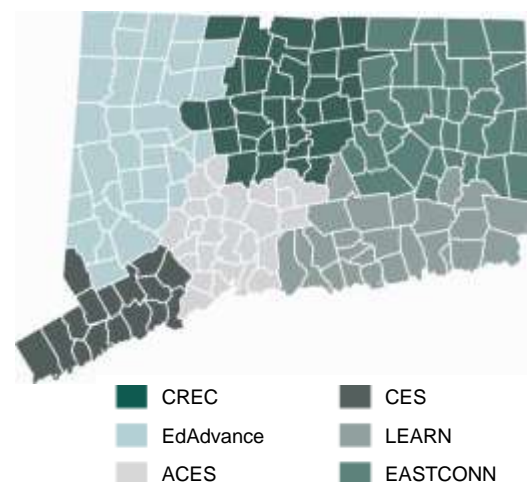
their work, improve policies, and increase the quality of partnership programs at the district level and in all schools. NNPS approaches enable districts and their schools to meet the requirements for family involvement under ESEA/ESSA.

- **School Model:** NNPS helps preschools, elementary, middle, and high schools organize research-based and goal-oriented programs of school, family, and community partnerships. To ensure that family engagement is no longer left to chance or to one parent or educator, a program of family and community involvement must be planned and implemented by an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) – a committee of educators, parents, and community partners who work together (**CPP3**) to engage all families and the community in productive ways. Each school tailors its annual partnership plans and activities to meet its learning goals for students and to meet the needs and interests of its students, parents, and teachers.

To understand the value and relevance of this approach to CFSP+, it is important to understand Connecticut’s established regional structure. CREC is the largest of Connecticut’s six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). Established under Connecticut General Statute 10-66 a-n, Connecticut’s RESCs are intermediate-sized entities that are smaller than the state department of education yet larger than local school districts. They were created to support the instructional and operational components of Connecticut school districts. All six RESCs are part of the RESC Alliance.

CFSP+ plans to leverage Connecticut’s system of RESCs to support its service delivery. By creating a

**Image 1: Map of CT RESCs**

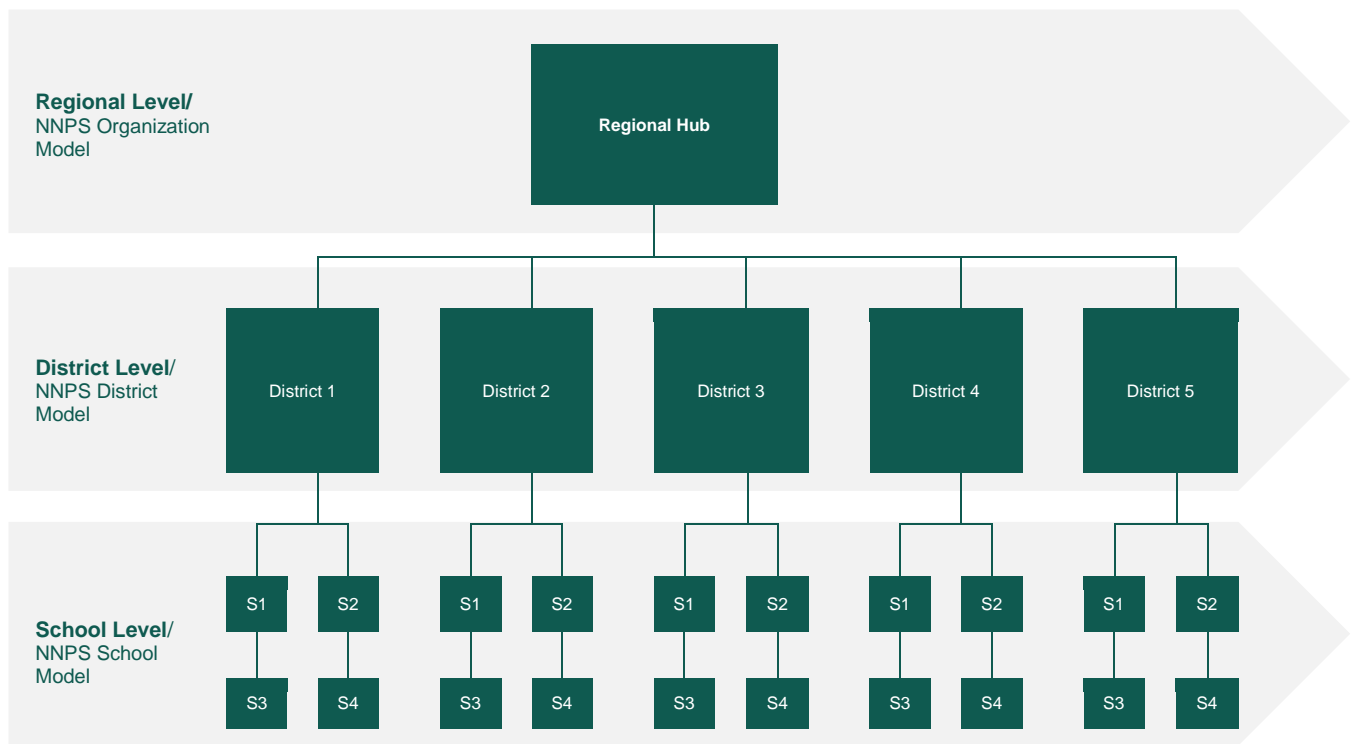




minimum of five regional hubs, each based out of one of Connecticut’s RESCs. Each participating regional hub will identify five (5) districts to be part of CFSP+. Each district will, in turn, identify four (4) schools to participate. The regional training, support and capacity building will result in twenty-five (25) school districts, one-hundred (100) school action teams and over five-hundred (500) parents, educators and community partners committed to innovative family engagement partnerships. In years four and five, five (5) additional school districts will be added to the cohort with the expectation that each district will identify two (2) schools, meaning an additional ten (10) schools will be served.

With this approach in mind, the value of NNPS’ tiered approach comes into focus. Each of NNPS’s tiers corresponds to a level of service delivery for CFSP+, as illustrated in the image below:

**Image 2: Intersection of CT Regionalization and NNPS Tiered Approach**



Each regional hub will become a member of NNPS at the Organization Level; each district that participates will become a member of NNPS at the District Level; and each school that participates will become a member of NNPS at the School Level.

All entities will receive the support, training, and resources that come with NNPS membership. Each district will enter into a MOU (a sample MOU is included as Attachment 3) and identify a District Facilitator in accordance with the NNPS model. Also in accordance with the NNPS model, each school will develop an Action Team for Partnerships. The NNPS *Handbook for Action* contains directions, outlines, inventories, planning forms, and evaluation tools for conducting the NNPS approach. The District Facilitators and School Action Teams will use these tools to assess family engagement practices at their schools and create individualized action plans that will be linked to school improvement plans.

This structure will make sure that personnel are available at every level to advocate for family engagement trainings and practices, to recruit participants in trainings, and to ensure that the content of trainings is integrated into practice at every level. Moreover, this approach will assure no single individual, school, or district works in isolation. Individuals will be supported by schools, schools will be supported by districts, districts will be supported by regional hubs, and regional hubs will be supported by the CFSP+ Team and each other.

