

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

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The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems builds on the original Head Start PFCE Framework developed in 2011 by the Office of Head Start and the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, and its partner organizations—the Brazelton Touchpoints Center (lead), Harvard Family Research Project, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Save the Children—under Grant #90HC0014 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start.

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INTRODUCTION

Family engagement is essential to high quality services for all children in early childhood care and education. From the beginning of life, families nurture their children and the capacities they will need to be ready for school. The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework for Early Childhood Systems is a guide to understanding the collaborative relationship between parents and early childhood systems, programs, providers, family caregivers, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring change for children, families, and communities.

Who is the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems for?

The research-based PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems is for State, Tribal and Territory leaders, administrators, providers, parents, and other decision-makers in early childhood systems and programs (See “What the Research Says” and “Selected References” below).

At the system level, the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems provides States, Tribes, and Territories, communities, programs, providers, family caregivers, and parents with a vision for integrating family engagement across early childhood system components. These components include system standards, licensing, monitoring, quality improvement processes, professional development, consumer education, and State and community partnerships.

At the program level, the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems provides a road map for integrating family engagement strategies across systems, programs, and service providers in communities.

What is the purpose of the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems?

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems describes the components of early childhood systems as they relate to parent, family, and community engagement. Consider these systems components as you plan to coordinate strategies throughout your system to positively impact programs and strengthen child and family outcomes. The Framework specifies the elements in a program that can be coordinated to impact child and family outcomes. (The program elements are similar to those of the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework.)

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems identifies important drivers for these outcomes within all system components and program elements across the entire early childhood (EC) field. These drivers are positive and goal-oriented relationships, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, inclusiveness, and equity.



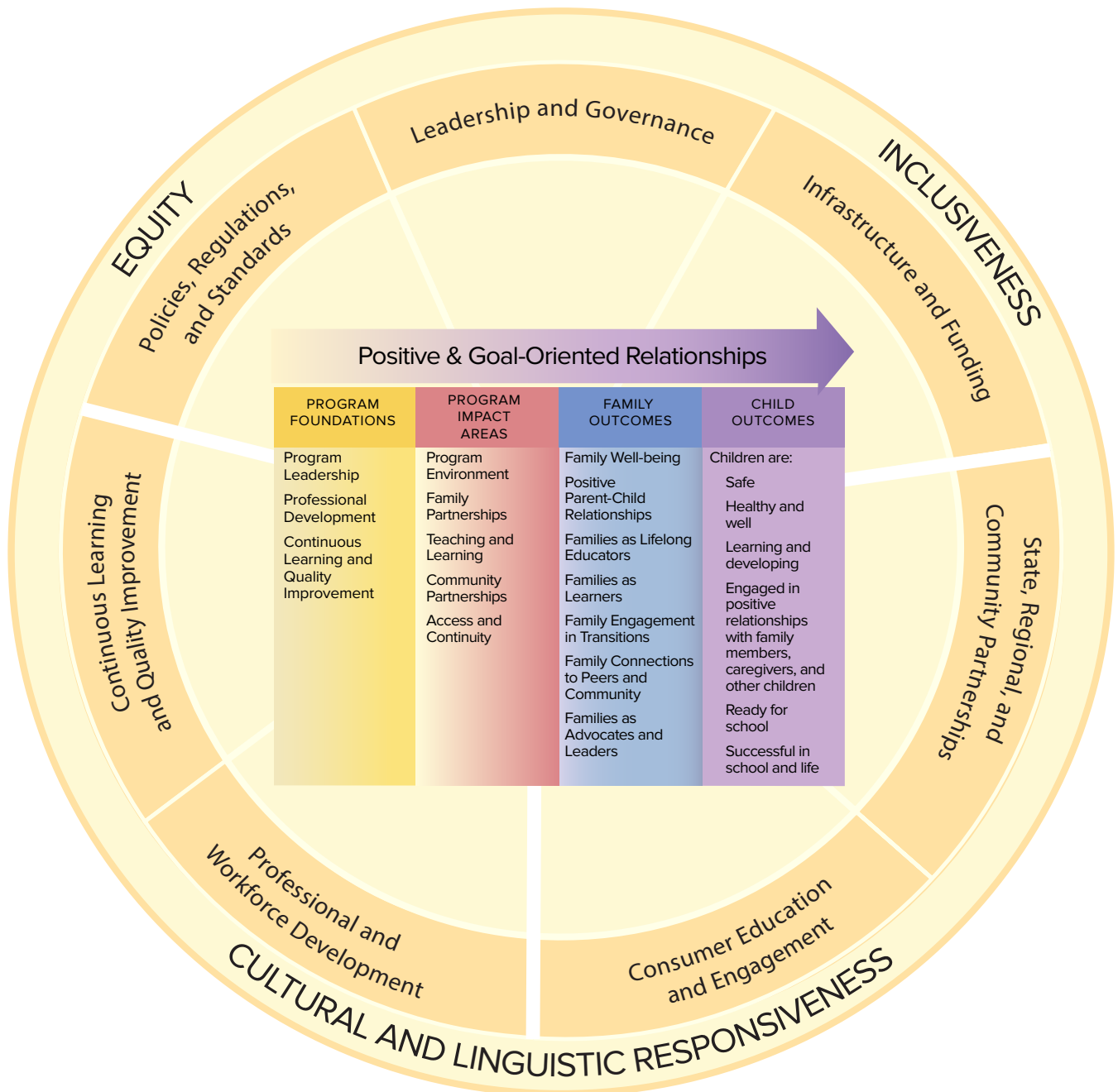
The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement intends to be as inclusive as possible of adult caregivers. We recognize that a range of statutes use eligibility-based definitions of parent. In this resource, **parents** refers to all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, including biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparents; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings.

In this resource the term **early childhood system** refers to a set of systems that seek to improve families' access to the range of supports that enable all young children to thrive. These systems include program services and support infrastructure related to children's health, early childhood education and care (including early intervention and IDEA Part B supports for children with delays or disabilities), and family support. System building refers to the ongoing process of developing, improving, and coordinating the structures and services that promote shared results for young children, families, and their communities.



PFCE FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems is a visual guide for understanding how early childhood systems components can be aligned to support early childhood programs providers, family caregivers, family child care givers, and community service providers. Together they work with parents to promote positive, enduring outcomes for families, children, and communities. Equity, inclusiveness, and cultural linguistic responsiveness are overarching PFCE aims.



