# BUILDING STRONGER CONNECTIONS WITH SCHOOLS

## Year 4 Parent Leadership Institute Evaluation

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# Overview of the Children's Aid Parent Leadership Institute

The 2016-17 school year marked the third full school year of operation of the Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) of Children's Aid (CA). The PLI is funded via a 2013 Investing in Innovation (i3) development grant. Key goals of the PLI include: (1) improving the capacity of parents to effectively engage in the school community in support of their child and (2) increasing the capacity of school staff to create and support environments which are welcoming to and supportive of the active engagement of parents as key members of the school community. Through implementation of the PLI, CA expanded its partnership with six schools located in the South Bronx community of Morrisania, an area characterized by high levels of poverty, health disparities, and crime, and low levels of academic achievement and attainment among both children and adults. CA contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to conduct an independent evaluation of the PLI initiative.

National and local organizations have long advocated for the implementation of parent engagement activities by schools as a potential means of improving student academic performance and engagement (Ishimaro et.al, 2016). However, although there is consensus that families play a significant role in a student's academic achievement and engagement (Cabrera& LaNasa, 2001; Jeynes 2005; Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca, 2011; Perna

> *"ALL OF THE WORKSHOPS ARE PURPOSEFUL. IT'S NOT A WORKSHOP JUST TO SAY, OKAY, WE NEED TO COLLECT NAMES. WE'RE ACTUALLY DOING THIS TO SERVE OUR COMMUNITY."*
>
> **Teacher from a PLI School**

& Titus, 2005; Robinson & Harris, 2014), there are divergent opinions about what effective parent engagement looks like in practice and the role that school-based staff can play in fostering deeper levels of parent engagement (Ishimaru et. al, 2016; Mapp & Kutner, 2013; Robinson & Harris, 2014).

For each year of its operation, the PLI has advocated for a model for parent engagement that is grounded in the premise that active, direct services and supports delivered to parents will enable parents or other participating adult family members to become strong, informed, and engaged advocates for their children. The focus on parents as recipients of services in the PLI framework broadens the scope of parent and family engagement efforts beyond that of traditional school-based activities which often center parents as primarily encouraging and supporting higher levels of performance for their child and not as the recipients of services.

The focus of the PLI and its work on building the capacity of parents to be leaders and advocates for their child aligns with the process of stage setting as identified by Robinson and Harris (2014). The researchers identify stage setting as parent efforts to "construct and manage the social environment around their children in a way that creates conditions where success is possible (p. 200)." The PLI, with its focus on building parent capacity, has encouraged partner schools to think creatively about ways to authentically encourage parents to become more engaged in school. The project director stated, "what you're trying to do is to get ways that maybe you can push outside of getting them [parents] in there for doughnuts for dads or muffins for moms. Getting beyond that to talk about the real, authentic ways of encouraging parents to get involved."

## Staffing and Program Components

At the heart of the PLI are the CA parent engagement coordinators (PECs) who collaborate with parents, school staff, staff from local community organizations, and other CA staff to develop and deliver programming that meets the needs of the parents and families served by participating schools. The coordinators are supported by a project director who manages PEC hiring, provides training to PECs and school staff, facilitates parent engagement opportunities with teachers, and works with PECs to coordinate campus parent engagement activities.

There are three core PLI components: (1) a separate space in the school for parents; (2) dedicated staff to help identify and meet parent needs; since Year 1and (3) delivery of tailored services and supports to parents and school staff to improve parent skills and capacity to effectively engage in schools (Exhibit 1). Jointly, these three program components reflect the desired operation and potential impact of the PLI.

### Exhibit 1
### Overview of Key Components of the PLI

| Program Area | PLI Component |
|---|---|
| **Space in the school** | The parent resource room is an adult-focused space dedicated to providing parents with a welcoming area within the school |
| **Dedicated staff** | Parent engagement coordinators (PECs) coordinate closely with other CA staff in their schools, school leadership, the local parent association, parents, teachers, and the district-assigned parent coordinators or other staff designated to work directly with parents in the participating schools. |
| **Tailored services and supports** | PECs: (1) coordinate the design and delivery of adult education workshops and parent leadership development activities; (2) help parents link with needed resources both within the school and within the broader community as needed; and (3) work with other school staff to support effective parent connections |

# PLI Logic Model and Fidelity of Implementation

As required by the i3 grant, staff from PSA and CA developed a logic model (Appendix A-1) detailing the planned operation and impact of the PLI. This initial model incorporated the components of the PLI as a separate, externally-developed initiative and neglected to account for the potential, and often significant impact, of the context of the partner school on PLI implementation and outcomes. Interviews conducted during the 2015-16 school year (Year 3) revealed the impact that school context, particularly as it related to principal understanding and buy-in, had on the nature of PLI implementation across partner schools.

In response to these findings, the evaluation team updated the logic model to better reflect the different factors that may affect PLI parent engagement efforts (Exhibit 2). The updated logic model highlights several school context factors which can affect parent engagement efforts in partner schools including: (1) principal vision for parent engagement in his/her school and level of buy-in for the model of parent

engagement supported by the PLI; (2) level of support from the community school director and the extent to which PLI activities supported or were integrated into other community school operations; and (3) connections with teachers and teacher buy-in of the PLI model. Each of these three factors potentially affects the processes of developing and maintaining a shared vision of parent engagement in the local school context. The evaluation team updated the logic model again based on Year 4 data collection findings to include the potential role of local area superintendents and district parent engagement policies and added this to the contextual factors portion of the model.

Findings from Year 3 and 4 data collection align with prior research on the design and implementation of family engagement work. The dual-capacity framework (SEDL, 2013) highlights the important role that school context plays in terms of multiple factors including (1) openness of administrative staff to working with parents in new ways; (2) school and district policies and procedures dedicated to fostering deep, integrated partnerships with parents; and (3) a shared, building-wide commitment to building the capacity of both parents and staff to partner successfully. The framework notes that school conditions can foster school-family partnerships along a continuum of ineffective to effective partnerships. An ineffective school lacks any meaningful opportunities for school staff and parents to build partnership capacity. An effective school is characterized by staff who recognize the contributions that parents can make to student learning while providing multiple opportunities for family members to engage with their child around learning and within the school overall.

Over the course of the evaluation, the evaluation team has observed the complexity of the work of the PLI. As noted above, the PLI is an externally developed initiative which is nested into schools of various levels of interest and capacity in building new relationships with parents. Moreover, schools themselves are nested within larger administrative regions and the overall New York City school district. Additionally, the PLI is one of many programs and initiatives operated by Children's Aid. Available information suggests that this nesting of the PLI in Children's Aid, the partner school, and regional and districtwide offices affects the nature of initiative activities within and across schools. Discussions with CA staff have revealed that CA, as an organization, has evolved and continues to evolve as it makes organizational adjustments to develop and implement a more broadly defined view of parental involvement in schools. During interviews, CA staff discussed different challenges faced in building internal consensus on what effective, meaningful parent engagement activities and support looks like in practice.