With this regional approach, CFSP+ will have the partners, structure, and resources in place to address its capacity building work and its delivery of professional development.

A note about participating districts and schools—CFSP+ will target Connecticut’s Alliance Districts. These districts are the state’s lowest-performing based on the Accountability Index. In total, the Alliance Districts serve over 200,000 students and over 410 schools. By targeting these districts, CFSP+ will be sure to reach the state’s most underserved children and families,

including those that are racially and linguistically diverse, have children with special needs, and are from low-income communities. This approach will help ensure the program is equitable in design (**CPP3**).

It will also help address the impact of COVID-19 (**CPP4**). The report, “Education a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on American Students” by Susanne B. Goldberg, Acting Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education states, “the many ways that COVID-19, with all of its tragic impacts on individuals, families and communities, appears to be deepening divides in educational opportunities across our nation’s classrooms and campuses. We know from early studies that for many students, the educational gaps that existed before the pandemic are widening. And we see that these impacts on falling disproportionately on students who went into the pandemic with the greatest educational needs and the fewest opportunities- many of them from marginalized and underserved groups.” By providing services to Alliance Districts, CFSP+ will address the disproportional effect COVID-19 has had on those children and families who were already struggling.

### **Evidence-based Training**

With the NNPS model providing structure, CFSP+ plans to share evidenced-based and effective family engagement approaches throughout the state including (1) home visitation programs, (2) welcoming schools, (3) family engagement planning, and (4) parent leadership training.

#### *(1) Home Visitation:*

Research indicates that home visitation programs can engage families and result in positive student outcomes (e.g., McKie, Terziev & Gill, 2021; Sheldon & Jung, 2015). CFSP

will provide training and support in models such as the two listed below, and/or will partner with other entities doing so.

*Parent Teacher Home Visiting (PTHV):* PTHV is an evidenced-based program **(CPP1)** that focuses on improving family-school relationships which has been proven to successfully lead to measurable benefits for all stakeholders: students, teachers and the school. According to the research, when schools implement the PTHV model students do better in school, teachers change their thinking about students, and families change their thinking about school (McKnight et al., 2017).

While the PTHV model is adapted in a wide variety of settings across the US, all settings follow the following five non-negotiable core practices: (1) visits are always voluntary for educators and families and arranged in advance; (2) teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day; (3) focus of the first visit is on relationship-building and discussion of hopes and dreams; (4) there is no targeting – practitioners visit all or a cross-section of students so there is no stigma; (5) educators conduct visits in pairs, and after the visit, reflect with their partners.

Research from teachers and parents found that PTHV helps to interrupt implicit biases **(CPP3)** that educators and families have about each other. These mindset shifts operate in ways that improve partnerships between educators and families, addressing a key concern raised by the Dual Capacity-Building Framework.

*Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP):* To address significantly declined school attendance and high rates of chronic absenteeism due to COVID-19 **(CPP2)**, Connecticut has directed funding towards the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) in the 15 Connecticut school districts with the greatest need. This home visitation program is

supported by the state’s six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs), with CREC as the lead RESC. Each RESC coordinates directly with the districts and local organizations (such as Youth Service Bureaus, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.) in their region (**CPP4**). Together, these organizations expand their capacity to address specific student needs, including troubleshooting problems with new broadband services; providing additional academic supports, like tutoring; and connecting students with critical social service needs (e.g., food security, behavioral and mental health care, etc.).

Extensive primary research—including surveys of Connecticut families and school leaders — highlighted the need for “people power” to go door to door and provide direct support to students and families with low rates of attendance and/or low engagement with remote learning during the 2020-21 school year. RESCs expand personnel capacity within existing, on-the-ground community organizations, many of which are already providing the necessary support for these absent and disengaged students. Components of the program include:

- Coordinate with identified school districts to conduct asset mapping of programs, resources, and initiatives.
- Identify and engage community partners.
- Develop student engagement plans for school year 2021, bridging summer 2021, and reopening and sustaining student engagement for school year 2022.
- Design or expand existing home visiting programs to ensure consistent training and appropriate protocols for conducting home visits across identified districts.
- Work collaboratively with the CSDE and state and national partners identified by the CSDE for training and technical assistance, implementation of best practices and continuity across LEAP program implementation.

LEAP was developed in consultation with Attendance Works, national experts on chronic absenteeism. Attendance Works' expertise and deep knowledge of research in the area of attendance continues to inform the project, as the partnership is continuing during implementation. The Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC), a research collaborative of public and private universities across Connecticut formed to conduct evaluation studies of CSDE-funded COVID-19 related projects and other research related to COVID-19's impacts on education, will conduct a mixed methods, comprehensive evaluation of LEAP to study its effectiveness.

## *(2) Welcoming Schools*

In order to help create welcoming schools, CFSP+ will employ The CT Welcoming Schools Initiative.

*The CT Welcoming Schools Initiative:* This initiative was born out of a desire to improve family involvement in schools and afterschool programs. The Initiative aims to make parents feel welcomed, to celebrate the diversity of the school community, and set unique goals to improve how inviting the school appears to its community (**CPP3**). Robbins, C., & Searby, L. (2013) found schools that take the time to develop relationships with their families and create a welcoming environment have successfully increased parent participation (**CPP1**).

CREC is the lead agency for the Connecticut State Department of Education Partnership on Welcoming Schools. CFSP+ is working in partnership with the Regional Education Service Center/State Education Resource Center Alliance to offer the following technical and support services:

- **Developing Awareness:** This introductory 1.5 hour session provides school districts and after school programs with an overview of the principles of family engagement,

highlighting the benefits of active parent participation in the Welcoming Schools Walkthrough.

- **Building Knowledge:** This half-day workshop incorporates practice videos, hands-on group activities, and discussions. Participants leave with information and resources related to family engagement principles, training on the Welcoming Schools process and the complete Welcoming Schools manual. Participants of this training are ready to implement the CT Welcoming Schools process in their own schools.
- **Onsite Technical Assistance and Reflection:** Facilitators implementing the Welcoming Schools Initiative in their district or program for the first time may want additional, on-site support. For example, the Welcoming Schools trainer can provide report writing services summarizing all Component Team Reporting Forms and parent and staff surveys. They can provide technical support to develop an action plan to implement recommendations from the Welcoming Team, or assist in other areas identified by the school or district.

CFSP will revise the Welcoming Schools model to incorporate approaches related to COVID and a refined emphasis on equity. This revision will be a co-constructed design with family, school, district, community partners and SFEC representatives. The effectiveness of this revised version of the strategy will be studied as part of the CFSP+ program evaluation.

### *(3) Family Engagement Planning*

In order to support family engagement planning, CFSP + will employ the following two programs.

The **Guiding Partnerships with Schools (GPS) Family Engagement System** is an online hub for educators working to deepen the level of involvement of families in schools

(www.guidingpartnerships.com). Through an interactive system of self-assessments, customizable action plans, and implementation resources all aligned to a best-practice framework for family engagement, GPS assists schools in evaluating the status of family-school partnerships and developing data-driven plans for improvement.