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The early years of life are critical times to foster bonds between children and their caregivers and to establish positive relationships that promote children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development (Klebanov & Travis, 2015). The PFCE Framework draws on a range of research conducted in Head Start and Early Head Start, in other early childhood programs, as well as in K–12 schools.

Organizational and Systemic Approach

The organizational context of early childhood programs is important for establishing quality family partnerships (Douglass, 2011). The PFCE Framework emphasizes the effect of organizational processes on family engagement and parent-child outcomes.

These processes occur within and across both system components and program elements (Sheridan & Kim, 2015). Establishing relational trust and focusing on accountability across systems of care are linked to improved partnerships with families and progress toward addressing systemic challenges (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). High-quality family partnership practices are best achieved when leaders model reciprocal, professional, caring relationships, and share power within the entire organization (Douglass, 2011; Douglass & Gittell, 2012).

Provider-Parent Relationships

Programs that prioritize effective family engagement practices support the efforts of providers and all staff to build positive and goal-oriented relationships with families. Families who are active, respected participants can help providers see new ways to build safe, welcoming, and trusting environments (Reedy & McGrath, 2010; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010).



Strong partnerships between teachers and families help build their trust in each other (Karakuş & Savaş, 2012). Mutual trust helps providers feel more confident and open with parents, especially when discussing concerns about a child's development or behavior (Reedy & McGrath, 2010). Parents' perceptions of teacher responsiveness are an important dimension of parent-school relationships and correlate with the frequency of parental involvement (Powell et al., 2010).



Parenting

Programs such as Early Head Start that prioritize family engagement improve parents' knowledge of child-rearing practices (Love et al., 2005). Parent knowledge relates most directly to three of the PFCE Framework family outcomes:

- Positive parent-child relationships
- Families as lifelong educators
- Families as learners

Access to information about their children's learning and development affects parents' self-efficacy, confidence, and skills (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005). It also influences their motivation to trust, collaborate, and remain positively involved with providers and programs (Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002; Powell et al., 2010).

Child Development and School Readiness

Family engagement plays a major role in children's school readiness, impacting social-emotional and academic competencies (e.g., Starkey & Klein, 2000; Powell et al., 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011). These effects have been found all the way through K–12 and beyond (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013; Jeynes, 2016). Family engagement also improves child-teacher relationships (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008) and helps smooth child and family transitions to kindergarten (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012).

DEFINING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement is an interactive process through which early childhood education (EC) providers and other EC professionals, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. Building and maintaining these relationships is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families.

At the program level, family engagement involves parents' engagement with their children and with providers as they work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children. At state systems levels, EC leaders partner with parent leaders and programs to promote family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for providers and families. At both the program and state systems levels, EC providers work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

Community engagement refers to the same kind of mutually respectful, strengths-based interactions. In communities, these take place among community members and agencies, families, and EC staff at all levels. As with family engagement, interactions between EC staff and community agencies build positive, culturally and linguistically responsive relationships. These relationships support parents' roles as valued community members and their progress toward their goals for themselves and their children.

At the program level, community partners provide material child development supports and resources that families, providers, family friends, and neighbor caregivers want and need. They can work with families and EC providers toward such goals as parents' educational advancement, economic mobility, and other aspects of family well-being.

At the state systems level, State and local early childhood leaders actively seek out and respond to community strengths and needs. They collaborate with families, community members, and other local agencies to identify common goals, align resources, and share data for continuous improvement and effective partnerships. Together they design systems and policies that promote equitable access to high-quality EC programs and other comprehensive services. These services may include health, nutritional, and social services, among others.

Children are at the heart of meaningful family engagement. They are the inspiration for positive, goal-oriented parent-provider relationships.

Parents enter into relationships with providers on their children's behalf, and they deepen them with their children in mind. They know their children better than anyone—their temperaments, personalities, strengths, vulnerabilities, talents, and special needs. They know their own cultures and the cultures they want to transmit to their children. When parents share their knowledge, they improve provider practices and program quality.

Providers create authentic partnerships with parents when they convey their eagerness to welcome parents' expertise and their readiness to share the care. Parents can believe in the partnership when they feel the passion that providers share with them—for the quality of the child's everyday experiences, for supporting the parent-child relationship, and for laying the foundations early for a thriving future.



PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VISION: SYSTEMIC, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE

Every day parents, other family and community members, and professionals in the early childhood system interact in ways that can be considered family engagement activities. These interactions include important, relationship-based practices that help families achieve their goals. For parent, family, and community engagement practices to be effective and have a long-term impact on children and families, they need to be systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.

Systemic

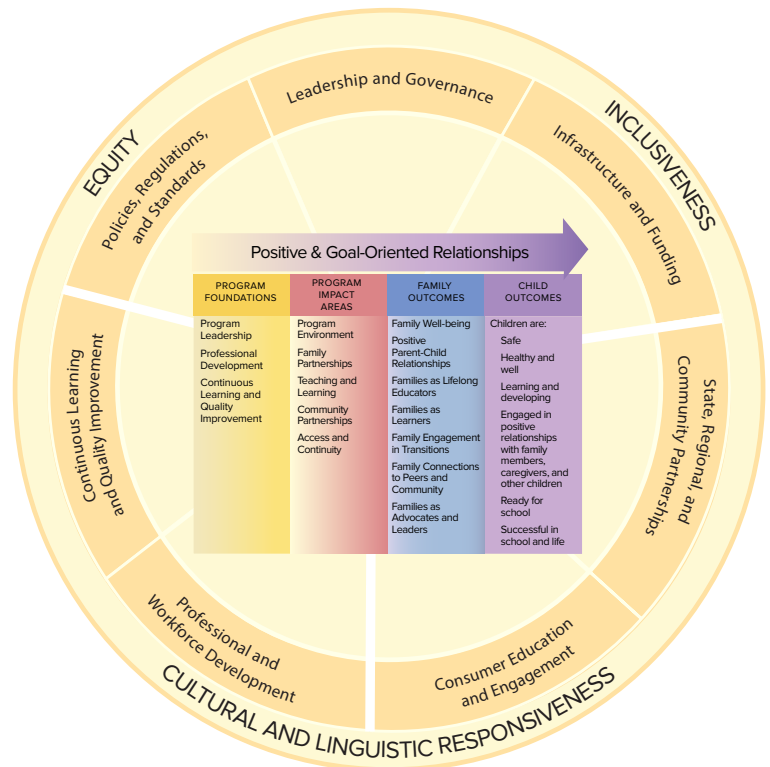
All early childhood systems components and program elements specified in the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems have a role to play in promoting PFCE. By *Systemic* PFCE, we mean that everyone involved in early childhood systems and programs works together toward a shared vision of PFCE. All providers, parents, agencies, and organizations understand each other's roles and how they connect to others in the system. PFCE is everyone's business.