Within the i3 evaluation framework, the logic model is directly linked to measures of fidelity of implementation. I3 requires that grantee establish targets for key inputs, activities, and outputs as outlined in the logic model. Staff from CA and PSA jointly developed implementation targets in Year 1 of the PLI and made slight adjustments to the targets after Year 2 to better reflect the realities of on-the-ground implementation. Parent engagement coordinators are responsible for collecting information on parent participation in PLI services and/or workshops and entering those data into the CA data management system. Each year the PLI director provides an export of these data to the evaluation team who compile the data to determine CA success in achieving implementation targets. Exhibit 3 provides each of the fidelity of implementation targets for the 2016-17 school year. We include the completed Year 4 fidelity of implementation matrix in Appendix A-2.
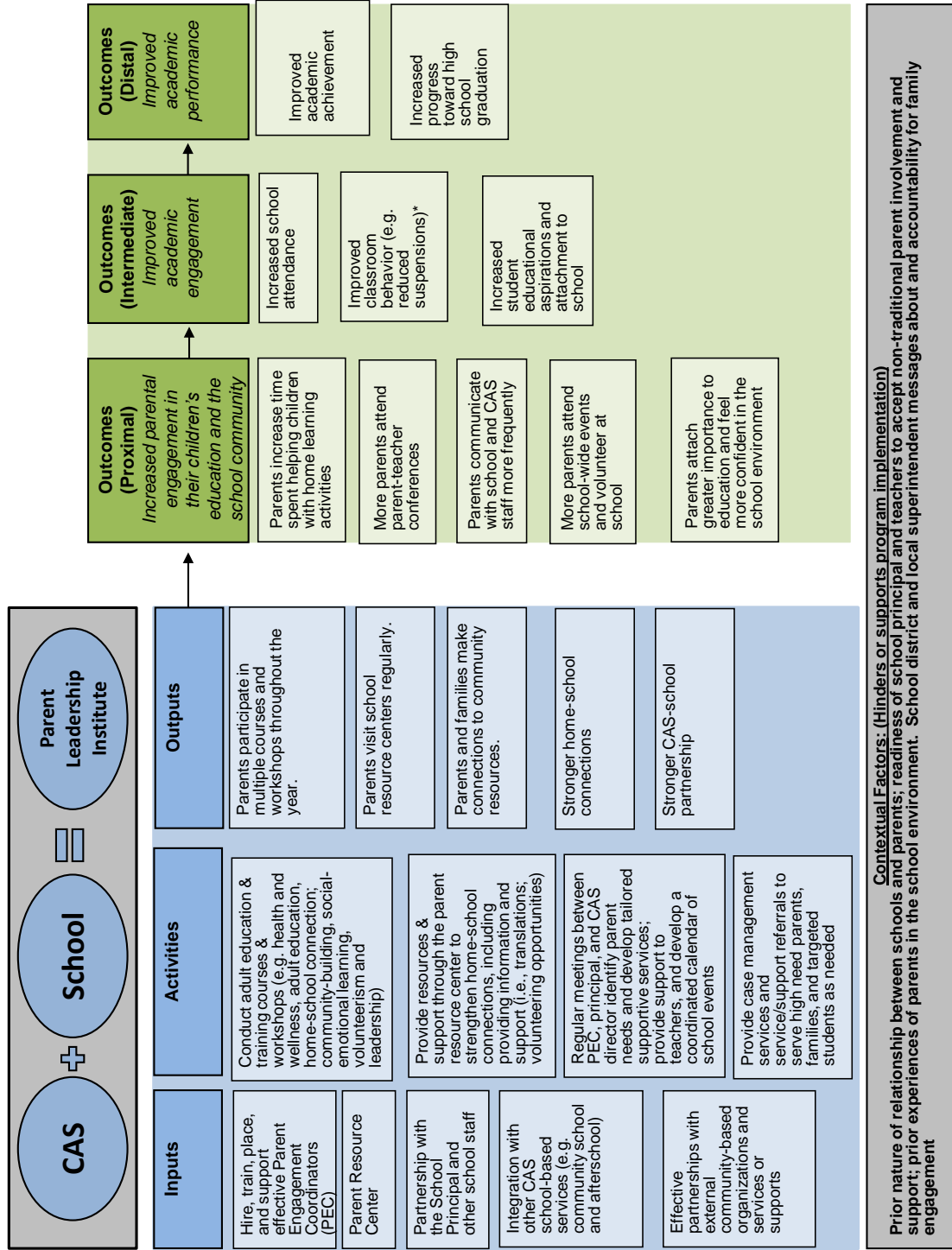
**Exhibit 2**
**Revised PLI Logic Model**

**CAS + School = Parent Leadership Institute**

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs |
|---|---|---|
| Hire, train, place, and support effective Parent Engagement Coordinators (PEC) | Conduct adult education & training courses & workshops (e.g. health and wellness, adult education; home-school connection; community-building, social-emotional learning, volunteerism and leadership) | Parents participate in multiple courses and workshops throughout the year. |
| Parent Resource Center | | Parents visit school resource centers regularly. |
| Partnership with the School Principal and other school staff | Provide resources & support through the parent resource center to strengthen home-school connections, including providing information and support (i.e., translations; volunteering opportunities) | Parents and families make connections to community resources. |
| Integration with other CAS school-based services (e.g. community school and afterschool) | Regular meetings between PEC, principal, and CAS director identify parent needs and develop tailored supportive services; provide support to teachers, and develop a coordinated calendar of school events | Stronger home-school connections |
| Effective partnerships with external community-based organizations and services or supports | Provide case management services and service/support referrals to serve high need parents, families, and targeted students as needed | Stronger CAS-school partnership |

**Outcomes (Proximal)** — *Increased parental engagement in their children's education and the school community*

- Parents increase time spent helping children with home learning activities
- More parents attend parent-teacher conferences
- Parents communicate with school and CAS staff more frequently
- More parents attend school-wide events and volunteer at school
- Parents attach greater importance to education and feel more confident in the school environment

**Outcomes (Intermediate)** — *Improved academic engagement*

- Increased school attendance
- Improved classroom behavior (e.g. reduced suspensions)*
- Increased student educational aspirations and attachment to school

**Outcomes (Distal)** — *Improved academic performance*

- Improved academic achievement
- Increased progress toward high school graduation

**Contextual Factors: (Hinders or supports program implementation)**
Prior nature of relationship between schools and parents; readiness of school principal and teachers to accept non-traditional parent involvement and support; prior experiences of parents in the school environment. School district and local superintendent messages about and accountability for family engagement