GPS consists of 5 main components: (1) Family-School Partnership Self-Assessment; (2) Self-Assessment Results Report; (3) Status of Practices Checklists; (4) Dynamic Action Planning Tool; (5) Implementation Resource Library

The Family-School Partnership Self-Assessment is the cornerstone of the GPS tool. The assessment is an opportunity for schools to get feedback from all stakeholders (families, educators, school staff) on the quality of family-school partnerships in the school community. The questions on the self- assessment were derived from the family-school partnership framework developed by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp, and outlined in their seminal work *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. In this book, the authors describe 5 key elements of high quality family-school relationships; GPS content developers worked in partnership with Anne Henderson to revisit these concepts and re-frame them for a contemporary audience.

**Image 3: GPS Concepts Re-Framed for Contemporary Audience**

Henderson & Mapp	GPS	Description
Building Relationships	Building Trust	The extent to which positive, goal-oriented relationships exist between the school and families.
Linking to Learning	Connecting Classroom and Home	The extent to which family engagement activities improve families' understanding of curriculum, instruction, and standards and involve them in their students' learning.
Addressing Differences	Honoring Differences	Honoring Differences: The extent to which families from various cultural, linguistic, ethnic and/or socio-economic backgrounds are honored and reflected in school



		curriculum and activities.
Supporting Advocacy	Strengthening Family Voice	Strengthening Family Voice: The extent to which parents have an understanding of and a voice in the educational progress of their child and the educational opportunities for all students in the school community.
Sharing Power	Developing Family Leadership	Developing Family Leadership: The extent to which families are involved in all major decisions at the school, including improvement efforts and decisions that impact student achievement.

In collaboration with Anne Henderson, GPS developers drafted 8 items per each of 5 newly re-framed components of what makes for effective partnerships between schools and families.

*Friday Café:* Friday Café is a morning discussion and networking series for people who work at the intersection of families and learning. Its mission is to expand thinking, build connections, and develop a robust professional identity for family and community engagement staff. Borrowing a low-cost but high-impact strategy model from Creative Mornings started by artists in Brooklyn, the CSDE joined with CREC and SERC to create Friday Café, a learning community for family and community engagement professionals. An advisory group of practitioners assists with choosing topics, speakers and venues for each month. During the pandemic, Friday Café has been implemented virtually, with attendance as high as or higher than in-person sessions.

Topics have included “Trust,” “The Open-Door School” and “The Student Voice in Partnerships.” Participation is broad, not just people who work directly with families, but also educators and administrators who supervise them and want a deeper understanding of the benefits of greater family and community engagement. Friday Café has been a means of introducing schools, districts, and community partners to evidence-based strategies and laying the groundwork for deeper involvement.

#### *(4) Parent Leadership Training*

With access to high-quality leadership professional development and training opportunities, parents become powerful advocates for children and the family unit becomes a vital constituency for student and school improvement. The Parent Leadership Indicators Project housed at NYU Metro Center demonstrated that high quality parent leadership initiatives start a “Ripple Effect”, where parents experience personal transformation, engage in collective action, and become valued advisors to public officials, school systems and other families.

Research on parent leadership suggests that parent leaders become role models for engagement for their children but for other children as well. Often, this effect has led to parents increasing their skills and their confidence regarding their involvement in schools. Some parents have continued their education and have taken on leadership roles within schools and their communities (Grant & Ray, 2010). Higher participation on school leadership councils or teams is associated with increased teacher awareness of student’s cultural and community strengths and challenges. (Marscholl, 2008) **(CPP1)**.

Connecticut has a deep and robust system of evidenced- based parent leadership programming. Examples of programs include Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parent SEE), People Empowering People (PEP and PEP Spanish), and ASPIRA Parents for Excellence (APEX). The listed programs are approved by CSDE as evidenced based models **(CPP1)**.

Additionally, CSDE dedicated legislative funding (CGS 10-4u) through the Parent Trust Fund to support and promote programs aimed at improving the health, safety and education of children by training parents. CFSP+ will work in partnership with CSDE and parent leadership programs to **(CPP4)**:

- Link evidenced based parent leadership programs to school districts as a resource to train parents in their communities;
- Showcase and highlight exemplary programs on the CFSP website [www.ct-fsp.org](http://www.ct-fsp.org);
- Identify meaningful opportunities for parent alumni leaders to continue to use their skills as parent advocates, panel speakers, family engagement ambassadors, advisors to state and district leaders and to participate as council members;
- Provide outreach and information through social media to address challenges of COVID (CPP2);
- Work in partnership with Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and community partners to convene a Connecticut Parent Summit (parents and Leadership Program Coordinators);
- Work in partnership with state and community agencies to examine a “peer to peer” portal that will house data and provide an avenue of communication for families and stakeholders to connect with parent leaders.

### **(3) Sustainability**

Connecticut is fertile ground for family engagement work. The State Department of Education’s document, *Full and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut’s Definition and Framework for Family Engagement*, was the result of a collaborative effort that included the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, the Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative, the Commissioner’s Roundtable and Design Team, parent and community organizations, state agency staff, school district officials, teacher organizations, and advocacy groups. This extensive degree of participation speaks to the amount of commitment at all levels.

CREC is at the forefront of this effort. This is evident through CREC’s leadership in such efforts as the CT Welcoming Schools Initiative, the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program, and—especially—through CREC’s pursuit of and award for the 2018 SFEC grant. See Attachment 4, CFSP Dashboard, for a snapshot from the program evaluator of the successes and challenges of CREC’s existing SFEC grant.

CREC is committed to the work of building capacity for family engagement, and CFSP+ is designed to continue that work and yield results that will extend beyond the period of federal financial assistance. The regionalized approach that leverages Connecticut’s existing regional infrastructure means that the project is replicable and scalable. Regional hubs can add districts and schools as interest grows and the project demonstrates success. CREC’s ongoing partnership with NNPS will ensure that the resources will be there to expand the program and continue to build capacity in Connecticut for family engagement.

## **B. QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **(1) Adequacy of Management Plan**

CREC’s management plan for the CFSP+ will blend sound operational, financial, and performance oversight to ensure that CREC delivers the highest possible quality of services while adhering to the U.S. Department of Education’s expectations and reporting requirements.

**Operational Oversight:** The CFSP+ will be under the overall supervision of Christine Ruman, the director of CREC’s Grants and Special Projects unit. Ms. Ruman will act as the Project Director and oversee the Project Manager, Dr. Veronica Marion.

The CFSP+ will be located in CREC’s Grants and Special Projects Unit, composed of staff with expertise in grants and contracts designed to support high quality public education. The unit is dedicated to developing and managing innovative approaches to education

challenges, securing funding for such efforts, evaluating funded programming and strategies, and building sustainability for the approaches that result in the intended impact.