Integrated

All parts of systems and programs achieve better PFCE results by working together. By *Integrated PFCE*, we mean that all people and organizations in early childhood systems coordinate and reinforce each other's efforts in order to maximize their impact. They coordinate within and across different education settings and health, nutritional, social, and other services to help families access community activities and services and to work toward seamless experiences for families.

Comprehensive

Early childhood systems are designed to respond holistically to the full range of strengths, interests, and needs of children and families within the contexts of their communities. By *Comprehensive PFCE*, we mean that everyone involved in the early childhood systems works to connect families with all of the available health, early childhood care and education, and family support services and resources they need to achieve their goals.



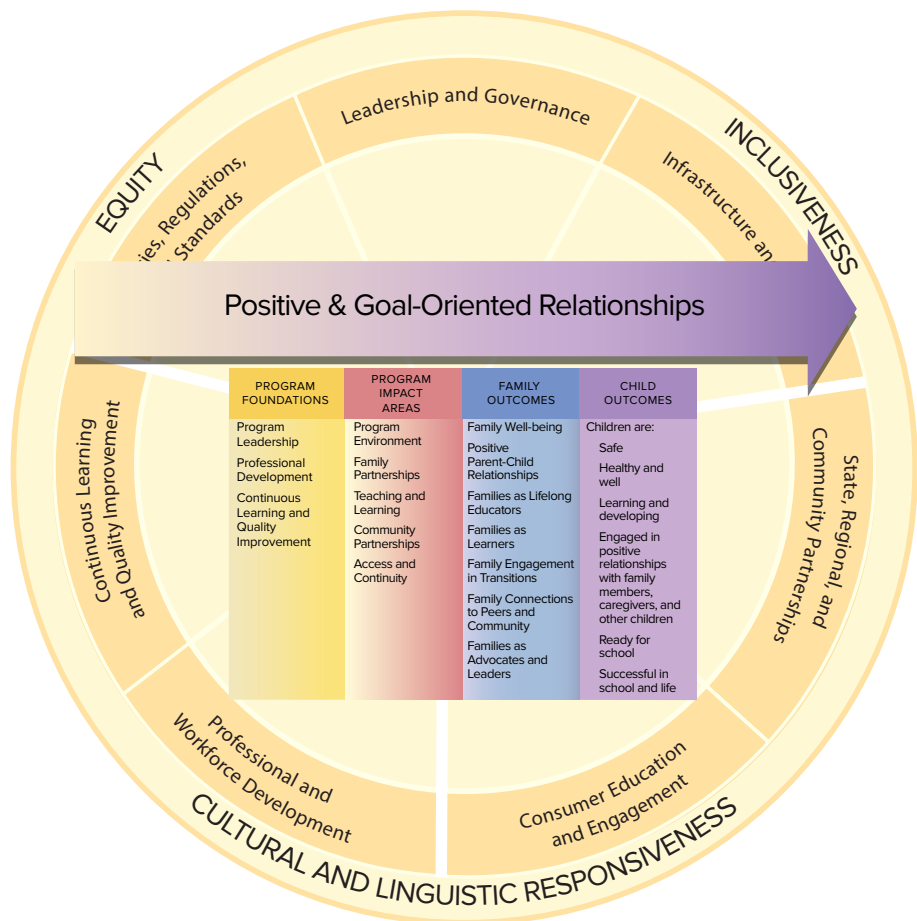
POSITIVE, GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS ADVANCE CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

Positive and goal-oriented relationships develop over time through interactions among individuals in Early Childhood (EC) systems and programs, including parents, other family members, program staff, and other EC system professionals. These relationships

- are fueled by parents’ passion for their children,
- are based on mutual respect and trust,
- affirm and celebrate families’ cultures and languages,
- provide opportunities for two-way communications,
- include authentic interactions that are meaningful to those who participate in them, and
- often require awareness of personal biases and the effect of those biases on mutual respect and trust.

Positive, goal-oriented relationships improve wellness by reducing isolation and stress for families, parents, and providers. When these relationships focus on shared goals for children, providers and families can experience the support that comes from knowing that they are all on the same team. These relationships strengthen EC programs and systems and are core to every aspect of them.

Positive, goal-oriented relationships promote the aims of equity, inclusiveness and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.