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# Exhibit 3
# Implementation Fidelity Matrix

| Major Component | Subcomponents | Fidelity Scores | Level Calculated | Adequate Fidelity at Campus/School level | Program-level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Establishing Parent Resource Centers at Each School** | Allocation of space in the school building | Not completed = 0 Completed = 1 | Campus | Campus has dedicated space for center = 1 | |
| | Hours Center is scheduled to open spans both the school day, afternoons, and evenings | Not scheduled = 0 Scheduled = 1 | Campus | Campus center has scheduled hours during day, after school, and evenings = 1 | |
| **Program-level threshold** | | Campus score = 0 - 2 | Program | Score of 2 = adequate fidelity at campus-level = 1 | 3 of 4 campuses have adequate fidelity (score = 1) |
| **Hire and Train Family engagement coordinators** | The number of family engagement coordinators planned for each school are hired and trained by CAS | Hire target number = 1 Not able to hire target number = 0 | Campus | 100% of target hired and trained = 1 | |
| | The proportion of family engagement coordinators with qualifications set for their position | Not qualified = 0 Qualified = 1 | Campus | At least 90% of staff meet qualifications for their position = 1 | |
| **Program-level threshold** | | Campus score = 0 - 2 | Program | Score of 2 = adequate fidelity at campus-level = 1 | 3 of 4 campuses have adequate fidelity (score = 1) |
| **Conduct adult education and training courses and workshops** | Offer planned GED, ESL & Technology courses | Offered all planned courses during the school year = 1 Fewer than planned courses actually offered = 0 | Campus | 100% of planned courses offered = 1 | |
| **Program-level threshold** | | Score = 0 – 1 | Campus | Score of 1 adequate fidelity at campus level = 1 | 3 of 4 campuses are at adequate fidelity (score = 1) |
| **Provide Resources/support Through Parent Resource Center** | Provide information and support in advance of parent teacher conferences | Available = 1 Not available = 0 | Campus | Provide services to at least 10% of parents = 1 | |
| | Provide help desk, support center during parent teacher conferences | Available = 1 Not available = 0 | Campus | Provide services to at least 10% of parents = 1 | |
| | Provide individualized support on communicating with teachers | Available = 1 Not available = 0 | Campus | Provide services to at least 10% of parents = 1 | |

| Major Component | Subcomponents | Fidelity Scores | Level Calculated | Adequate Fidelity at Campus/School level | Program-level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Provide opportunities for parents to sign up for school leadership and volunteer activities | Available = 1 Not available = 0 | Campus | Provide services to at least 20% of parents = 1 | |
| | Targeted outreach to parents of struggling students | Outreach efforts made = 1 Efforts not made = 0 | Campus | Contact at least 50% of parents of struggling students = 1 | |
| Program-level threshold | | Score = 0 – 5 | | Score of 4 or higher = adequate campus-level fidelity = 1 | 3 of 4 campuses are at adequate fidelity (score = 1) |
| Provide parents with information about available community resources | Provide information, supports, and referrals for other parent and family needs (e.g., housing and emergency assistance; sexual health) | Not completed = 0 Completed = 1 | Campus | At least 30 parents per campus receive information or referrals = 1 | |
| | | | Score – 0 - 1 | Score of 1 = adequate campus-level fidelity = 1 | |
| Program-level threshold | | | | | 3 of 4 campuses are at adequate fidelity (score = 1) |
| Parents participate in courses and workshops | Parents complete at least one course or workshop | Parent does not complete course or workshop = 0 Parent completes course or workshop = 1 | | 50 parents per school complete a course = 1 < 50 parents = 0 | |
| | Parents achieve leadership level (complete 2 courses and core workshops) | Parent does not complete leadership level = 0 Parent completes leadership level = 1 | | 30 parents per school complete training level = 1 < 30 parents = 0 | ) |
| Program-level threshold | | Parent score = 0 -2 | 2 = adequate fidelity at parent-level | At least 30 parents in school have score of 2 = adequate fidelity = 1 | 3 of 4 campuses are at adequate fidelity (score = 1) |

# Year 4 Evaluation Goals and Methods

Over the past four years, the evaluation has explored the following proposition:

Through the coordinated efforts of Parent Resource Centers, parent engagement coordinators, and adult education and leadership development activities, parents will develop home environments that promote learning and will forge stronger connections with their children's schools, resulting in student achievement and attendance that exceed those of similar students enrolled in matched schools.

For the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 school years, the evaluation team has focused evaluation efforts on developing an in-depth understanding of what the PLI looks like in practice across each of the six partner schools (Hildreth, Butler, & Francis, 2016; Hildreth, Butler, & Orozco, 2017). The primary goal of the Year 4 evaluation was to document via interviews with representatives of key stakeholder groups and analyses of administrative data on parent participation in sponsored services, strategies for implementing PLI during the 2016-17 school year. Of particular interest was learning about ways that CA staff worked with school staff to integrate parent engagement activities into overall school operation.

In late spring 2016-17 members of the evaluation team conducted individual interviews or focus groups with more than 30 stakeholders representing each of the participating partner schools, the New York Department of Education, a partner organization, and Children's Aid staff. Analyses of these interviews serve as the primary basis for this report. To supplement these analyses, the evaluation team also analyzed CA administrative data on the types of services and supports provided to parents. These data provide additional context to the evaluation and provide information on "fidelity of implementation" as required by i3.

In Year 5, the evaluation team will assess the extent to which the PLI had a school-level impact on student academic achievement as measured by performance on state reading and mathematics assessments and school attendance rates. Using an interrupted time-series model, the impact study will compare the performance of the six PLI schools on these measures with that of 18 similar non-participating schools to explore potential effects of the PLI.

# Characteristics of PLI Partner Schools

As during the prior two school years there were six participating PLI schools in 2016-17. Each of the PLI partner schools continued to operate as a New York community school during the school year with Children's Aid serving as the lead community school partner for all but one school. Each of the traditional schools (one school is a charter school) also has a district-funded parent coordinator. As is relatively common in New York schools, several PLI schools are co-located, with two or more schools sharing a common building or campus. Four of the six PLI partner schools are co-located in this manner. There are also an additional three, unfunded and co-located schools which the project director and PECs indicate are also included in all provided activities and services to the extent possible.

Each of the partner schools have relatively small enrollments (ranging from 272 to 591 in 2016-17) and, similar to other Bronx schools, are characterized by comparatively high enrollment rates of students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners. Nearly all enrolled students (98 to 100 percent) represent a racial or ethnic minority group, and between 23 and 62 percent

of students were labeled as chronically absent (missed 10 percent or more of school days) during the 2016-17 school year. For all but one of the partner schools, fewer than 20 percent of students met annual English Language Arts and mathematics performance targets as measured on the New York State Department of Education Assessments.

