Preamble: Parent and Family Engagement Core Beliefs & Commitment

The Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) believe that education is a partnership and shared responsibility among the student, parent (caregivers), family, school, and community. An equal, equitable, and high-quality education is every child's civil right; as educators, we strive to deliver on this essential democratic principle. The BPS will guarantee pathways to opportunity that will lead to achievement and success in exchange for hard work, commitment, and collaboration of our students and parents (see Education Bargain). The academic achievement and success of our students hinge upon the actions, relationships, and strengths of parent partnerships and community engagement.

Students, who are at the center of the partnerships, have unique skills, talents, and learning styles and are accountable for their academic achievement. Parents and families provide their children with the foundation of their values, including educational values, responsibilities, expectations, for home/school environment, and aspirations. Parents are primary providers in preparing their children for school readiness and academic success. Parents' knowledge of their children's unique histories, traditions, as well as life and learning experiences are important to their success. Parents also share knowledge about community resources and challenges, both of which are valuable and critical to their child's progress.

Purpose of Policy

This policy establishes the framework and responsibilities for the implementation of strategies to increase effective, meaningful, and authentic parent and family engagement throughout the BPS. The Board of Education champions the development of goal-oriented, comprehensive implementation of school and district-wide parent and family engagement practices that support the academic achievement of all students, school improvement, and uphold all state, and federal mandates.

This policy seeks to strengthen the partnership among parents, families, school and district staff, the Superintendent, and the Board of Education by providing for multiple opportunities for parent and family engagement. This partnership will be further strengthened by expanding learning opportunities that help parents and families support their children at home. Such learning opportunities shall be offered, but not limited to: school-based, virtual and in-person trainings, meetings, activities, and events as well as those
provided or sponsored by the Office of Parent and Family Engagement at BPS Parent Centers, Community Schools, or other locations throughout the district and community.

This policy outlines areas in which parents and families may participate in local school and district-wide matters, and is supplemental to rights of parents guaranteed by other Board of Education policies as well as state and federal laws.

This policy in no way eliminates an individual parent's right to make his or her feelings known at any level in the district on any topic of concern, nor does it prevent the district from involving individual parents in appropriate situations.

This policy will be reviewed biennially to consider revisions.

**Definitions**

a. BOE - Board of Education consists of nine locally elected members representing the following districts in the City of Buffalo: Central, East, Ferry, North, Park, West, and At-Large (3).

b. BPS - Includes all schools, departments, and components that have a role in accomplishing the goals of this policy.

c. Board-recognized Parent Group - a group that has met the established criteria (see BPS Parent Congress application) and has obtained BOE approval to serve on the BPS Parent Congress.

d. Community - This term includes but is not limited to: non-for profit organizations, community or faith-based groups, and community members that may contribute to or participate as stakeholders in the implementation of this policy.

e. Parent Engagement - Active voice, involvement and presence of parents and caregivers, working with all in school, home and/or community to ensure ongoing student learning, wellness, and development. This definition was collaboratively developed in the summer of 2020 by the Re-Envisioning Parent Engagement in the Buffalo Public Schools committee a diverse committee of stakeholders inclusive of parents, teachers, BPS administrators, and community members.

f. Parents or Families - These terms are used interchangeably and include caregivers who are legally responsible for a child in the BPS. This term refers to all families of students in the BPS including families of English Language Learners, Multilingual Learners, and students with special needs.

**Board of Education Responsibilities/Expectations**

The Buffalo Board of Education values the richness and diversity of all parents who have children in the Buffalo Public Schools. The engagement of parents, families, and community members in the education of BPS students creates a positive bond between the home and community that has a positive impact on student outcomes. The BOE supports a collaborative approach model developed by parent groups, in partnership with the district, which encompass four major opportunities for parent and family engagement. In response, the Board of Education will create the following opportunities:

- **Opportunity 1**: Parent Engagement (School level)
- **Opportunity 2**: Parent Engagement (District level)
Opportunity 3: Parent Governance (School/District levels)

Opportunity 4: Parent Governance (District Level)

Opportunity 1: Parent Engagement (School level)

Parents will be invited to engage in various school-based opportunities (e.g. Family Math Night, Open House, Title I Meeting, Parent-Teacher Conference, Parent Engagement Plan Development, School Improvement Plan Development, etc.)