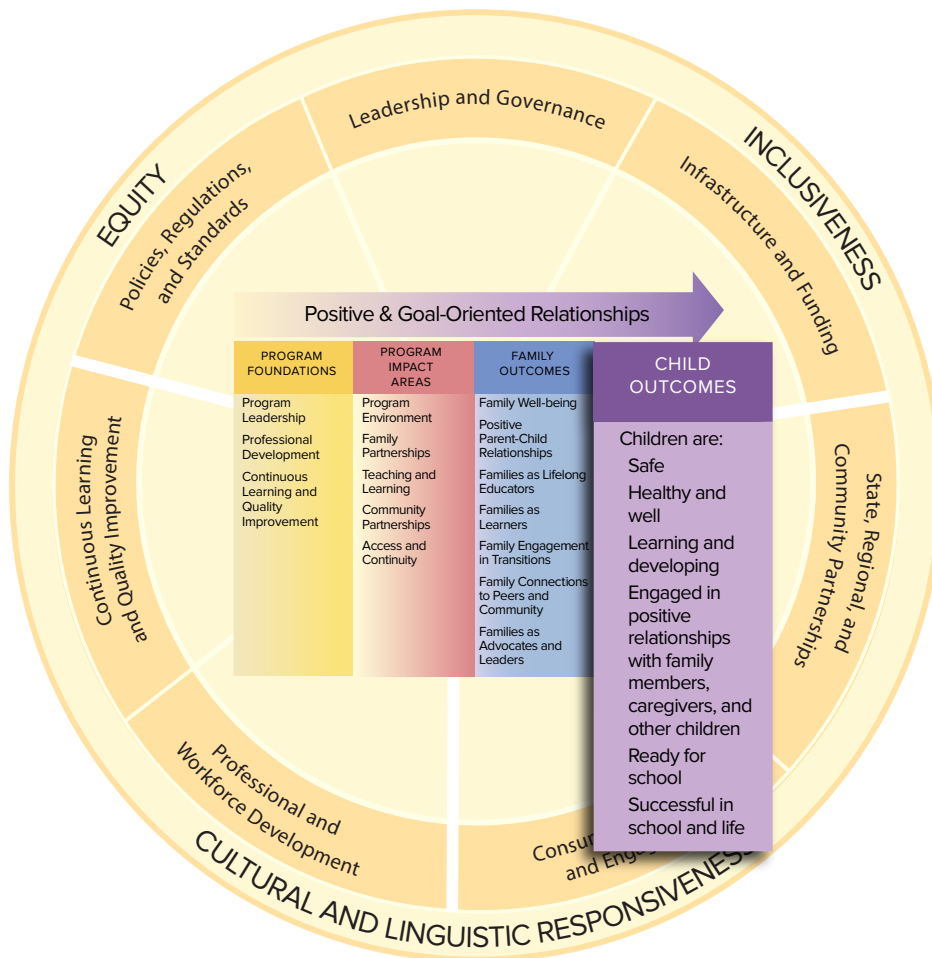
PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEGINS WITH THE END IN MIND

Child Outcomes

In line with State and local early learning guidelines, early childhood systems and programs strive for overarching outcomes that children are

- safe;
- healthy and well;
- learning and developing;
- engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children;
- ready for school; and
- successful in school and life.

These outcomes are aligned with the child outcomes in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.



Family Outcomes

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems specifies seven family outcomes that research has shown to promote positive child outcomes.

Family Well-being

Families are safe, are healthy, have opportunities for educational advancement and economic mobility, and have access to physical and mental health services, housing and food assistance, and other family support services.

Positive Parent-Child Relationships

Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships with their child that nurture their child’s health, development, and learning.

Families as Lifelong Educators

Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, at school, and in their communities.

Families as Learners

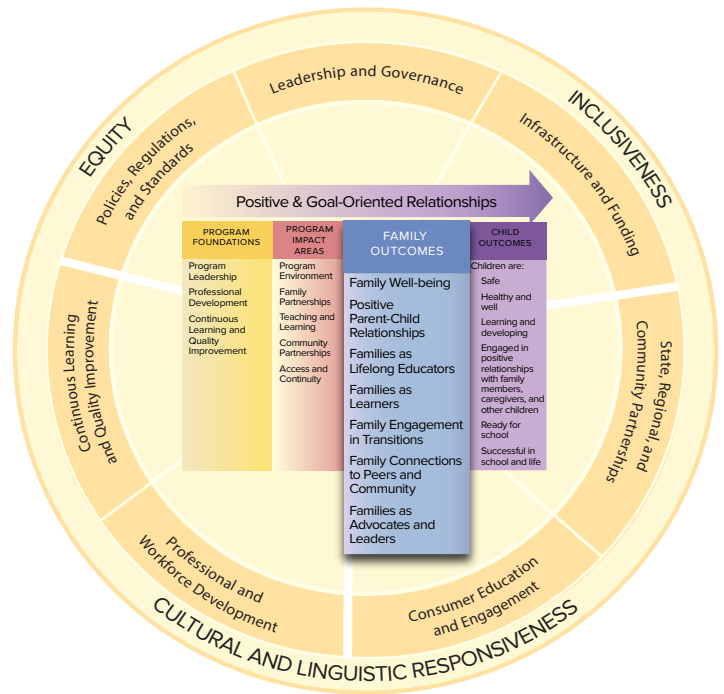
Parents and families learn about their child’s personality, development, and learning style. They also advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

Family Engagement in Transitions

Parents and families encourage and advocate for their child’s learning and development as they transition to new learning environments within and between EC services, early elementary grades, and beyond.

Family Connections to Peers and Community

Parents and families form connections with peers, mentors, and other community members in formal or informal social networks. These social networks are supportive and educational, honor and are inclusive of families’ home language and culture, and enhance families’ social well-being and community life.



Families as Advocates and Leaders

Parents and families advocate for their children and play leadership roles in EC programs and systems. They participate in decision-making, policy development, and community and state organizing activities to improve children’s health, development, and learning experiences.

These outcomes can guide EC professionals as they work with families on the goals parents set for themselves and their children, and as they track progress together toward these goals.



DEFINING EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS COMPONENTS AND PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems shows how **EC systems components** and **program elements** can be coordinated to strengthen program quality and promote positive family and child outcomes. Equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness are overarching PFCE goals. These goals are achievable when they are prioritized within and across all systems components and program elements.

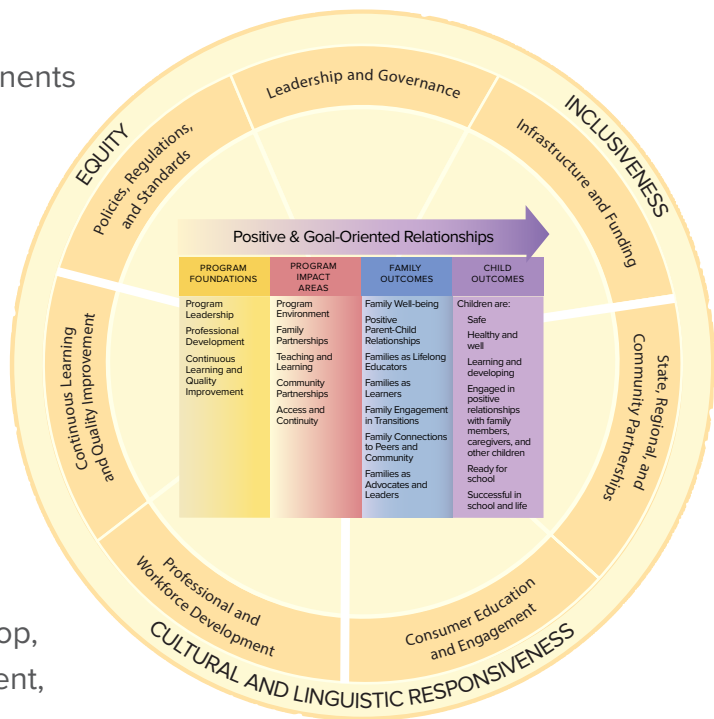
System Components

The seven state and local EC system components work together to promote effective PFCE include:

Leadership and Governance

Families, early childhood professionals and State, Territory, Tribal, and local policymakers, administrators, and staff of health, human services, education, workforce, family support, and other agencies all have leadership roles in supporting parent, family, and community engagement. These leaders have unique opportunities within their own roles to develop, promote, and support a shared vision of parent, family, and community engagement.