All projects in the Grants and Special Projects Unit are managed using a technical assistance model that emphasizes support for the schools and districts participating in and implementing grant-funded services. This is coupled with the development of a defined system of management, oversight, and data collection to ensure both the highest quality of services possible as well as compliance with grant or contract requirements. The Grants and Special Projects Unit is well-positioned to carry out the SFEC grant, which currently houses ED-funded efforts including the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, Project Prevent, the Statewide Family Engagement Center (2018 cohort), and provision of technical assistance for Connecticut's 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

A project Leadership Team will be composed of senior leaders and experts from leadership partner organizations including the CSDE (**CPP4**). The current CFSP Leadership team guiding the work of SFEC grant awarded in 2018 includes representation from CSDE, CREC, and the CFSP Advisory Council (described below), along with the following community stakeholder organizations:

- State Education Resource Center (SERC), a quasi-public entity that facilitates professional learning and consultation throughout the state with specific expertise in areas including equity in public education, serving students with a range of needs and abilities, and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS);
- Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), which provides support to families of children with a disability or chronic illness, birth through age 26, including a parent training and information center;

- African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP), a nonprofit providing resources, training and advocacy to help parents become their children's best advocate, including resources on the Planning and Placement Team process and transition into adulthood.

CFSP+ leadership team partners will continue and/or new partners will be selected through a contracting process compliant with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, 2 CFR 200.317-200.326. See Attachment 5 for a template MOU with leadership partners.

**Financial Oversight:** CREC's Business Services Department will manage financial oversight. CREC has vast experience successfully managing federal and state-funded programs, including Title I, II-A & D, III and IV as well as several competitive federal and state grants.

The Grants Management Office staff within the Business Services Department is headed by Peggy Sampson who has over thirty years of experience managing federal, state, and private grants. The staff is highly experienced in all aspects of grant management and will manage this grant to ensure fiscal compliance with federal requirements as they have done with all other federal grants. Under the leadership of CREC's Deputy Executive Director, Sandra Cruz-Serrano, and the CREC Comptroller, Jeffrey Ivory, CREC also manages funding for educational programs and services, school construction projects, and regional services.

Each CREC program has its own individual budget. Budgets are approved by the CREC Council and monitored monthly by Business Services. Each budget receives its own unique account in which payroll, timesheets, and attendance data is maintained. The CREC Business Services Department operates according to accepted accounting principles and is audited annually by an independent firm.

As a recipient of federal and state funds, CREC is required to undergo a single audit in conformance with: a) the provisions of the Federal Single Audit Act of 1984 as amended in 1996; b) the U.S. Office of Management and Budget Circular A-133, *Audits of State, Local Governments and Non-Profit Organizations*; and c) the Connecticut State Single Audit Act. As part of CREC's single audit described above, tests are conducted to determine the adequacy of the internal control structure, including that portion related to federal and state financial assistance programs, as well as to determine that CREC has complied with applicable laws and regulations. The results of CREC's single audit for the most recent fiscal year provided no instances of material weakness in the internal control structure or significant violations of applicable laws and regulations.

**Performance Oversight:** Performance oversight will be managed through an ongoing system of feedback and improvement, as described in the response to the section immediately below.

## **(2) Continuous Improvement**

The project staff, leadership team, and advisory board (described below) will all have important roles to play in ensuring that there is ongoing feedback and continuous improvement in the project's operation. Additionally, CFSP+ will contract with an external evaluator. Details on the evaluator's selection process and specific approach are included in section E, Quality of the Project Evaluation. However, it should be noted here that a required qualification of the contracted program evaluator will be extensive experience with process evaluation.

The evaluator will gather data and provide information in a timely manner, so that the leadership team can make informed decisions to discontinue, continue and strengthen strategies early in the project. Including a process evaluation that regularly provides data to support

decision-making as an integral part of the project management structure supports the implementation of high quality services.

With support from the program evaluator, the project director will report biannually to both the advisory board and the leadership team on progress toward meeting performance measures, aligned with the submission of reports to the SFEC program office. In addition, the following actions will be taken to ensure continuous improvement.

- The project director will meet with advisory council to discuss strategies and performance measures detailed in grant; request advise on priority implementation;
- The leadership team will design an implementation plan and begin to implement strategies
- The evaluator will provide user-friendly (user = project personnel, leadership team, advisory council) quarterly reports including fidelity of implementation and progress data
- The leadership team will review reports and identify specific questions or issues to raise with the advisory council
- At quarterly meetings, the advisory council will review evaluation reports and ask for observations, feedback, and ideas based on identified issues
- The project director, with the support of project staff, will identify actions that respond to evaluator and advisory council feedback and bring them to the leadership team
- The leadership team will comment on project director responses and the project director, project staff, and/or partners will act accordingly

### **(3) Delivery of Services**



Quality of service delivery is a direct result of quality of staff and clarity of roles. To ensure the highest possible quality of services, staff funded through the SFEC grant will have experience and expertise relevant to their positions (see *Quality of Project Personnel* for key personnel and Attachment 6 for staff job descriptions). Partner organizations and service providers will demonstrate qualifications to provide services as outlined in the SFEC notice inviting applications. See Attachment 7 for *Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for prospective partners*, which includes requirements for demonstrating experience in training and support to public education stakeholders related to effective policies and practices for parents and families, particularly those from typically underserved populations.

The work plan below details the roles staff will have through the delivery of services. Note that the text for the aligned objectives column can be found in the Project Design section.

**Image 4: CFSP+ Work Plan**

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>Aligned Objective(s)*</i>
Leadership partner agreements developed	October – December 2022	CREC Deputy Executive Director Project Director Leadership partners, executive director or designee	2, 3, 4, 5
Hire SFEC staff	October – December 2022	Project Director Project Manager Leadership Partners	All
Identify and recruit NNPS districts and schools (5 districts, 20 schools)	October 2022, annually	Project Manager, with regional partners in Years 2-5	1
Conduct Friday Café (family engagement education and networking)	October 2022, alternating months	Project Manager Professional Learning Manager	2
Identify regional partners (RESCs or others) and enter into memorandum of understanding for provision of NNPS and other family engagement training and support	November 2022	Project Director Project Manager	1
Identify regional partner professional learning needs	November 2022	Project Manager	1

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>Aligned Objective(s)*</i>
SFEC stakeholder kickoff	December 2022	Project Director Project Manager	1, 5
NNPS training and technical assistance for participating districts and schools	December 2022, ongoing	Project Manager Regional Partners Years 2 – 5	1, 2
Establish CFSP budgets and obtain CREC Council approval	December 2022	Director of Business Services Project Director	All
NNPS District Facilitator coaching meetings	December 2022, monthly	Project Manager	1
Contract with qualified program evaluator	December 2022	Project Director Leadership Team Project Manager	All
Regional partner training and collaboration	December 2022, ongoing	Project Manager	1
Recruit participants for the Welcoming Schools update committee including family, school, district, and community representatives	December 2022	Program Manager	2
Develop and disseminate evaluation and data collection plan	January 2023	Project Manager Program Evaluator	All
Leadership Team meetings	January 2023, monthly	Project Director Leadership Partner representatives Advisory Council co-chairs	5
Advisory Council meetings	January 2023, quarterly	Project Manager Advisory Council co-chairs	5
Identify evidence-based family engagement training and technical assistance providers for family engagement staff, and other school and district staff, community organizations.	January 2023, then annually in July	Project Manager Leadership Team Professional Learning Manager	2
Identify parent leadership training and family education providers, with input from Advisory Council	January 2023, then annually in July	Project Manager Leadership Team Professional Learning Manager	3, 4
Revise Welcoming Schools Toolkit	Begin January 2023, complete by July 2023	Project Manager Professional Learning Manager	2
Contract with training and technical assistance providers for school, district and community	February 2023, then annually in August	Project Director Project Manager	2