# Year 4 Implementation Findings

In this section we explore the PLI during 2016-17 in terms of meeting fidelity of implementation targets and understanding strategies for working with representatives of the different stakeholder groups. In the first section we provide a discussion of the inputs, activities, and outputs as they operated during the school year. Where applicable, we include the extent to which CA was successful in achieving fidelity of implementation targets for the school year. In the second section we explore PEC strategies for working with principals and teachers and CA efforts to shape district-level views of parent engagement. We conclude the report with a summary of findings and recommendations for future implementation of the PLI as a model for parent engagement.

Within the framework of the logic model (Exhibit 2), inputs are the different types of resources that an organization provides or uses in support of an initiative or program. Program staff and partners, in turn, leverage use of these resources to support the design and delivery of activities in support of a program's long and short-term goals (e.g. program implementation). In this section, we discuss each of the key measures included in the fidelity of implementation matrix.

## Availability of Parent Resource Rooms

### Implementation Targets: Availability, Met; Hours of availability, Met

In Year 4, CA continued to meet the implementation target for the availability of parent resource rooms with all four campuses having a dedicated space. However, as in prior years, interview participants reported that the functionality of the space and the extent to which it fostered the types of family engagement promoted by the PLI varied across campuses. These variations reflect the challenges CA has faced in securing access to a separate, dedicated space in partner schools since Year 1. Space available for parent resource rooms varied from a small office off the school's main office for one campus to a large, recently renovated space that also began housing the school's food pantry in Year 4. The space for another campus was in the process of renovations at the end of the 2016-17 school year.

> "*THE SCHOOL CAN BE LIKE A COMMUNITY HUB FOR PARENTS WHERE THEY'RE GETTING RESOURCES OR EXPERIENCES THAT HELP TO ELEVATE THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCES AT SCHOOL.*"
> **Children's Aid Community School Director**

During each year of the PLI evaluation, respondents representing school staff, parents, and CA staff have highlighted the importance of this space for facilitating increased levels of family and parent engagement. During interviews, participants discussed the ways in which the space can help facilitate parents' levels of comfort and frequency of time spent on campus. For example, the principal of the school with the small office off the main office noted that he never saw parents congregating in that space. The school's PEC agreed and commented that the size of the room and the proximity to the main office likely dissuaded

parents from wanting to spend time there  . This description of the resource room stood in contrast to the school that housed a separate space for parents and served as a location for many PLI activities including ESL and GED classes. One PEC described the space as being a "neutral zone" and a space where parents feel safe and comfortable. A community school director added that having a "specialized space" parents aligns with the school's goal of "meeting families where they are."

A CA staff person emphasized the importance of the neutral space and discussed the ways in which staff have viewed the space has evolved over the course of the PLI. The staff person stated, that it became increasingly important over time to use the space on each campus and to sponsor activities only in ways that aligned with parents' expressed needs. The staff person explained,

> Because, everywhere else in the school, what's happening in there is dictated by the principal or the teachers. So being able to really create a space where there can be a different power dynamic and real collaboration between parents and school staff, parents with each other, regardless of who their kid is at a school; that is becoming more and more critical, we see, to the work.

The staff member added that maintaining the neutrality of this space grew to be a "non-negotiable" or core aspect of the PLI model over time.

A review of calendars for the school year and discussions with PLI stakeholders continue to indicate that the centers operated throughout the school year with activities offered at some schools during the day and at others on evenings or weekends to best meet the needs of parents. One PEC noted that consistently offering services on a regular schedule in the same space has been critical for building parent buy-in and trust over time. The coordinator stated, "We have ESL every Tuesday and Thursday, no matter what. We don't move them; this is their room." Some PECs also noted that teachers and other school staff used the rooms for other non-PLI activities.

# PEC Staffing

## Implementation Targets: Number, Met; Appropriate qualifications: Met

Throughout PLI implementation, CA has had notable success in maintaining stability in PEC staffing. During the first three years of operation, CA replaced one staff person during Year 2. There was no additional turnover in PEC staff during Years 3 and 4. This stability of staffing has likely had a positive effect on PLI implementation stability over time and reflects positively on the strategy for hiring and placement that was developed during Year 1. Describing the initial hiring process, one CA community school director stated, "I think the [hiring] process that we engaged in, we did a fishbowl, it was a very rigorous process… and I think that really set the tone in the right direction for us, and it has been huge for us. I think for other programs that's probably the most important decision they make."  The program director added that there was an intense focus on hiring staff who were familiar with and lived in the local community. Interviews with parents, teachers, and partners reveal high levels of satisfaction with the PECs with people highlighting the flexibility and commitment of PECs to doing what is necessary to meet the needs of parents and to serving as important members of the school community.

Parents who participated in focus groups during the spring site visits also spoke very highly of their contacts with their school's PECs. Describing the impact of the PEC, one parent stated, "She is the spark of the program. When there is a workshop, she is outside yelling, 'parents, parents, come we have a

workshop today'."  Similarly, a parent described the work of the PEC saying, "She motivates. She makes you feel part of the team, she calls you; she looks for you."

# Adult Education and Training Courses and Workshops

## Implementation Target: Offer planned courses including GED, ESL, technology courses, etc.: Met

Both interview and administrative data indicate that CA staff successfully delivered a range of workshops and activities to families at all partner schools during the 2016-17 school year. Both PLI and other school staff describe on-going efforts to tailor services to meet the needs of the families and broader community served. PECs reported sponsoring or leading a total of more than 200 different activities across the four campuses during the school year. Available programming during the school year included regular ESL and GED classes, family archery, healthy cooking, parent organization meetings, college enrollment planning, school choice planning and preparation, stress management, resume development, and immigration support services.

The topics of activities varied both across and within campuses and reflected the emphasis placed on tailoring services to meet the needs and interests of families. For example, one community school director described school efforts to provide services and supports to the school's grandparents, parents who had recently immigrated from Africa, and families which included an incarcerated parent or other family member. Other examples of targeted services include separate groups for fathers and mothers and for Spanish-speaking parents. A community school director stated, "We will ask them want they want, what they need, what they think is important, or we use a little bit of research so we become experts on the topics or common issues that affect that group [of parents]."  A representative from an organization that partners with CA highlighted staff efforts to "listen to the interests and needs of the people that they are serving; they're not coming in with an agenda per se." The representative commented that this strategy helps make family members feel more comfortable in the school building and also helps to build a sense of community among parents and other family members. Interviews with parents from two campuses confirmed staff reports about efforts to engage parents in the selection and design of activities. At the core of this focus is an understanding that parents choose to be involved in the school and tailoring services increases the likelihood that parents will make the choice to participate in engagement activities.