They can work collaboratively to set agendas, establish common principles, identify shared objectives, coordinate efforts, share data, as they measure progress toward aligned objectives. They can create formal leadership roles and feedback loops that include all families served by the early childhood system. Their role in raising the visibility of engagement, effectively communicating results and challenges, and responding to the voices of parents, families and communities is essential to sustain and improve results. Collaborative governance structures—such as Early Childhood Advisory Councils, Children’s Cabinets, and interagency coordinating councils—can use their authority to facilitate these efforts at the local, State, Territory, and Tribal levels and to support PFCE as a priority in the early childhood system.



Policies, Regulations, and Standards

Eligibility policies, quality standards, licensing rules, and other legislative and administrative requirements impact families, programs, communities, and systems. Early childhood system leaders can look for existing federal, state, and local policy opportunities within children's health, EC, and family support to emphasize PFCE as a priority, promote effective practices, and hold the system accountable for achieving desired child and family outcomes. In some cases, system leaders also have the authority and influence to change existing policies and/or encourage others to do so. In all cases, the wisdom of families, providers, and community members can inform the policymaking process and the development of regulatory guidance and implementation tools to ensure that desired results are achieved.

Infrastructure and Funding

Finance decisions, fiscal policies, and infrastructure can impact how well and how quickly PFCE becomes integrated into a comprehensive early childhood system. Early childhood system leaders can allocate resources to efforts that have the most potential for PFCE impact. They can offer incentives and rewards to promote continuous improvement for programs and systems as well as to promote collaboration across children's health, EC, and family support. The infrastructure that supports a coordinated early childhood system together includes, for example, systems for quality rating and improvement, licensing and monitoring, consumer education, and coordinated data. This infrastructure provides opportunities to promote PCFE integration at all levels.

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

State, Territory, and Tribal early childhood systems that incorporate continuous learning and quality improvement as a core function can ensure that decisions made throughout the system are data-driven, apply lessons from past efforts, and contribute to desired outcomes for children and families. Key components of a cycle of continuous learning improvement include guiding principles such as including those that build safety and trust in using data, agreements on core indicators and appropriate assessment tools, coordinated data systems, and collaborative decision-making processes.

Everyone in the early childhood system, including parents, providers, and community partners, can be engaged in deciding what data to collect, what rules and processes to use when sharing it, and how to use it to inform decisions at the program, policy, and system levels.

Workforce and Professional Development

Early childhood system leaders can ensure consistency across the fields of health, early childhood care and education, and family support through appropriate professional development opportunities. Along with input from families and frontline workers, data about the strengths and needs of each system's early childhood providers and other professionals should be used to create an array of resources, training, coaching, and other supports for individuals in the full range of roles and sectors of the early childhood system.

State, Regional, and Community Partnerships

Partnerships across multiple sectors and at every level are essential for a fully functioning early childhood system that is responsive to and effectively engages all communities, families, and their children.

Parents, families, and community partners provide vital information, advocacy, and support for partnerships among stakeholders at the local level, in States, Territories, and Tribes, and among EC programs and community organizations. Other key partners with resources to contribute include community, civic, business, and philanthropic organizations working to improve the lives of children and families. Leaders at every level can work to remove barriers and support partnerships that contribute to the full range of opportunities and services that address children and families strengths and needs in their communities.

Consumer Education and Engagement

Educating families about the components of quality early childhood programs so they can be informed consumers of programs and services for their children is a primary responsibility of the early childhood system. When early childhood systems and programs effectively engage families as valued early childhood consumers, families are recognized as decision-makers, trusted peers, leaders, and advocates for their children, themselves, and their communities.

Consumer engagement relies on two-way, relationship-based interactions between families and early childhood professionals. Parents and professionals share information with one another and work together to build each other's knowledge and capacities. As families expand their knowledge and leadership capacities they can become more effective in finding and applying research-based information to guide their choices about a program for their child, monitor their child's experiences in a program, or use their voices to advocate for higher quality and equitable access to services.

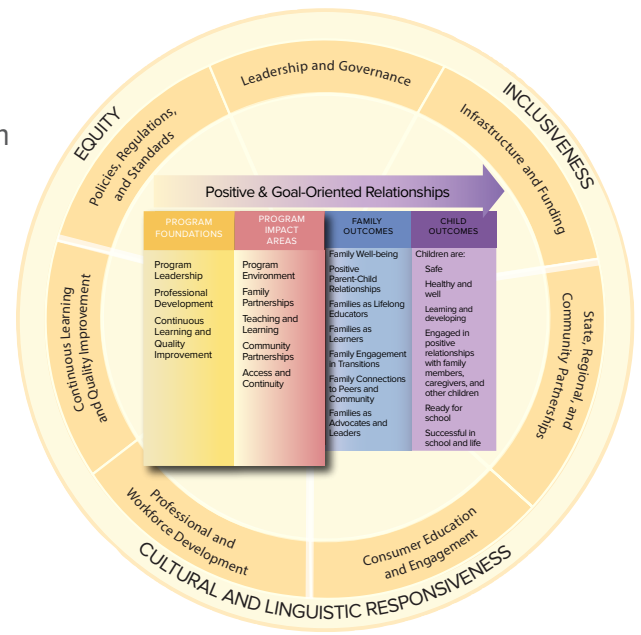
As early childhood professionals expand their knowledge and capacities through relationships with families, they can become more effective in inviting and responding to families' interests and values, supporting and partnering with families and other stakeholders, and improving the quality of their work. Leaders can model for EC providers and other professionals their active efforts to learn from family feedback and to use it to improve quality. (See Integrating PFCE into Early Childhood Systems: Scenarios for examples).