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>Aligned Objective(s)*</i>
Contract with parent leadership training and family education providers	February 2023, then annually in August	Project Director Project Manager	3, 4
Conduct/offer evidence-based family engagement training and technical assistance for family engagement staff, and other school and district staff, community organizations.	March 2023, ongoing	Project Manager Professional Learning Manager	2
Conduct/offer parent leadership training and family education	March 2023, ongoing	Project Manager Professional Learning Manager	3, 4
District Facilitator share and collaborate sessions	January 2023, quarterly (3 x school year)	Project Manager	1
Disseminate data collection and documentation protocols	March 2023	Project Director Evaluator	All
Identify gaps in Leadership Team expertise and contract with expert consultants/providers	February 2023, review annually	Project Director Leadership Team Evaluator	All
Project implementation plan developed	January 2023	Project Director Project Manager Leadership Team Evaluator	All
Project communications plan for ongoing internal communication and external marketing/promotion developed and disseminated	April 2023	Project Director Website and Communications Coordinator	1, 3, 5
Identify family engagement resources and training materials to be included on CFSP website	Ongoing	Project Manager Website and Communications Coordinator Leadership Team	2, 3, 4
Train schools, community members and districts in new Welcoming Schools Toolkit.	Beginning September 2023	Project Manager Professional Learning Manager Regional Partners	2
Annual Performance Reports	Annually, as established by Project Office	Project Director Project Manager Director of Business Services Program Evaluator	All

**(4) Appropriateness of Time Commitments**

Project Director | **0.3 FTE**

Responsibilities: Project leadership, accountability, convening of leadership team, collaboration with partners and other stakeholders, monitor budget, work with program evaluator to monitor project progress, manage partner relationships

#### Project Manager | **1.0 FTE**

Responsibilities: Convene the Advisory Council, develop and implement regional strategy, provide training and technical assistance for Welcoming Schools, NNPS and other evidence-based practices in collaboration with project partners; recruit participants; act as the primary point of contact for the evaluator for data collection and communication of evaluation results, lead the Welcoming Schools revision, including ensuring a diverse group of stakeholder participants (**CPP3**), document and communicate progress of Welcoming Schools updates

#### Professional Learning Manager | **0.5 FTE**

Responsibilities: Coordinate professional learning opportunities provided through SFEC grant: registration, evaluations, logistics, contracts; follow-up with participating schools and districts to assess needs for further support; provide technical assistance to participating schools and districts

#### Website and Communications Coordinator | **1.0 FTE**

Responsibilities: Manage communication with leadership team and advisory council (announcements, minutes, resources); expand and maintain website; develop and utilize social media; collect and publish qualitative family- and school-based experiences with family engagement and document via video and/or written format

#### Administrative Assistant | **0.5 FTE**

Responsibilities: Purchasing, human resources functions, maintenance of records, data entry and other administrative functions

#### Partner Organizations

Responsibilities: Provide professional learning about evidence-based family engagement to schools and districts; train underserved families on how to access schools **(CPP1-4)**

### **(5) Diversity of Perspectives**

To inform the efforts and decisions of the 2018 CFSP Leadership team, CREC convened an Advisory Council. The primary role of the Advisory Council has been to advise the Project Director, Project Manager, and the Leadership Team on project activities and hold project personnel accountable for implementation of strategies that are truly responsive to the needs of Connecticut families, schools and communities.

CREC will build upon the existing Advisory Council to provide the same function for a new CFSP+, if awarded, to leverage the existing infrastructure and ensure a continuity of support. The Council includes parents, students, community members, educators and partner agency representatives **(CPP3-4)**. CREC and the project partners have long-standing, trusting relationships with families throughout the communities they serve. Through its school choice and student services programs, CREC provides direct services to thousands of families in diverse communities throughout the greater Hartford region. The agency has a rich history of working with families from a diversity of cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and from across the socio-economic spectrum.

In addition, CREC and partner agencies' relationships with statewide professional organizations provide existing channels to ensure PK – 12 educator and community member representation on the project Advisory Council. Twenty-four parents residing in urban, suburban and rural districts across the state of Connecticut, one student, three school districts, leadership team members, and representatives from the following statewide and local organizations serve on the Advisory Council. The Guidance and Terms for the Advisory Council are included as

Attachment 8. Membership rotates, but the current membership is illustrative of the diverse perspectives informing and influencing CFSP:

- Connecticut Association of Board of Education (CABE), a membership-based organization that represents nearly all boards of education across Connecticut. CABE assists local and regional boards of education in providing high quality public education for all Connecticut children through support for effective leadership and governance.
- Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership, serving the Greater Bridgeport region, RYASAP (Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership) works to ensure the safe and healthy development of youth, young adults, and families by actively engaging organizations, public officials, and community leaders around issues that matter most to the community.
- Asian Pacific American Coalition, a non-profit organization founded in 2008 that provides services and education for and about the Asian American community.
- Mohegan Tribe Education Department, the Mohegan Tribe is a federally recognized tribe and sovereign tribal nation of Mohegan people.
- Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC), a state agency that focuses on children from birth into grade school, overseeing a network of programs and services that help young children and families thrive.
- American Federation of Teachers Connecticut (AFT CT), a union representing 30,000 teachers and school support staff, nurses and healthcare professionals, higher education faculty and state and municipal government employees in nearly 90 local unions across Connecticut.

- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Hartford, a non-profit agency serving people of all faiths, focusing on children, families and the elderly.
- Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), under the auspices of the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors, provides leadership training to parents and grandparents.
- Meriden Children First Initiative, an agency that supports the health, development and early learning of children.
- University of Connecticut (UConn) Extension, offers the People Empowering People (UConn PEP) program, which elevates voices by empowering individuals through community-based parent leadership training.
- DanburyWORKS, a community group working to improve equity and the quality of life in the city of Danbury.

CREC will also engage primary partners who bring diverse perspectives to the leadership of the project, such as SERC, CPAC, and AFCAMP, the CFSP partners participating in the 2018 SFEC grant. As mentioned above, partners will be selected in compliance with 2 CFR 200.317-200.326.

## **C. PROJECT PERSONNEL**

### **(1) Qualifications of Project Director**

The project director, Christine Ruman, is the Director of CREC's Grants and Special Projects unit. Between school districts, the CSDE and CREC, Ms. Ruman has more than twenty years of experience awarding and receiving state, federal and foundation grants. She has been the district level Title I family engagement coordinator at CREC and supported the development

of a family and community education specialist network for schools participating in CREC's federal magnet schools grant. Ms. Ruman has participated in family engagement training, including the Welcoming School training, has attended conferences dedicated to family engagement including the 2021 National Family and Community Engagement Conference and has provided training to schools on effective advisory councils. She has expertise in grant implementation and compliance, and will provide technical and programmatic guidance to Dr. Veronica Marion.

