



UNITED PARENT LEADERS ACTION NETWORK

UNITED PARENT LEADERS ACTION NETWORK COMMENTS ON STATEWIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CENTERS (SFECs)

The United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN) is a non-partisan national network of parent leaders and organizations who are passionate about improving systems and policies that affect children and families. We represent 31 different state, regional, and local level parent leadership organizations that reach well over 700,000 families each year.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights the need for stakeholder engagement in decisions that affect the education of children. UPLAN believes that the Department of Education's (US ED's) implementation of the Statewide Family Engagement Center (SFEC) program must reflect a commitment to bringing the voices of parents to the design, roll-out, and evaluation of any family engagement effort. We point to Section 4504, part a1C, a1D, and a1E of Title IV of ESSA. This part of the statute requires SFECs to promote families' roles in systems leadership, program design, and decision-making.

UPLAN members know firsthand that when parents bring their real-world perspectives to the policy-making table, outcomes for children improve. We ask US ED to apply ESSA's demands for community and family leadership to the SFEC program. For example, applicants should be required to show how they will bring parents' voices and expertise to all aspects of their work. Grantees should also be required to demonstrate authentic family leadership of their program as part of their evaluation and commitment to equity.

As another pathway of promotion of families' roles, UPLAN believes that US ED would greatly benefit from a Parent and Family Advisory Council (Council). We believe the Council can advise US ED on the best strategies for ensuring impact and sustainability of the SFEC program. Parents are the experts on the systemic change and program innovation required for effective family engagement. This can also demonstrate another strategy of US ED's commitment to connecting parents to all levels of leadership in relation to SFEC – local, state and federal – as this is the best way to ensure the program's success.

Lastly, UPLAN is concerned about the impact of the FY 2018 appropriations amount on the SFECs' abilities to live up to their potential. With a minimum grant amount of \$500,000 and only \$10 million to spend, each SFEC could potentially lack the resources needed to meet its goals. Furthermore, we anticipate that many students live in states that won't have access to any of the supports that SFECs bring. As a national network that connects to over 700,000 families across the country through our member organizations, UPLAN calls on US ED to design the SFEC program for FY 2018 to strategically position it for greater funding in FY 2019 and beyond. The immediate plans for SFECs must have sustainability and growth of the program in mind in order for all children to have what they need to succeed.