Opportunity 2: Parent Engagement (District level)

Parents will be invited to engage in various district-based opportunities (e.g., BPS Parent Centers in-person or virtual programming, Community Schools' Saturday Academies, Urban Forum, High School Showcase, Budget Meetings, Title I Survey Completion, Parent and Family Engagement Summit, etc.).

Opportunity 3: Parent Governance (School/District levels)

Each school will invite parents to serve on school-based committees and teams to serve as partners in school-level decision-making (e.g., School Based Management Team).

Parents at each school will be invited to elect parent representatives to serve on BPS Board-recognized parent groups.

Opportunity 4: Parent Governance (District levels)

The Board of Education recognizes that parent groups play an important role in the education of Buffalo Public School students. To recognize the value of these groups to the important work of educating students, the Board of Education will invite interested parent groups to serve on the Buffalo Public Schools - Parent Congress, which functions as a partner in district-level decision-making.

Parent Congress Purpose

The purpose of the BPS Parent Congress is to ensure that opportunities for parent engagement occur on multiple levels. Additionally, the Parent Congress consists of elected representatives, with equal representation, of BPS Board-recognized Parent Groups that help inform the following district-level decision-making mandates:

a. District Comprehensive Improvement Plan
b. District Committee of Stakeholders
c. Consolidated Application
d. Other Shared Decision-Making Opportunities

The Parent Congress serves as a venue for disseminating relevant and important information from the district, and also functions as serve as a conduit for parental feedback to the district.

BPS Parent Congress 20-21 Membership
Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) - In order to facilitate student success within the Buffalo Public School, District voices of all members of the community must be engaged through ongoing relationships. Thus, it is the mission of the Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization (BPTO) to initiate, support, advocate for and recognize positive projects, programs and accomplishments of the students, their families, and schools. The BPTO is organized for the purpose of supporting the education of children in Buffalo Public Schools by fostering relationships among parents, families, administrators, all school staff (employed and volunteer), and community members.

District Parent Coordinating Council (DPCC) - District Parent Coordinating Council (DPCC) - A representative body which welcomes the participation of all parents/guardians/caregivers of BPS students as Associate Members in our meetings and on our committees. Our Voting Membership is comprised of one Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Representative and an Alternate, who have been elected/selected by the Parent Group from each school. The primary purposes of the DPCC are supporting the partnership of parents/guardians/caregivers with the Buffalo Public Schools, in accordance with Federal and State Laws, Regulations, as well as District Policies. Our work is centered on building the capacity for parent engagement in support of the District's Mission: "Putting Children and Families First to Ensure High Academic Achievement for All."

Special Education Parents Advisory Committee (SEPAC) -- SEPAC is dedicated to advocacy and support of our district's 5,000 students with disabilities and heightened needs. We assist by advising the district's Special Education unit as well as the Board of Education in the areas of access and inclusion. In addition, SEPAC helps coordinate services and support for families with help from key partners across the region. Parents/Guardians are supported by accessing information regarding their rights through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990). Our meetings are open to caregivers of students receiving special education services in the Buffalo Public School District.

The Buffalo Community Health Workers Parent Association (via The Community Health Network of Buffalo) provides support for a "Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child" approach to education of children in the Buffalo Public Schools, with a focus on parent and family leadership and engagement.

Most Valuable Parent (MVP) -- is a parent group who promotes the importance of trusting relationships between parents, students and schools. We believe these relationships must exist in-order to prepare our students for graduation, career readiness and to ultimately achieve the future success they deserve. MVP's goal is to work with both schools and families to bridge any gap that may hinder this process. We consider ourselves a voice, a resource and a service for both our School District and our Community.

Parent Congress Mission, Vision, Values (see BPS Parent Congress Bylaws)
Developed by consensus-and in partnership with the district. Formally adopted by BPS Parent Congress on February 11, 2020

Mission: Parent Congress is the collective organization of Buffalo Board of Education recognized district-wide parent groups engaging and building power among BPS Parents, Guardians, Caregivers, and any adult acting in loco parentis to ensure every student succeeds in school and LIFE! Moreover, our goal is to ensure that parent engagement is effective at all levels of the system and we collaborate on common issues as they arise.