Dr. Marion is the project manager of Connecticut Family School Partnerships at CREC. She has been the Director of Family Engagement for East Hartford Public Schools, a racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse suburb of Hartford, CT, and for Boston Public Schools. Prior to her work in school districts, Dr. Marion was with Connecticut's State Education Resource Center (SERC), providing training and technical assistance in family engagement and equity, including as Co-Coordinator of the Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) grant funded by the US Department of Education. Dr. Marion began her career as a first grade teacher, including twenty three years of experience working directly with students, families, educators and community members to support students at-risk of school failure, and in developing family-school-community partnerships to support student success. Dr. Marion will ensure that all required activities and project deliverables are completed in accordance with program requirements.

## **(2) Qualifications of Key Project Personnel**

The project director and project manager will be supported by a 1.0 FTE website and communications coordinator, 0.6 FTE professional learning manager, and a 0.5 FTE administrative assistant to support effective grant implementation. Please see Attachment 6 for



job descriptions for the website and communications coordinator and the professional learning manager.

### **(3) The qualifications of project consultants or subcontractors.**

Partner organizations and service providers will demonstrate qualifications to provide services as outlined in the SFEC notice inviting applications. See Attachment 6 for Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for prospective partners, which includes requirements for demonstrating experience in training and support to public education stakeholders related to effective policies and practices for parents and families, particularly those from underserved populations.

## **D. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES**

### **(1) Partner Commitment**

CREC has, and the partner organizations selected will have, extensive expertise and capacity to increase the extent and quality of family engagement practices throughout Connecticut. The 2018 leadership partners- AFCAMP, CPAC and SERC, described above- were well-qualified in this regard and partners in a subsequent SFEC grant will meet the same qualifications. CREC, AFCAMP, CPAC and SERC all have a demonstrated record of success in developing relationships, providing networks of support and increasing access to educational opportunities for historically marginalized and disadvantaged populations, including families of students with special needs, English language learners, families with low-income and diverse racial and ethnic communities.

CREC is a regional educational service center that facilitates professional learning and provides services through a high-quality cadre of content developers, trainers, direct service and technical assistance providers and has the infrastructure and capacity to develop, implement, and

expand evidence-based family engagement strategies. AFCAMP, SERC and CPAC each have long-standing outreach networks to ensure the participation of stakeholders from across the spectrum of need; these agencies also employ staff highly-skilled in equity and culturally responsive practices, as well as advocacy and empowerment training for parents and families. As AFCAMP operates a federally sponsored Community Parent Resource Center, CPAC administers a federally sponsored Parent Information and Training Center, and SERC maintains a Parent Information and Training Center even though federal funding for the initiative has ended, there exists a wealth of expertise and resources to expand school engagement opportunities to families across all regions of Connecticut. Throughout the duration of the project, CREC and partner agencies will continue to work in concert to address Connecticut's achievement and opportunity gaps through support for more effective family engagement in education across diverse communities.

## **(2) Appropriateness of Costs in Relation To Project Design**

At least 65% of the funds each year will be devoted to serve communities with high concentrations of underserved families. CREC plans to implement a regional approach to working with schools and districts and to maximize utilization of technology (local media outlets, websites and social media platforms) to reduce costs while systematically and comprehensively “getting the word out” on a statewide basis. These strategies have become increasingly more effective with families and service providers as electronic communications have become much more commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. **(CPP2-3)** Much of the management of the project and many of the project activities will be implemented, in part, through in-kind contributions from collaborating agencies including CREC, SERC, the CSDE, and others. The memorandum of understanding for school districts participating in NNPS (see

Attachment 3 for template) will include a commitment to dedicate a 0.5 FTE staff member to the project, which will be in-kind. CREC has a history of successful relationships with local and regional private funders, as do the community partners expected to participate in this project. Through a combination of direct financial support and the contribution of in-kind services, including support for project evaluation and administrative oversight, CREC anticipates obtaining 15% matching support for the project in years 2-5.

### **(3) Appropriateness of Costs in Relation to Number Served**

CREC believes that the budget for this proposal is reasonable given the five-year scope of the project. Thirty percent of the overall budget, each year, will be spent on establishing or expanding technical assistance for evidence-based parent education programs, such as home visitation, parent leadership training, Welcoming Schools, and family engagement planning. In Year 1 of the project, more resources will be spent on reviewing what has been effective as part of the project funded in 2018, and what should be revised; establishing project structures and processes to support new approaches; facilitating and reviewing assessments of need for training, technical assistance and direct services to support improvement in family-school-community partnerships; and developing action plans to assure that CFSP strategies and supports are accessed and implemented by newly participating LEAs and other stakeholders. CFSP+ plans to leverage Connecticut's system of RESCs to support its service delivery. In Years 2 and 3, 25 school districts, 100 schools and a minimum of 500 parents, educators and community partners will be served through NNPS. In Years 4 and 5, five (5) additional school districts will be added with at least two (2) schools participating in each district, meaning an additional ten (10) schools will be served. Participation in NNPS is not a pre-requisite for participation in other SFEC programming; additional parents and educators will benefit from home visitation programs,

parent leadership training, and other evidence-based programming described in Project Design, above.

## **E. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT EVALUATION**

For project evaluation, CREC will contract with an expert in the field of mixed methods approaches to program evaluation to consider both quantitative and qualitative measures of program implementation and outcomes. The contract for the evaluation will be solicited through a bid process, and the most cost-effective proposal that most closely matches the request will be selected per CREC's procurement policy. The evaluation will serve multiple purposes, including confirming program fidelity and training success, providing data for improving the program, and documenting program effectiveness through an analysis of data on program outcomes. The evaluation for this program will be formative in that feedback for program improvement based on process analysis will be provided, as well as summative in that data will be collected and analyzed regarding program impacts and outcomes. Additionally, CREC will engage a program evaluator to conduct rigorous research to evaluate the impact of a revised version of the Welcoming Schools program, described above.

CREC has significant experience in managing, reporting, and working with program evaluators on federal grants. In the last decade, CREC has been awarded competitive grants from the Carol M White Physical Education Program (2014); Magnet Schools Assistance Program (2017), the Statewide Family Engagement Center (2018), and Project Prevent (2019). CREC has also received various state, local, and foundation grants that required reporting, from entities such as the CT State Department of Education, the City of Hartford, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the Barr Foundation. CREC understands that with grant

funding comes accountability; data collection, feedback and reporting have been built into the management plan.

**Qualifications of Program Evaluator:**

- experience evaluating federal grants, including providing timely results to inform required grant reports;
- experience evaluating initiatives carried out by school-community partnerships;
- experience in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of family engagement strategies;
- expertise in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis;
- expertise in formative and summative evaluation;
- demonstrated expertise in conducting research to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of
- experience and expertise in culturally competent program evaluation.

The program evaluator will be selected through a contracting process compliant with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, 2 CFR 200.317-200.326.

**Summative Evaluation and Reporting:** The evaluator will determine the extent to which performance measures are attained. The evaluator will collect and analyze the data, prepare reports summarizing findings, and discuss the results with district and magnet school staff on an on-going basis.

The data and findings in the summative reports will be used to inform Annual Performance Reports and any other reports required by the U.S. Department of Education.

Monitoring the performance measures required under this grant program will be central to the evaluation plan. Final measures and targets will be established in consultation with the evaluator once selected and will be aligned with the required reporting of GPRA measures.

In addition to the required performance measures, CREC will set measures related to the CFSP+ program, to test that the activities implemented to support the CFSP+ theory of action (Attachment 9) produce the intended outcomes.