In contrast to prior years and a key aspect of this tailoring process, Year 4 planning included regular discussions and joint planning with the community school director and most district parent coordinators. Staff from all campuses described on-going strategies to ensure regular communication among key parties and to plan services in a manner that limited the duplication of efforts and ensured that a wide range of services were provided to families. Staff from all campuses discussed regular check-ins among staff and focus groups with parents to help shape the types of services and supports provided. A community school director reported that jointly working on calendars was an important organizational strategy for the school year and helped ensure coordination of efforts. Both the program director and some PECs added that joint planning also provided opportunities for PLI staff to introduce new ways to engage with parents. When asked to discuss changes in PLI implementation over time, one community school director stated, "I think our capacity is different. Our ability to provide so many opportunities for parents including workshops and partnerships." He also added that the level of coordination with the district-funded parent coordinator had improved, and there was less competition as the role of the PECs and the PLI became more clearly defined, stating "at this point, it doesn't feel competitive. It's just do parent work, and we all work together to get it done as opposed to asking, 'oh where is this coming from'?"

# Provide Resources/Support Through Parent Resource Center

## Implementation Target: Offer specified services to 10 percent of parents, Not met

CA has struggled to meet the implementation indicators associated with the delivery of specific services to 10 percent of parents and providing targeted support services for struggling students to 50 percent of identified students. One campus met the 10 percent threshold for parent support during conferences and support for communication with teachers. None of the other three campuses met any of these indicators. In prior years, staff had difficulties consistently entering case management information into the data management system.

Over the course of the three years of operation, Children's Aid has shifted its focus from case management of specific family needs to delivering specific workshops and activities centered around the resource room and building stronger connections with other partners both inside and outside of the school. The project director noted that Children's Aid has placed social workers in most schools as part of community school wrap-around services, and they are moving toward having social workers focus on case management services as needed by families. She noted that during the second year, PECs openly advertised access to the New York Times Neediest fund which provides direct funding to families to meet emergency needs. By Year 4, although those funds were still available, PLI staff were less likely to announce the availability to parents. One school added a food pantry to the resource center and provided services to hundreds of families out of the center.

# Provide Parents with Information about Available Community Resources

## Implementation Target: Provide information and support to at least 30 parents, Not met

As with the prior indicator, capturing the reach of PLI services continued to be a challenge for Year 4. No schools met the implementation target for the 2016-17 school year.

# Parents Participate in Courses and Workshops

## Implementation Target: At least 50 parents complete at least one course or workshop per campus, Met. At least 30 parents achieve leadership level (complete at least 23 hours of workshops), Met

Parent engagement coordinators were successful in meeting implementation targets for parent participation in workshops during the 2016-17 school year. PECs from all four campuses were successful in having at least 50 parents per campus complete one course or workshop. The number of participants in workshops continued to increase in Year 4. The number of adult participants increased from 856 in Year 2 to 1,887 in Year 3 to 2,817 in Year 4. The number of parents participating in an activity across campuses ranged from 327 to 952.

Additionally, three of four campuses were successful in having at least 30 parents achieve leadership status by completing 23 or more hours of courses or workshops. The number of parents achieving leadership status increased from 157 to 169 from Year 3 to Year 4. A total of 97 parents achieved leadership status in Year 2. Among parents achieving leadership status during the 2016-17 school year, approximately 46 percent of parents had previously achieved leadership status during a prior school year, and 54 percent had achieved the status for the first time during the year.

# Working with Principals and Teachers

Year 3 findings highlighted the role that school context played in the ways that the PLI has been implemented over time. The framework for understanding the continuum of school contexts outlined at beginning of this report provides a useful context for understanding goals and operation of the PLI. The development of strong partnerships with community school staff, teachers, principals, parents, and staff from partner organizations serves as an important but hard-to-quantify aspect of PLI operation. Interviews with PECs, community school directors, district parent engagement coordinators, principals, and parents underscore the challenges faced in developing and maintaining these partnerships over time.

### Working with principals.

Principals play critical roles in shaping how schools function. Across all campuses staff noted that, at some level, principals from all schools recognized the importance of securing parental involvement and the potential positive impact of parental involvement on student

> "BUT HERE, I HAVE LOST THE FEAR. AND WITH MY SON, I CAN READ TO HIM . I CAN SAY THE ALPHABET WITH HIM. AND IN NUTRITION CLASS, IT'S GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH TO KNOW THESE THINGS, TO KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR MY SON SO HE CAN STAY HEALTHY."
>
> **PLI Parent**

achievement. A CA staff person commented that findings from the Year 3 report revealed a gap "between our understanding of the practices around parent engagement, versus what principals understand and/or want." She added that the principals do not have to engage in the PLI if they choose not to. To address this gap the PLI program director focused efforts on modifying how the program interacted with principals on two key levels: (1) within each partner school and (2) at the district level by developing an understanding of the messages about family engagement that principals received from regional and district offices and office staff. The staff person commented that the district-level work was a key shift in practice that they had not anticipated when initially designing the program.

Despite these efforts, principal understanding of the full extent and goals of the PLI continued to vary across campuses in Year 4. Interviews with nearly all principals revealed a clear tension between a more direct focus on parents as facilitators of student academic achievement and engagement and the more seemingly indirect focus on increasing parent capacity as promoted by the PLI. Interviews with principals also indicate that accountability pressures from the school district to meet specific goals for parent engagement may be the source of some of these tensions. These pressures may be especially challenging if the PLI operates on a co-located campus because the PEC must balance meeting the needs of a different principals who might have different goals or visions for PLI operation.

Principal interviews highlight these tensions. For example, one principal commented that he was not fully clear on PLI goals. He stated, "I think one of the things that I would like to know more about [is] what Children's Aid vision for parent engagement is and how that would combine with what our vision is."

Principals from two schools emphasized the importance that they placed on having the PEC help them meet the parent engagement duties as captured in their annual principal evaluation. One principal stated,

> I have requirements that I need to meet. Those academic outcomes that I need to meet…The feedback that I get when I'm evaluated against the quality review or my performance, from my superintendent. And so I have to put an action plan into place also.

Another principal expressed a similar sentiment highlighting the tension between an explicit focus on serving parents as individuals versus serving parents as means of facilitating increased student engagement and school improvement. Discussing strategies to improve PEC hiring by Children's Aid, the principal stated:

> *TO KNOW THAT YOU CAN COME IN AND IT'S NOT THREATENING. YOU CAN COME IN AND SIT WITH YOUR CHILD AND DO PROJECTS WITH THEM, AND THE MATERIALS ARE THERE, AND THERE'S A RESOURCE AND THERE'S AN OUTLET. EVEN IF THE PARENT DOES HAVE A STRUGGLE … IT COULD BE WITH A TEACHER, IT COULD BE WITH THE SCHOOL, IT COULD BE WITH WHATEVER, TO KNOW THAT THERE'S A NEUTRAL VOICE THAT'S NOT THERE TO JUDGE, AND THAT IS THERE TO SUPPORT THEM AND THEIR CHILD. THAT MAKES IT ALL THE MORE WORTHWHILE."*
>
> **Teacher in PLI school**

> I would say that the organizational weakness for Children's Aid might be what their vetting process is to bring in individuals who all have that idea that our job here is to support the principal and the school, not thinking of themselves as individuals or as separate from the school, but thinking of themselves as part of the school.