Vision: The Parent Congress vision is to facilitate unprecedented levels of family involvement, engagement, and collaboration, as full and equal partners, in school and district decisions to ensure ALL students are ready
for college, career, and healthy productive lives, which will enhance the culture and quality of life in our community.

Values:

1. We strive to always consider the impact of our actions on our STUDENTS and Families FIRST.

2. As we are first and foremost responsible for and accountable to our students and families, we value COLLABORATION that includes these voices, while also being mindful of our community partners.

3. We value COMMUNICATION that is respectful, honest, and effective.

4. We value DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION in such a way that we can be flexible, adaptable, celebrate our differences, be culturally open, and meet all families where they are.

5. We value CONSENSUS as our way to partner together and advocate for our families in ways that are firm and flexible.

Consensus, as defined in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, is an opinion that everyone in a group agrees with or accepts.

Parent Congress Consideration
Parent groups that are interested in consideration for Board of Education recognition to serve on the Buffalo Public Schools Parent Congress and partner in district-level decision-making must meet the following criteria:

a. Have Bylaws

b. Have a greater number of parents who make up the membership

c. Have no fewer than 10 members

d. Serve a District-wide purpose

Annual Recertification
To remain active with Parent Congress, parent groups will be required to annually submit to the BPS Office of Parent and Family Engagement the following:

1. Agenda and minutes from at least five of the parent group's formal meetings
2. Parent group's Membership Roster
3. Parent group's Bylaws
4. Evidence of participation of Parent Congress sponsored-events

District Responsibilities/Expectations

The district will reference Dr. Joyce Epstein's research-based framework of Six Types of Involvement to successfully engage parents, families, and the community with a focus on promoting student success:
1. **Parenting**: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level.

2. **Communicating**: Communicate with families about programs and student's progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication.

3. **Volunteering**: Improve recruitment, training work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

4. **Student Learning at Home**: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

5. **Decision Making**: Include families as partners in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTO/PTA, committees, and other parent organizations.

6. **Collaborating with the Community**: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

In addition to supporting the above-written opportunities for parent and family engagement, the district will also be expected to:

1. Ensure for mutual respect, communication, and accountability between school-parent and district-parent.

2. Work in collaboration with the BPS Parent Congress, other parent leaders, as well as district and community stakeholders -to develop and monitor the district Parent and Family Engagement plan.

3. Provide, a collaborative process, leadership training to Parent Congress and other parent leaders.

4. Collaborate biennially with the BPS Parent Congress, and other parent and community leaders to review and revise as needed, the Parent and Family Engagement Policy 3170.

5. Conduct annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the BPS Parent and Family Engagement Policy including identifying barriers to greater participation by families, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, limited literacy, or are a racial or ethnic minority. The district will use these findings to design strategies to support successful school and family interactions.

6. Invite families to engage in district activities and events like the Parent and Family Engagement Summit, High School Showcase, Urban Forum, Consolidated Application Budget Meetings, Title I Community Stakeholders Meetings, etc.

7. Provide support to schools in developing and implementing Parent Engagement plans that include effective strategies and activities that encourage successful interaction and engagement of families with teachers and other school personnel.

8. Help parents and families establish home environments that support student learning and social-emotional wellness.
9. Ensure for multiple modes of communication with parents and families that are respectful, culturally and linguistically accessible and appropriate in accordance with the parent engagement component of the District English Language Learner Policy #8281 and NYSED Commissioner’s Regulation Part 154.

10. Recruit and encourage the engagement of parents and families to partner with schools and district to support student learning. Provide information and resources to parents, families, and community to support student learning inside and outside of the classroom.

11. Foster a network of sharing best parent and family practices.

12. Provide a budget allocation to support school and district parent and family engagement initiatives.

13. Support the establishment of a parent organization in every school.

14. Provide support to parents seeking to establish a district parent group.

15. Provide support to any parent group seeking board recognition.

16. Support the placement of a parent engagement liaison at every school.

17. Oversee Parent Centers that provide learning opportunities, resources, collaborative opportunities, and support to parents, families, and community.

18. Ensure compliance with state and federal parent and family engagement legislation.

19. Partner with the BOE and Parent Congress to conduct an annual event designed to encourage engagement of parents and families.

