



## **The time is now to put parents at the center of our education system**

Never in our history has the home been more important as the family becomes the main source of learning, comfort, and stability during this coronavirus outbreak. We know that parents who are under-resourced and most vulnerable are in need of supports that are sorely lacking. Consider Flora, a single mother with three school-aged children who just lost her minimum wage job. From a tiny apartment, she is navigating online instruction for her children with one smart phone and few supports for her new role. Her children need her, so they don't fall behind, and she needs help to provide that support.

At the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), we have joined many others in providing families with free digital learning tools in recent days, but we know that this is not enough. It is not enough for Flora and her family and it is not enough for the millions of families in rural communities where internet is neither available nor reliable. There are an estimated 30 million parents or primary caregivers who lack basic literacy or English skills.

NCFL has spent the past 30 years researching, refining, and implementing family education solutions with over 4.5 million parents and children. Unless steps are taken to empower parents, many of the same families will continue to live in poverty. Pretending that we can help all children succeed with new approaches to education is an empty dream. In the midst of this crisis, let us wake up and acknowledge that parents are the lifeblood of an effective education system. Together, we must build a true national infrastructure that supports families.

The federal government has developed a single program solely dedicated to family engagement, Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC), which operate in select states across the country. These SFECs implement evidenced-based family engagement strategies in these states and their school districts to foster meaningful engagement with families, providing parents with tools and ultimately furthering their children's academic and developmental progress. This program *must* be expanded so that every state has a vehicle to support under-resourced parents, positioning all families to finally thrive. At a time when our country reevaluates our expenditure of trillions, a one-time investment of \$245.5 million is all that is needed to turn this into reality.

No longer can we make parents an afterthought when designing our nation's educational solutions. This crisis underscores parents' extraordinary impact on our generations to come. Please join us in acknowledging these facts, rethinking our approach, and finally creating a system that addresses the root of our country's continual educational struggles once and for all so that parents can navigate this crisis and ultimately become agents of generational change.

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