This response highlights a persisting gap between the PLI vision and the principal's vision for parent engagement. The CA vision for parent engagement prioritizes the parent as the recipient of services and support and helping parents "set the stage" for student academic success. This focus stands in contrast to a vision of engagement which prioritizes the principal or students. The ultimate goals of each of the visions for parent engagement are the same: enable students to be more engaged in school and experience increased levels of academic achievement. It is the paths by which these goals are achieved that differs. This is not to say that CA staff don't appreciate the importance of being directly supportive of the principal and his/her goals for the school. A CA staff person discussed the transactional nature of relationships between external and school-based staff in some schools. In these situations, external staff such as the community school director may be asked to perform some duties or hold activities which fall outside the scope of their preferred work. However, building trusting relationships with principals is critical to the initiative's overall success so some level of transactional work may have to occur. The CA staff person noted that it is important for staff to balance these competing demands. She stated:

> So we've had to really work with the [community school] directors. Both kind of understanding the position they're in, supporting them because they do a lot of work to clear the path for the parent engagement work; while at the same time, figuring out those points where, no, this is a non-negotiable point in terms of the practice, because it might undermine the parent's trust in what's happening there, or it might send the wrong message, which would undermine trust. Those things we've had to do a little bit more work around. That's not in every place, but in some places, where it tends to show up more.

Discussing the different roles between the work of the PEC and the district coordinator in her school, another principal stated that she prioritized the public relations role of the parent engagement staff

person, stating that a key role for the school's district-funded parent coordinator was to "get our message out there…to be the first face our parents see when they come to the school." The principal also noted that the district coordinator also provided a level of "interference" when a parent just needed to talk.

Reflecting on this aspect of school context, a CA staff person emphasized the importance of PECs maintaining neutrality between parents and the principal when operating in the school rather than being seen by parents as an extension of the principal. The staff person noted that gaining the trust of parents is critical for the type of work called for by the PLI. The almost inevitable dynamics of power that come to play in schools when dealing with the principal has the potential of undermining this trust. Discussing the relative independence that the PECs have from the school's principal compared with district-provided parent coordinators, the CA staff person stated:

> What they've begun to understand is that there are some things that just have to come from the school's parent coordinator, versus things that happen in the parent engagement center. Ideally, what we'd love to see is that everybody's practice is the same, and that tension between parent engagement vis-a-vis the principal in the principal's role, versus just good engagement that really reinforces the role of the parent in the school community and in their child's education; that those things will become one and the same. But right now, that's not the case. The parent engagement coordinator really being focused on just that, not intervening in a conflict between a principal and a parent. In that instance, the power dynamic is all leaned on the principal's end because the parent coordinator is employed by who?

Few PECs described extensive relationships with principals around PLI planning and implementation. Both the PECs and the principals stated that principals were more likely to have regular conversations with the community school director or the district-funded parent engagement coordinator about parent engagement work. Describing the principal's involvement with family engagement activities, one PEC acknowledged the different pressures the principal faced as leader of the school and how those pressures might affect the level of engagement with parent activities. She stated,

> I guess that the weight of having the city behind her, teachers, and the daily things that happen…I think it's taken a toll on her, as on all of us, but I feel this is a team effort, and I feel that if she could delegate more and have less on her shoulders, it [the PLI] could work better. Her role could be more substantial, it could have more meaning, or she could reach out to better grasp what she's supposed to do as principal.

The PEC indicated that the principal was somewhat separated from the parents and that things might be better if she was "out" there more. A PEC who leads activities on a co-located campus described a more open relationship with one principal and more challenging relationship with the other principal, stating:

> The principal trusts us so much. We're able to say, 'that might not work, let's try it this way.' Or we're able to say, 'we failed, how can we do it better next time?' We have a healthy partnership. We don't have that relationship [with the other principal]. [The principal] wants everything her way. If I produce good work, that's good for her. We did a workshop, she came in and said, 'This is great. This is what I want to see more. And she left. It's not the best partnership, but at the end of the day…as long as parents feel safe in this room and the workshops we do are successful, that's all that matters.

PECs from the other two campuses described similar respectful, but somewhat limited, relationships with principals.

*Working with teachers.* Both PECs and the project director noted increased levels of involvement with teachers in partner schools during the 2016-17 school year. All four PECs described more explicit efforts to connect with teachers. Teachers who participated in focus groups also reported increased outreach by PECs during the school year compared with prior years. Strategies for connecting with teachers included reaching out to them individually to see if there were

> "WE'RE PUSHING TEACHERS. WE'RE [WORKING] NOT ONLY WITH THE PARENTS, BUT THE TEACHERS AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS. AND I THINK, AS TIME GOES BY, THEY SEE THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS. THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF ENGAGING A PARENT. IT'S NOT JUST PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCE."
>
> **PLI Parent Engagement Coordinator**

ways that the PECs could help teachers make better connections with parents and responding to specific requests for assistance posed by some teachers. PECs also reported inviting teachers into the resource room so that they could see both the number of parents who were in attendance and the types of activities in which they were engaged. One parent engagement coordinator linked the development of these relationships with the consistency of services and visibility that the PLI had achieved in the school over the prior two school years. Over time, PECs said that they were able to build credibility with and gain the trust of some teachers in the school. Describing work with teachers, one PEC stated that she approaches teachers individually to discuss parent engagement strategies and the ways that engagement can support student goals for students. PECs, teachers, and principals from several of the campuses discussed PEC support of the academic parent-teacher teams (APTT) conferences implemented by some PLI schools. These conferences provide a platform for the development of a closer partnership between parents and teachers. One PEC also discussed working with teachers to offer grade-level mathematics and literacy sessions for parents.

Teachers from three campuses discussed their work with their school's PEC. Describing the role and impact of the PLI, one teacher stated:

> I see that as a way to engage parents and bring them into the building. If you think about a child's life cycle as a triangle in school, one angle is the parent, one angle is the child, and one angle is the teacher. And they have to work in conjunction, or else you'll have that open shape, and information goes in and out, but it isn't retained. By having your parents actively involved, it creates that support. One good thing about a triangle is that you turn it on any side, it will stand. So that parent is very necessary to help that triangle remain a structure, its integrity and to stand. I think by these programs... The parents feel involved, and they feel that they are important.