20. Provide a mechanism for parents and families to report concerns.

School Responsibilities and Expectations

"Children have the greatest chance of reaching their potential and becoming positive members of the school community if schools treat parents as partners" (Wood. 2011).

Principals, in creating environments that promote and support parent and family engagement, will utilize as a reference Dr. Joyce Epstein's research-based framework - Six Types of Involvement to create meaningful partnerships with parents, families and community stakeholders.

1. **Parenting**: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level.

2. **Communicating**: Communicate with families about programs and student's progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication.

3. **Volunteering**: Improve recruitment, training work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
4. **Student Learning at Home**: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

5. **Decision Making**: Include families as partners in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTO/PTA, committees, and other parent organizations.

6. **Collaborating with the Community**: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Additionally, principals will be expected to:

1. Ensure for a welcoming and culturally inclusive school environment.

2. Ensure for mutual respect, communication, and accountability between school-parent.

3. Develop a system for ongoing effective and reciprocal communication between school and home. Involve parents as equal partners in School Based Management Teams (SBMT) as outlined in the District Plan for School Based Planning and Shared Decision Making. SBMT meeting dates and times should be jointly developed with parents and widely shared with the entire school community.

4. Collaborate with school parent leaders to establish a parent organization in each school and shall:
   
   a. Call at least one business meeting of the parent organization each year to encourage the inclusion of new parents into the organization.

   b. Elect officers and have regular meetings, scheduled in consultation with parents and announced publicly, inviting all to attend.

   c. Be maintained as a viable entity to ensure that parents, who are full partners in their child’s education, have an opportunity to be included in meetings and decision-making.

   d. Elect/appoint members to represent all parents from the school community to serve on BPS Board-recognized parent groups School Based Management Team, and other teams or committees related to student achievement.

5. Involve parents and families in the planning and development of school’s Parent Engagement Plan inclusive of: budget, activities, School-Parent Compact, Parent and Family Engagement Policy, etc.

6. Establish a parent room in each school, which will include basic resources and infrastructure (i.e., meeting space, desk/table and chairs, a computer, phone, resource materials, etc.).

7. Provide a mechanism for parents and families to report concerns.

**Parent Responsibilities and Expectations**

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents" (~Jane D. Hull).
Parents play a vital role at all stages of a child's education, and a supportive role in education can improve achievement. An effective school-parent partnership is essential to increase academic student performance and support social-emotional wellness.

Parents are requested to:

1. Ensure that children attend school and classes, on time, every day.
2. Ensure that children are prepared for classes and ready to learn.
3. Ensure for mutual respect, communication, and accountability between parent-school.
4. Ensure that children show respect to school staff, other students, and school property.
5. Ensure that children complete classwork, to the best of their ability, and devote additional study time outside of school hours.
6. Provide a learning environment to support homework completion and actively monitor children's homework.
7. Remain informed about opportunities, and whenever possible, participate in school and district-level shared decision-making.
8. Review, support, and contribute to revisions to district policies (e.g., Attendance, Code of Conduct, Wellness, Parent and Family Engagement, etc.)
9. Attend meetings, activities, learning sessions, conferences, and other events designed to increase equity, access, and opportunities to support student academic achievement and social-emotional wellness.
10. Respectfully communicate with school staff as partners in their children's academic success.
11. Report concerns impacting student academic achievement and/or social-emotional wellness to appropriate school or district staff.

The Buffalo Board of Education and the Superintendent of Buffalo Public Schools endorse and support this policy to help ensure the BPS mission of "Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all."

Buffalo Public Schools Parent Congress Application
BPS Parent Congress Bylaws
BPS Parent Engagement Liaison Handbook
District Plan for School Based Planning and Shared Decision Making
District Comprehensive Improvement Plan

NOTE:
Refer also to Policies
#3110 -- Community Relations
#7110 -- PK-12 Comprehensive Student Attendance
#7310 -- School Conduct and Discipline
#7660 -- Parent Involvement-- Children with Disabilities
#8260 -- Programs and Projects Funded by Title 1
#8280 -- English Language Learner Policy
#7515 -- District Wellness Policy

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Works Cited
Wood, Chip & Babs Freeman-Loftis (2011)