Program Elements

The program elements are the foundations and program impact areas, selected program systems and services, that promote strong family engagement and child outcomes. Eight program elements work together to promote systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE. They include three Program Foundations and five Program Impact Areas.

To create lasting change for families and children, EC programs need strong foundations that work together: Program Leadership, Professional Development, and Continuous Learning and Improvement.



Program Leadership

EC program directors and other leaders, managers, and decision-makers, including parents, set expectations and model effective PFCE practice. Leaders set a clear vision and goals, and make sure that program policies, operational procedures, and hiring practices actively promote PFCE.

They monitor activities in all of the Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas and make changes when needed to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. Leaders advocate for the inclusion of diverse family voices at all levels of the EC system. They encourage families to participate in decision-making processes.

Professional Development

PFCE professional development is important for all EC professionals, regardless of role. Professional development plans can be aligned with both continuous learning and improvement data as well as family and community feedback. These plans include training, ongoing supports (such as coaching, supervision, recognition of challenges, and successes), and information about career options. When staff members come together as a community of learners, they create a mutually supportive environment for continuous learning and improvement. Parents, families, other community members, and providers can co-design and co-lead training to strengthen family and community partnerships.

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

EC program leadership, staff, and families are committed to using data to continuously improve family engagement practices. Leaders and managers build support and capacity for this work among staff, families, and community partners. Program leaders invite them to select indicators of PFCE progress, plan for continuous improvement, and interpret data. Together, they seek out opportunities to use and share their program data to inform local and state planning and policy decisions. They monitor their own progress toward PFCE outcomes, and use data to periodically fine tune plans and actions.

Program Impact Areas

The Program Foundations described in the previous section support the implementation of activities and strategies within Program Impact Areas. These areas—Program Leadership, Professional Development, and Continuous Learning and Improvement—advance systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE.

Program Environment

Program environment refers to the features of the program and its physical setting that affect the interactions and relationships that families and staff experience. High-quality EC program environments help protect the health and safety of children, families, and EC providers and other professionals; make them feel welcomed, valued, and respected; and promote their well-being, learning, and development.

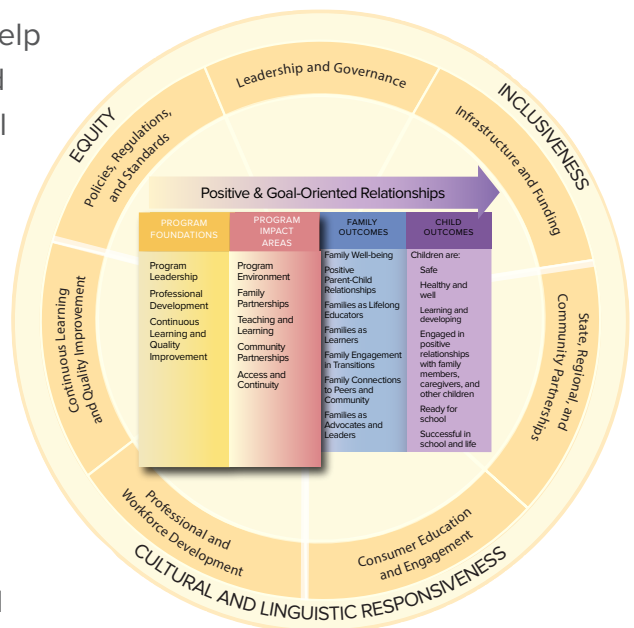
High-quality environments facilitate cultural and linguistic responsiveness, promote open and regular communication, and provide a sense of support to families. These environments create opportunities for families to build relationships with other families and community organizations.

Family Partnerships

In family partnerships, EC providers and families build ongoing, reciprocal, and respectful relationships. Providers and EC stakeholders value families’ unique expertise about their children. They engage in regular communication with families to understand their goals for their children and themselves, and they work toward those goals together. Families’ goals may include, among others, advancing their children’s learning or their own education, obtaining a job, seeking housing stability, developing their own advocacy and leadership skills, and contributing their skills and strengths to programs. As knowledgeable consumers of EC programs, families assess EC quality and are offered opportunities to further advocate for it.

Teaching and Learning

Through teaching and learning, families and EC providers work together to promote children’s learning, development, and school readiness. As children’s first and most important teachers, parents and families are engaged as partners in their children’s learning and development. Parents and families share their knowledge about their child, and EC providers share information about the child’s progress. EC programs build connections with community partners to offer children and families access to other learning opportunities.



Community Partnerships

Through community partnerships, EC programs and community organizations build collaborative relationships that support positive child and family outcomes. These organizations may include libraries, health centers, schools and school districts, sources of economic support, the workforce, higher education and human service agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, and others.

These organizations can respond to families' interests and needs, connect families to outside resources, and encourage parent and family engagement in children's learning. Partnerships also can promote successful transitions for children and families from one service setting to another over time, for example, or when multiple services are needed during the same time period.

Access and Continuity

Policies, rules, and procedures can promote access to affordable, high-quality EC services and continuity for children and families in these settings. These policies and procedures help programs provide services for families in need and ensure the continuity that children's development requires. The intention is to address specific challenges, such as family homelessness, that can interfere with consistent service access. Transitions procedures and practices can also ensure effective transitions from and to early childhood care and education programs.