The following logic model will also be refined in collaboration with the evaluator.

**Image 5: Logic Model**

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Intermediate Outcomes	Final Outcomes
<p>Federal: SFEC funds for project administration, professional learning, regional infrastructure development, Title I funds for district facilitators (some districts)</p> <p>State: CT State Department of Education, CT Office for Early Childhood, Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, Statewide Education Resource Center</p> <p>Districts: Funding for district facilitators and other family engagement staff, local partnerships, central office and school leadership</p> <p>Community: Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities, other local entities serving on the advisory council</p> <p>Programs and providers: LEAP, PTHV, Welcoming Schools, Friday Cafe, GPS, NNPS, PLTI, PEP</p> <p>Expert evaluators</p>	<p>Participation of districts and schools in National Network of Partnership Schools</p> <p>Development of a regional approach to parent engagement training and technical assistance</p> <p>Parent training: leadership and school engagement, focus on underserved families</p> <p>Collaboration with CSDE to implement the CT Framework</p> <p>Community-building and networking between district family engagement leaders</p> <p>Strengthening of statewide and regional partnerships to support families</p> <p>Revise Welcoming Schools Toolkit to include needs and lessons emerging from COVID-19 experiences and up-to-date equity principles and study its impact on family engagement</p> <p>Existence of a well-functioning CFSP</p>	<p>NNPS schools are trained to create family engagement action teams</p> <p>Schools and district are trained in evidence-based family engagement strategies</p> <p>A regional infrastructure leveraging the RESC Alliance or other existing regional entities is developed to expand the capacity to support family engagement</p> <p>Families are trained in communication with schools, and educational leadership and policy</p> <p>District family engagement leaders gain skills and connections with leaders in other districts</p> <p>Welcoming Schools Toolkit is revised in collaboration with families, schools and districts</p> <p>CFSP leadership team collaborates on project decision-making, taking into</p>	<p>Schools and districts create and implement equity-centered family engagement plans informed by the Dual Capacity and CT Family Engagement frameworks</p> <p>Evidence-based family engagement strategies are integrated into plans</p> <p>Schools and districts receive technical assistance from regional partners in plan development and implementation</p> <p>Families and schools better understand how to communicate with each other</p> <p>Families learn to advocate for their children at a school, local policy, and/or state policy level</p> <p>Increase in school staff knowledge of family engagement and welcoming school environments</p> <p>Project is managed efficiently</p>	<p>Families report higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schools</p> <p>Families report an increase in understanding of their role in their children's education</p> <p>School staff report increased understanding of effective family engagement strategies</p> <p>School staff implement effective family engagement strategies</p> <p>Family engagement plans are implemented as intended, and impacts are discussed</p> <p>Positive student outcomes related to academic achievement, social-emotional skills, discipline and attendance family engagement with schools</p> <p>Increased collaboration between entities addressing family engagement</p>

	<p>leadership team and advisory council</p> <p>Assess CFSP strengths and needs, and evaluate progress on an ongoing basis</p>	<p>account feedback the advisory council</p> <p>CFSP communicates evaluation results, shares with stakeholders and makes adjustments as needed</p>		
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<b>Context</b>
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 169 school districts in Connecticut with significant local control, can dampen regional efforts</li> <li>• Impact of COVID-19 on students, families and communities</li> <li>• Urban, and some suburban and rural, school districts serve a large percentage of poor students; significantly different resources in districts based on community wealth</li> <li>• Historic and on-going racism systematically excludes families of color</li> <li>• Low numbers of teachers and administrators of color; cultural competence is an issue</li> <li>• Fragmented system to support special needs students and their families</li> </ul> <p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant support from state agencies on family involvement</li> <li>• Long-standing and well-respected family engagement and leadership programs (PLTI, PEP, Welcoming Schools, Friday Cafe)</li> <li>• Strong local and statewide family advocacy and support organizations, some of which collaborate effectively</li> </ul>

**Formative Evaluation:** The evaluation contractor will also aid in the continual improvement of the project through formative evaluation, an examination of implementation that returns information to project, school, community partners, and district staff to help them improve program performance.

Formative evaluation includes the study of program fidelity (the degree to which a program is implemented as designed) and reach (the proportion of the target group that participates). Components of fidelity include: the degree to which the program adheres to its goals, plans, activities, timeline; dosage, or the amount of program delivered; the quality of program activities and services; and responsiveness of participants to program activities.

Process indicators will be established in collaboration with the evaluator and will be used to assess the fidelity of project implementation. Consultation with the leadership team, school and district staff, and community partners as well as an audit of current documentation practices and data sources will inform the decision around which data to collect and monitor. Data may include hours of professional learning related to project initiatives; feedback on training; review of program content; attendance; and satisfaction surveys or other measures of project quality. Measures will include a mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback to ensure sufficient detail to inform the improvement process.

Project objectives and draft performance measures follow. As mentioned above, they will be revised and finalized with the program evaluator.

**Image 6: Project Objectives and Performance Measures**

Objectives	Draft Performance Measures ( <i>and type</i> )
1. Implement a regional approach to reinforce the Dual Capacity Framework and Connecticut’s Definition and Framework for Family Engagement.	1a. CREC and at least 4 other regional hubs develop expertise in the frameworks, as demonstrated by development of a regional network for family engagement support; and documentation of collaborative meetings between leads of each regional hub. ( <i>Process</i> )  1b. At least one school district in each regional hub (5 total) and 4 schools within each district (20 total) will be trained in the National Network of Partnership Schools model, annually. ( <i>Process</i> )  1c. At least twenty schools will develop family engagement action plans aligned with the Connecticut and Dual Capacity frameworks, through a team of diverse stakeholders including families representative of their school community. ( <i>Process</i> )
2. Build the capacity of the	2a. At least 300 individuals representing schools, districts, community



<p>SEA, schools, districts, community organizations and state agencies to understand and use evidence-based family engagement practices.</p>	<p>organizations and state agencies receive training and technical assistance on evidence-based family engagement practices, annually. (<i>Process, GPRA</i>)</p> <p>2b. Increase in the number of schools implementing evidence-based family engagement practices (<i>Outcome, GPRA</i>).</p> <p>2c. Increase in the skills and knowledge of schools, districts, community organizations and state agencies with respect to evidence-based family engagement practices. (<i>Outcome, GPRA</i>)</p> <p>2d. Update the Welcoming Schools Toolkit through an equity lens to reflect up-to-date best practices. (<i>Process</i>)</p> <p>2e. By the end of Year 4, at least 100 schools will implement the updated Welcoming Schools Toolkit. (<i>Process, GPRA</i>)</p> <p>2f. Implementation of the Welcoming Schools Toolkit will have a positive impact on family engagement and family connectedness to their children's schools. (<i>Outcome, GPRA</i>)</p>
<p>3. Train families to understand school practices, district policy and state education policy as it relates to their children's education.</p>	<p>3a. At least 200 family members participate in family education and training about family engagement in schools, annually (<i>Process, GPRA</i>).</p> <p>3b. Increase in families who report that family education and training was effective. (<i>Outcome, GPRA</i>)</p>
<p>4. Train families to become leaders in their schools, districts, state, and or at the federal level to advocate for practices and policies that support high quality public education for all students.</p>	<p>4a. At least 100 family members participate in parent leadership training, annually. (<i>Process, GPRA</i>)</p> <p>4b. Increase in families who report that parent leadership training was effective (<i>Outcome, GPRA</i>)</p>
<p>5. Establish cross agency partnerships, representative of state, local and community stakeholders.</p>	<p>5a. Develop and maintain a project leadership team representative of diverse stakeholders. (<i>Process</i>)</p> <p>5b. Leadership team participates in project level decision-making. (<i>Process</i>)</p> <p>5c. Develop and maintain an advisory council consisting of diverse stakeholders. (<i>Process</i>)</p> <p>5d. Advisory council input is incorporated into decision-making; documentation of the process and decisions are shared with stakeholders (council and leadership team). (<i>Process</i>)</p> <p>5f. SEA and LEA practices and policies demonstrate an increased capacity to support family engagement. (<i>Outcome</i>)</p> <p>5g. SEA and LEA family engagement practices and policies are informed by equity and best practices. (<i>Process</i>)</p>