Although some teachers were open to PEC support, PECs noted that not all teachers were open to PLI efforts. However, despite some resistance, PECs commented that they continued to attempt to make these connections finding that some resistant teachers become less resistant over time, especially if they were able to see the partnerships with other teachers in practice. PECs also noted that teacher turnover also makes it important for PECs to continue to reach out since new relationships are constantly needed to be forged with incoming teachers.

*Working with district staff.* CA staff made efforts to explain its vision of parent engagement with staff from the New York Department of Education. The program director reported that the primary goal of the district outreach was to increase awareness of the nature of PLI engagement efforts. The project director stated that as part of these efforts she presented to district parent coordinators approximately

three times about core elements of the PLI approach. Topics of training included: the use of space, cultural competence, parent trust, and parent advocacy. A former district staff person praised CA efforts to bring a coherent view of parent engagement to the school district. The former staff person noted that there has traditionally been no clear vision for parent engagement in the district beyond the desire for increased levels of parent involvement. She added that the lack of clarity resulted in a lack of consistency of efforts across schools and parent coordinators.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section of the report we summarize key findings from Year 4 and highlight potential implications of these findings for future scale-up efforts for Children's Aid and the PLI.

## The PLI Model: Fidelity of Implementation and Potential Changes to the Model

The PLI continued to operate as initially planned for most key program components. The PLI was successful in meeting implementation targets for (1) PEC staffing, (2) the availability of a resource room, (3) the delivery of a diverse array of activities and workshops for parents, and (4) the number of parents participating in activities and workshops and achieving leadership status. Participation and leadership level numbers increased annually between Years 2 and 4.

As for the other two indicators which reflect the case management aspects of the initial PLI model, some campuses were able to achieve one or two of the individual indicators, but the initiative as a whole was unable to achieve the overall indicators for any school year. This status likely reflects both the difficulty of adequately capturing the more informal aspects of PEC work and the increased focus, over time, on working with school staff more closely and developing and delivering a wide range of tailored activities for parents as a whole.

This shift in focus from individual case management to larger scale activities for parents and more direct contact with other school stakeholders potentially has implications for the program model. If this is the direction that staff from Children's Aid advocate, then removing case management activities as indicators of PLI operation may be something to consider as the organization reviews ideas for scale-up and replication. It is likely that some level of this work will continue as a result of PEC relationships with parents but removal of this work as a key area of focus for PECs may be warranted. Continuing to build strong connections with the community school director, school social worker, and other school-based staff will allow parents to continue to receive needed services and supports while allowing PECs to continue focus on joint planning and developing tailored activities.

Another potential change to the PLI model centers around core components which currently include space, staff, and the tailoring of services to parents. However, undergirding the PLI model both explicitly and implicitly is the work needed to develop and maintain partnerships with key stakeholders including the principal, teachers, and other community school staff. As CA considers options for scaling up and/or replicating the PLI model, it may be helpful to consider making this core work more explicitly a component of the PLI model. A more formal recognition of the role of these partnerships in the PLI model highlights the importance of these partnerships and may encourage earlier conversations with the different stakeholder groups about the role the PLI can play in overall school operation.

## Working with Teachers and Principals

The development of effective partnerships continued to be an area in which most PECs expressed at least some level of challenge. Year 4 saw an increased effort to work more directly with teachers around their work with parents. Both PECs and teachers discussed the increased efforts toward collaboration. The on-going challenges in developing effective partnerships are likely a reflection of the persistent gap between how principals typically view parental involvement and the vision of the PLI. More traditional views of parent engagement conceive of parents primarily as monitors and motivators of their children. This monitoring and motivating of students may lead to increased levels of student performance. The PLI also recognizes the importance of this level of parent involvement. However, the focus of the PLI is on increasing the capacity of parents to be effective in these roles and making them feel comfortable and welcome in the school via participation in sponsored workshops and activities. In the model, increasing parent capacity and level of comfort in the school may result in higher levels of student performance by helping parents set the stage for higher levels of student performance or engagement. Interview data from Year 4 indicate that more work with principals is likely necessary to help craft more closely aligned visions of parent engagement. It will be important for CA staff to clearly explain its focus on stage setting versus traditional parent engagement at the beginning of activities and making efforts to secure principal understanding and buy in.

However, despite these gaps in visions for parent engagement, the PLI continued to operate, with success, on all campuses during the 2016-17 school year. During interviews, all principals noted that they valued parental involvement at some level and also valued the partnership with Children's Aid. These factors appear to provide some level of space for the PLI to operate and provide opportunities for parent engagement work on all partner campuses. Referring back to the SEDL continuum of family-school partnership, no PLI schools were operating at the completely ineffective level. The increased level of partnership with other members of the school community, particularly the community school director, allowed the breadth and depth of PLI implementation to increase in Year 4. However, to move to fully effective partnerships as defined in the SEDL model, full principal buy-in to the PLI model would be needed. CA may want to consider the extent to which this level of full principal buy-in, as opposed to minimal to moderate levels of buy-in where principals are open to but not fully engaged in the work, are desired in discussions of scale-up and replication. Data from Years 3 and 4 suggest that the PLI can operate with success in schools characterized by a low/moderate level of principal buy-in. Full integration of the PLI into overall school operation will, however, only occur with higher levels of principal buy-in and engagement.

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# Appendix A

# Exhibit A-1
# Initial PLI Logic Model

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes (Proximal) *Increased parental engagement in their children's education* | Outcomes (Intermediate) *Improved academic engagement* | Outcomes (Distal) *Improved academic performance* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Hire and Train Parent Coordinators**

Conduct adult education and training courses and workshops, including:
- Literacy, GED, ESL, & Technology courses
- Supporting academic achievement at home
- Home study environment
- Executive functioning and child development
- School system data
- School choice and transitions
- College preparation & planning
- Advocacy practices

Parents participate in multiple courses and workshops
- 240 parents (~40 per school) complete core workshops and at least two course series
- 320 additional parents (~50 per school) attend at least one workshop in home study environments, college prep, using school system data to monitor a child's progress, or school choice/transition

Parents increase time spent helping with home learning activities

More parents attend parent-teacher conferences

**Create Parent Resources Centers**

Provide resources/support through parent resource center to strengthen home-school connections, including providing information and support on:
- Parent/teacher conferences
- Improving parent/teacher communications
- How to become involved in school leadership and volunteer activities

Target outreach to parents of struggling students

Parents visit school resource centers
- 240 parents (~40 per school) visit at least 5 times to:
  + sign up for courses and workshops
  + build relationship with school staff
  + learn how to communicate with teachers
  + receive support for parent/teacher conferences

Parents communicate with school staff more frequently

More parents attend school-wide events and volunteer at school

More frequent use of DOE school system data

**Activate Linkages to Community Partners**

Provide parents with information about available community resources for themselves and their children