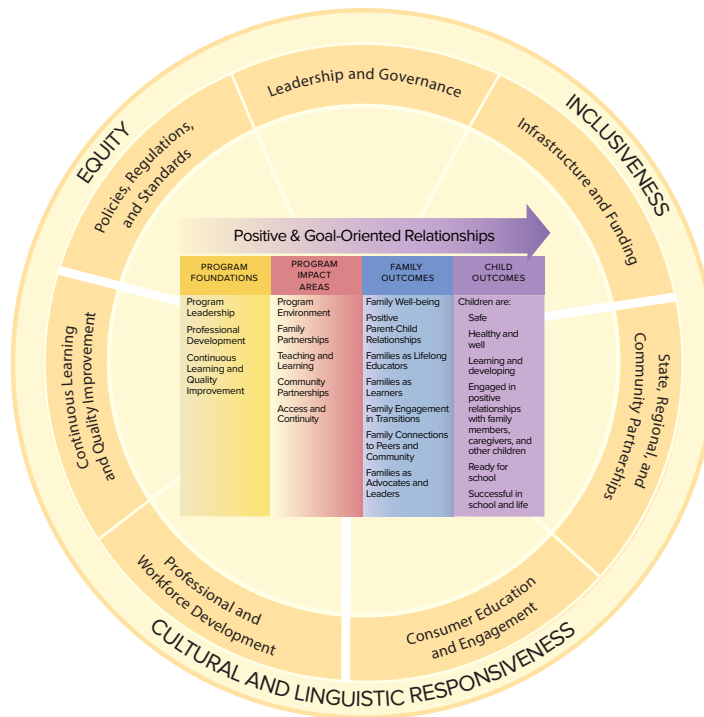


USING THE PFCE FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

You can begin to use the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems by considering the child and family outcomes. Next, identify the strategies and activities that you can use to work toward these outcomes. Within and across the early childhood system components and program elements of the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems, choose strategies that are consistent and mutually reinforcing. Early childhood systems leaders can follow the steps below to make plans for systemic, integrated, comprehensive parent, family and community engagement.

Leaders in systems and programs can work together to align strategies related to system components and elements. Together, leaders, early childhood providers, and other professionals can share their continuous learning about their progress toward positive outcomes for children and families.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems



Leaders who would like to improve coordination across their early childhood system can start by using the system components of the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems to identify and connect the overlapping activities across the system.

Early childhood systems leaders can follow the steps below to make plans for systemic, integrated, comprehensive parent, family and community engagement.

1. Brainstorm about the improvements that you want to consider making in each system component, focusing on one at a time.
2. Review and highlight the ideas that are the same, are similar, or seem related in two or more system components.
3. Look at these overlapping ideas for improvement together. Determine which ones would be best to plan or implement simultaneously, and which ones should be sequenced and in what order.
4. Identify the individuals and agencies associated with the system components related to your overlapping ideas.
5. Invite individuals and agency representatives to join an PFCE Improvement Team for Early Childhood Systems. Share your brainstorm for feedback. Work together to co-design the plan for coordinating the system components.

System components depend on and influence each other. When systems components are carefully coordinated in this way to work toward a shared goal, early childhood systems can create opportunities to share resources, avoid duplication, mutually reinforce efforts and maximize impacts for children and families.



INTEGRATING PFCE INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS: SCENARIOS

Consider the following scenarios as examples of what it might look like if a State, Territory, or Tribe has integrated PFCE into one or more of the system components in its early childhood system. These scenarios are composites drawn from a mix of current and planned efforts. They are informed conversations with input of leaders in several States and Tribes through facilitated peer learning communities.

We offer these scenarios to deepen understanding about the system-level opportunities for promoting PFCE. We hope they will spark ideas and conversations among leaders about what might be possible. These are just a few examples of many possible approaches. Leaders can use these ideas to arrive at solutions that best fit local challenges and opportunities.

Leadership and Governance

Scenario: A State’s Early Childhood Advisory Committee (SECAC) recommended implementation of continuous learning quality improvement processes to monitor how, and how well, the State’s early childhood system is promoting parent, family, and community engagement. The SECAC identified PFCE as a priority. It established a committee to assess the system’s current strengths and opportunities, and to develop recommendations for systemic change.

Committee members included:

- parent leaders from high-priority communities (including rural, suburban, and urban areas);
- the State child care administrator;
- the Head Start Collaboration Office director;
- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B coordinators, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting administrator;
- the Maternal and Child Health director;
- the State-funded Pre-K administrator; and
- local early childhood council representatives.

The parent leaders received a stipend and reimbursement for transportation costs to support their participation.

After reviewing the research literature, the committee recommended using the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems to define the State’s vision. Based on data and input from many state and local stakeholders and families, the committee identified two immediate priority recommendations:

1. Strengthening the emphasis of PFCE in the State's Quality Rating and Improvement System for early childhood care and education programs.
2. Revising the State's workforce competencies for children's health, early childhood care and education programs, and family support professionals to include core competencies for parent, family, and community engagement, using resources from the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement.

Scenario: A State Child Care and Development Fund administrator identified PFCE as a priority for the State's quality improvement efforts. In developing the State's CCDF Plan, the administrator consulted with other administrative leaders. The administrator contracted with the statewide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network to hold café-style conversations involving EC providers and participating families in five communities. The conversations focused on the key features of quality and family engagement. The conversations also sparked ideas for improving practice at the program level.

The results informed the State CCDF plan and led to the production of a series of program resources about effective strategies for:

- engaging families in their children's learning and development,
- connecting families to material supports and resources in the community, and
- creating opportunities for families to participate as leaders in program decision-making processes.

Policies, Regulations, and Standards

Scenario: A State used resources from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement to incorporate family and community engagement standards in its early childhood care and education QRIS standards. The new standards reflect current research. They are designed to be strengths-based and support culturally and linguistically responsive practice in support of the State's diverse families and communities.

The standards are applicable to

- center-based and family child care settings,
- State-funded prekindergarten programs, and
- IDEA Part B preschool special education programs.

The standards are also aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Scenario: A State’s Division of Early Childhood (DEC) studied best practices from other states to develop a family and community program self-assessment tool for EC programs. The State has contracted with a local university to develop and test a family engagement observation and measurement tool. It will be used to measure how, and how well, programs are implementing effective family engagement practices. The tool will be piloted and tested first with programs that serve predominantly migrant and seasonal worker families. Later, the results will be used to review and inform recommendations for revisions of current PFCE-related policies and standards.

Infrastructure and Funding

Scenario: A State’s Children’s Cabinet engaged in a process to promote PFCE as a State priority. The cabinet leaders made a commitment to identify and repurpose existing resources to support program/prekindergarten/child care standards and professional competencies for parent, family and community engagement. As a first step, they issued guidance for new provisions in contracts for the Statewide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network to provide technical assistance and support to early childhood care and education programs about the standards.

The cabinet also recommended that the agencies for children’s health, early childhood care and education, and family support deliver joint training on the PFCE standards and practices to all eligibility and intake staff. Finally, they recommended that the State child care administrator use CCDF quality improvement set-aside dollars to:

- provide training and coaching about the new PFCE standards to EC professionals, and
- support program-level self-assessments and incentivize improvements focused on PFCE in child care.

Scenario: A Tribe’s director of children and families is responsible for administering CCDF and family support funding to offer prenatal-to-five supports and services to families in the Tribe.