In addition to the project evaluation, the contracted evaluator will conduct a rigorous evaluation of the Welcoming Schools program, to measure the program's impact.

**Evaluation Design: Welcoming Schools Initiative**

The Welcoming Schools Initiative (WSI) will be implemented throughout the grant, working with schools over the course of two years. Each year, CREC will provide 20 school communities training and technical assistance supporting efforts to improve the school climate for families and to help promote family engagement in their children's education. The program includes two training sessions with district and school leaders, consultation with leaders to prepare for the initial Welcoming Schools assessment, support with distribution and collection of assessments, a written report to schools about the results of the assessment, and a follow-up assessment at the end of the second year to measure progress. The initiative is intended to increase partnerships among families, schools, and the community to improve schools and a range of student outcomes. Evaluation of the Welcoming Schools Project will be guided by the following questions:

- 1) To what extent did schools implement the core components of the WSI at the end of year 1 and year 2?
- 2) To what extent was there change in the WSI assessment at the end of year 2? Was there a difference in how teachers, families, and community partner rated the schools?
- 3) To what extent was school involvement in WSI associated with improvements in family perceptions of the school and/or their engagement in practices to support children's learning and achievement?
- 4) To what was involvement in WSI associated with improvements in student outcomes, and were results different for students from historically underserved communities or families?

Evaluation of the Welcoming School Program will use a quasi-experimental design, involving the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in participating and a match sample

of comparison schools. These data will be used to assess implementation of the program in schools to understand areas of strength and weakness (formative assessment), as well as for comparative analyses to estimate the impact of this work on teachers, families, and students.

*Formative evaluation:* Evaluators will ask schools involved in the project to report on the extent to which the training experiences were engaging, informative, useful, and empowering to execute the program. After the half-day workshop, attendees will be asked the extent to which they feel confident they can implement WSI at their schools, what the greatest strengths and challenges are to implementing this work at their school, the outcomes they expect to see at the end of the two years working with CREC, and the extent to which they believe this work can improve equity within schools.

After each technical assistance session, attendees working with CREC facilitators will be asked to provide ratings about the extent to which they felt like the support they are getting in the program is useful, relevant to their school's goals, and whether it is helping them improve the climate for family engagement at their school. Also, evaluators will interview CREC facilitators about their perceptions of the schools they will support for the upcoming year. These comments will be examined in relation to interviews with CREC facilitators at the end of the two years working with a school to identify potential leading indicators within schools or districts that might help predict success or struggle in the program. These indicators include, for example, principal leadership and support, district support, and WSI team composition.

As part of WSI, sites are expected to create a team that meets regularly to plan and implement improvements to the way the school engages families at the school and in student learning outside of school. These teams will be asked to list their members and their role (e.g.,

educator, family member, community member, etc.), and share meeting dates and agendas with evaluators.

*Summative evaluation:* Evaluators will use a quasi-experimental design to determine the extent to which the WSI is having an impact on the school communities in which it is being implemented. A matched sample of schools who are not implementing the WSI will be identified using propensity scores generated based on school characteristics such as size, student demographic characteristics, and prior student outcomes (i.e., attendance and achievement) and asked to join the evaluation. From both groups, evaluators will access data from educators, families, and students about their perceptions of the school and educators, home-school communication, family engagement practices, as well as academic and non-academic outcomes. The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Next Generation Accountability system will be used as a source of data with school level measures of student achievement, achievement gaps, rates of attendance, and other outcomes. Evaluators will also use data collected by districts from teachers and students on school climate, student-teacher relationships, family engagement, teacher job satisfaction, and social-emotional outcomes (e.g., sense of belonging). These scales, among others, are part of the Panorama Education Survey administered by districts and schools in Connecticut. For all WSI and comparison schools, evaluators will collect data from CSDE for the year prior to their involvement. These data will serve as baseline measures and compared to the same metrics two years later, once the plans made in WSI have had an opportunity to be implemented. The Next Generation Accountability and Panorama data will also be analyzed a year after schools are no longer supported in the WSI to test for sustained change or improvements in family engagement and student outcomes.

Evaluators will randomly select half the schools in the WSI each year to interview about their efforts to make their school more family friendly. These interviews will ask school teams what insights they have gained about their community and whether they feel as though involvement in this project has improved the school climate for students and family members. In years 3 and 4, evaluators will conduct 5 focus groups with teachers and 5 focus groups with family members from schools in the project. These focus groups will ask each group about their own perceptions of how welcoming the school climate is, how much they enjoy being at the school and why, and their beliefs related to how well the school and educators are doing to engage and support families in children's learning.

To ensure that the WSI evaluation serves the purpose of providing formative feedback to CREC staff and program participants, external evaluators will provide annual reports documenting work at each school for CREC and for the schools. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected by evaluators specifically about the process of program implementation to provide a more comprehensive description of the strengths and weaknesses of how this work is progressing.

Evaluation of the WSI examines the impact of family engagement trainings and on-going technical assistance on educators, families, and students. Evaluators will examine the training and education efforts in relation to attendees' reports that participation in these helped them build knowledge and skills for family engagement outreach and/or advocacy, build confidence (teacher or family efficacy) related to family engagement, and helped shift their cognitions related to the value of family engagement.

Evaluators will also examine the extent these activities are related to outcomes such as school climate, family engagement, student attendance, and student achievement. To produce

strong evidence of impact, the evaluation employs a quasi-experimental design comparing school outcomes from those in WSI to a matched group of schools that has not received any direct services to improve the school climate or promote equity through family engagement. To help account for any remaining differences in the samples, statistical controls include prior measures of the outcomes. This design provides an opportunity for the evaluation to produce evidence consistent with the WWC guidance for promising evidence of impact.

## F. ATTACHMENTS

A1 Resources

A2 CT Family Engagement – Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families

A3 CSFP+ District Joint Agreement Template

A4 CSFP Dashboard through 1-31-22

A5 CSFP Partner Agreement

A6 CSFP+ Job Descriptions

A7 SFEC Partner Request for Qualifications

A8 CSFP+ Advisory Council Guidance

A9 CFSP+ Theory of Action

Evidence Form

Letters of Support