Provide referrals to parents/families with specific needs

Parents and families make connections to community resources
- 300 parents receive information
- 180 make connections
- 75% of students establish a medical home and receive preventative services

Parents attach greater importance to education and feel they have more efficacy

Increased school attendance

More frequent completion of homework

Improved classroom behavior

Increased student educational aspirations and attachment to school

Improved performance on achievement tests

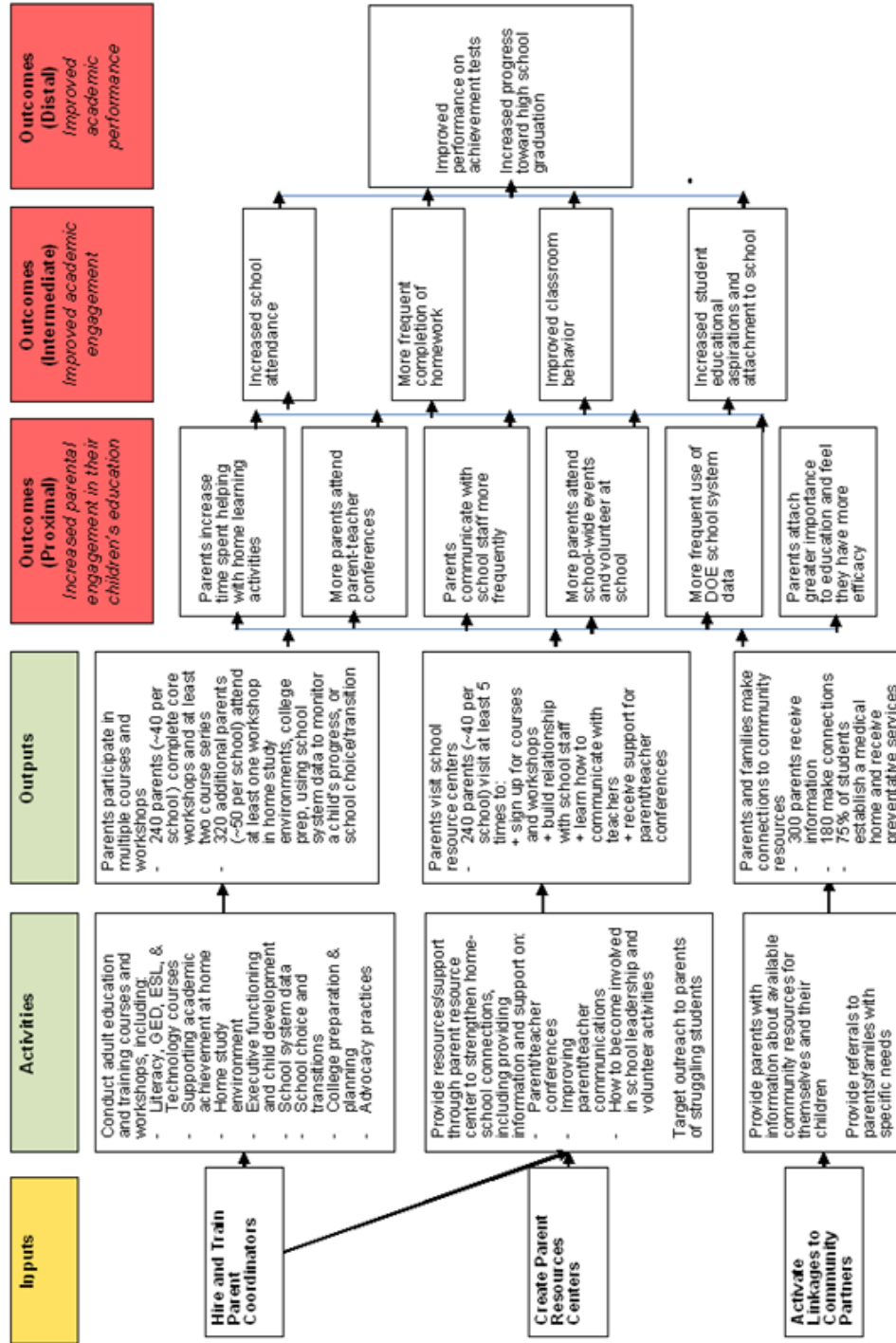Increased progress toward high school graduation

A-I

## Exhibit A-2
## PLI Fidelity of Implementation Matrix, 2016-17

| Major Component | Possible Score | Sub-Components | Campus A | Campus B | Campus C | Campus D | Programmatic Indicator Met |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 Establish Parent Resource Centers at Each School | 1 | **1.1** Allocation of space in the school building | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| | 1 | **1.2** Hours Center is scheduled to open spans both the school day, afternoons, and evenings | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| **Measures** | 4 | **1.0 Total** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **Yes** |
| 2.0 Hire and Train Family engagement coordinators | 1 | **2.1.** The number of family engagement coordinators planned for each school are hired and trained by CAS | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| | 1 | **2.2** The proportion of family engagement coordinators with qualifications set for their position | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| **Measures** | 2 | **2.0 Total** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **Yes** |
| 3.0 Conduct adult education and training courses and workshops | 1 | **3.1** Offer planned GED, ESL & Technology courses | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| **Measures** | 1 | **3.0 Total** | **Y** | **Y** | **Y** | **Y** | **Yes** |
| 4.0 Provide Resources/support Through Parent Resource Center | 1 | **4.1** Provide information and support in advance of parent teacher conferences to 10% of parents | N | N | N | N | No |
| | 1 | **4.2** Provide help desk, support center during parent teacher conferences to 10% of parents | N | Y | N | N | No |

| Major Component | Possible Score | Sub-Components | Campus A | Campus B | Campus C | Campus D | Programmatic Indicator Met |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | **4.3** Provide individualized support on communicating with teachers to 10% of parents | N | Y | N | N | No |
| | 1 | **4.4** Provide opportunities for parents to sign up for school leadership and volunteer activities to 10% of parents | N | N | N | N | No |
| | 1 | **4.5** Targeted outreach to parents of struggling students to 50% of parents identified | N | N | N | N | No |
| **Measures** | **5** | **4.0 Total** | | | | | |
| **5.0 Provide parents with information about available community resources** | 1 | **5.1** Provide information, supports, and referrals for other parent and family needs (e.g., housing and emergency assistance; sexual health; at least 30 parents) | N | N | N | N | No |
| **Measures** | **3** | **5.0 Total** | **N** | **Y** | **N** | **N** | **No** |
| **6.0 Parents participate in courses and workshops** | 1 | **6.1** Parents complete at least one course or workshop | Y | Y | Y | Y | Yes |
| | 1 | **6.2** Parents achieve leadership level (complete 23+ hours of workshops; at least 30 parents) | Y | Y | N | Y | Yes |
| **Measures** | **2** | **6.0 Total** | **2** | **2** | **Y** | **2** | **Yes** |