In addition to direct services, the Tribe is using a portion of its funding to

- compensate families for their contributions to program-level decision-making processes;
- conduct surveys and focus groups with families; and
- offer a series of café-style conversations for families and program staff to build common understanding about children’s health, services for children with special needs and their families, early childhood care and education, family engagement, and school readiness.

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

Scenario: A State Early Childhood Advisory Committee (SECAC) recommended the implementation of continuous learning and quality improvement processes to monitor how, and how well, the State’s early childhood system is promoting parent, family, and community engagement.

Key features included:

- Guidance and tools for EC programs. Among these were pilots of a program self-assessment tool and a family engagement observation and measurement tool that are culturally and linguistically responsive to diverse program staff and families.
- Continuous feedback opportunities for families, early childhood professionals, and community stakeholders to share their perspectives on
 - the quality and accessibility of programs and services, including services for children with special needs and their families, and
 - progress toward family and community engagement outcomes
- Improvements to the State’s coordinated early childhood data system to collect and aggregate family and community engagement data across communities, programs, and agencies

Scenario: A State child care administrator oversaw a collaborative process with multiple stakeholders to strengthen the emphasis on family and community engagement in the State’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

The revised QRIS offers programs the opportunity to earn points for conducting the Strengthening Families Program self-assessment and for using the results to inform an annual quality improvement plan. The self-assessment tools encourage a reflective and collaborative action-planning process. The process involves families, staff, and program leadership. Programs can use an online version of the self-assessment to develop their plans and track their actions over time. The State administrator can then aggregate data across programs. The data can be analyzed and used to identify priorities for technical assistance, coaching, and training about family engagement topics and strategies.

Workforce and Professional Development

Scenario: As part of its Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan, a State consulted with leadership of a Tribe within the State’s boundaries. The purpose of the consultation was to strengthen the capacity of the early childhood workforce to engage families in order to improve school readiness outcomes.

Together, the State and Tribal child care administrators

- reviewed the National Center Parent, Family, and Community Engagement’s core competencies resources;
- surveyed EC professionals (including family child care providers);
- held focus groups with diverse families, including those who were members of the Tribe; and
- consulted with professional development system stakeholders (including community college partners and the network of trainers and coaches available to providers on the reservation and in the surrounding state).

The input from the consultation informed the development of a framework and core competencies for family and community engagement for all EC professional roles. These included cultural and linguistic competencies inclusive of the Tribe’s culture and native language. The State and Tribal administrators also collaborated with leaders within their family support agencies to deliver cross-sector training and guidance. Focused on the family engagement framework and competencies, these professional development activities were geared to eligibility staff for child care subsidy and family support programs.

Scenario: A State’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) oversaw a collaborative process to amend professional licensing and certification requirements for early childhood health, home visiting, early intervention, family support, and child care professionals. The amendment included requirements for pre-service and in-service training and coursework on family engagement.

Over the next two years, the SECAC will focus on conducting strengths and needs assessments for

- child care centers and family child care providers;
- home visiting professionals;
- early intervention specialist;
- staff and social workers in the State’s network of family support center;
- pediatric nurse practitioners and community health center staff; and
- child welfare case workers and administrators, family court judges, and staff.

This assessment will inform recommendations for developing and implementing workforce competencies, training, and professional development for all professional roles in these sectors within five years.

State, Regional, and Community Partnerships

Scenario: A State offers flexible funding to local early childhood councils to address the strengths, goals, and needs of families with children (ages prenatal to 5) in their communities. The State's Department of Early Childhood (DEC) is responsible for supporting these councils to implement a shared vision for PFCE. DEC has drawn on resources from the federal Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care to develop guidance to local councils. It focused on examining existing data and collecting new data about community strengths and needs to inform local planning efforts. DEC has suggested language to include in memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and other formal agreements with community partners to promote effective and consistent family engagement.

DEC also convened local council leadership from across the State to share best practices and provide technical assistance on setting goals, objectives, and benchmarks for measuring progress toward local implementation of the shared vision. Recently, DEC identified engagement of families of children with disabilities as a priority. The agency is partnering with federally funded Community Parent Resource Center to develop family engagement resources for local school districts operating IDEA Part B and State-funded prekindergarten programs serving children with disabilities and developmental delay.

Scenario: A State child care administrator and a Head Start Collaboration Office Director convened recipients of the federal Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grants in three high-priority communities to learn about PFCE and test innovative practices. The grantees met in person and virtually to learn from training and technical assistance specialists and local content experts. Together, they also developed action plans for promoting best practices among the Early Head Start and child care program grantees. The State child care administrator and Head Start Collaboration Office Director partnered with a local institution of higher education to evaluate the effectiveness of the innovative practices on program quality and levels of family engagement.

Consumer Education and Engagement

Scenario: In response to the requirements in the 2014 Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule of 2016, a State child care administrator developed a plan to promote consumer education and engagement. The goal was to ensure that families are informed and supported to find and choose the best care for their children. The administrator sought input from focus groups of diverse families with differing interests and perspectives.

Under the plan, the administrator revised the content and design of the State’s early childhood care and education consumer engagement website.

- Information in multiple languages
- Opportunities for families to engage with child care agency staff and with other families through features such as chat, surveys, and contact us through support groups for families
- Opportunities for information sharing about early childhood care and education via text or social media (e.g., links to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest).

As the CCDF Final Rule requires, the website also provides quality rating data for individual programs; licensing health and safety inspection data for individual programs; and aggregate data about serious injury, deaths, and substantiated child abuse in child care settings.

Scenario: A State child care administrator designated a portion of the State’s CCDF quality set-aside dollars to expand a parent-to-parent peer network supported by a Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agency to include early childhood care and education professionals.

The intent is to:

- create opportunities for parents and EC professionals to build mutually respectful relationships and learn from one another, and
- enhance families’ understanding of and skills for advocating for their child in their early childhood care and education program.

The CCR&R will consult with parents in the network and seek input from EC professionals to design the expansion effort in a way that respects the needs and interests of both parents and professionals.

Closing Thoughts

To learn more about the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems and other resources of the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, visit the NCPFCE web pages on the following websites:

Child Care Technical Assistance

<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/centers/national-center-parent-family-and-community-engagement>

Early Child Knowledge and Learning Center

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/national-center-parent-family-community-engagement-ncpfce>

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