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Deborah Spitz, U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW., Room 3E306  
Washington, DC 20202

**RE: Docket ID ED-2015-OESE-0130**

My name is Heidi Brewington; I am the Federal Advocate for the California State PTA, which represents more than 800,000 members and 3,500 local associations, over 50 percent of which are in Title 1 schools.

I would like to offer the following input on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):

As a parent, I saw firsthand the impact that actively engaged families have on their schools, communities and most importantly, their students (including students with special needs) versus the students whose families are not involved. Those students with actively engaged parents and families are succeeding not just in the classroom, but in their communities.

National PTA has standards for family engagement that are backed up by over twenty years of research. You can find this at the following link to National PTA's website:

[http://www.pta.org/files/National\\_Standards.pdf](http://www.pta.org/files/National_Standards.pdf). This research confirms what California State PTA advocates and what many of our school districts know and have adopted: **Families are an essential ingredient for student success and excellent schools**. Family engagement is critical to accountability, which ESSA is trying to accomplish.

In order for ESSA to be successfully implemented, it will need adequate funding in order to encourage and promote meaningful parent and family engagement. Research shows that family engagement in a child's education increases student achievement, improves attendance and reduces dropout rates.

**The "one-size-fits-all" approach does not work. Parent engagement is more than regional Parent Centers and we need for the federal government to recognize that.** California is rich with diversity; what works for a school in Sunland, CA may differ for what works for a school in Eureka, CA... Just as what works in California may differ from what works in Washington. We need to reach out to parents, guardians, students and communities and embrace the diversity of each community and each state in order to be successful in increasing family engagement.

PTA developed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide <http://capta.org/resource/family-school-partnerships/> to empower PTA leaders, parents, educators, community members, and students to work together for the educational success of all children and youth. **Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of family-school-community partnerships:**

- ❖ Greater student success
- ❖ Increased communication among parents, teachers and school leaders
- ❖ More parent involvement in supporting teaching and learning
- ❖ More community support for the school
- ❖ Higher teacher morale.

**PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships:**

- Standard 1—**Welcoming All Families into the School Community.** Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
- Standard 2—**Communicating Effectively.** Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
- Standard 3—**Supporting Student Success.** Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
- Standard 4—**Speaking Up for Every Child.** Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
- Standard 5—**Sharing Power.** Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
- Standard 6—**Collaborating with Community.** Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

To help California preschools and public schools engage parents and families with the purpose of building diverse and inclusive communities that understand the education system, know how to help their children succeed and actively participate at their local schools and districts, it is crucial to have:

- Active and meaningful participation and training at the school site and district level that empowers parents, students and families to become active leaders through diverse channels for participation including but not limited to school site committees and councils, district committees and councils, English learner advisory committees parent/teacher/student associations, and other advisory bodies that involve parents, families and or students.
- Families and their communities empowered through programs and activities that promote parent engagement in schools, supports parents as their children's first teachers, develop parent leaders, encourage parents to advocate for a complete education that includes a full curriculum to close the access, achievement and opportunity gap.

Knowledge is power and education is the power behind family engagement. The California State PTA advocates increasing the number of engaged parents and families so that they may be empowered to support the needs of more than 9 million children (pre-school through high school).

**While we know that the parent/family centers referenced in ESSA are great, we need regulations that support more than just a few centers.** We need regulations that will drive meaningful parent engagement as I have described. As mentioned earlier, over 20 years of research developed by National PTA standards for family engagement confirms what we know; we know that family engagement is key to student success. **We need regulations that make it a priority for schools, districts and states to engage parents in supporting their schools and engaging in decision making and accountability.** Parent engagement should never be viewed as a requirement to "check-off" or a location to meet... but an ongoing, interactive process and we believe the ESSA regulations could help drive this process. We are here to support you in those efforts.

Thank you.

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