

# Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems: Action and Implementation Guide



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Parent, Family and Community Engagement

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# Introduction

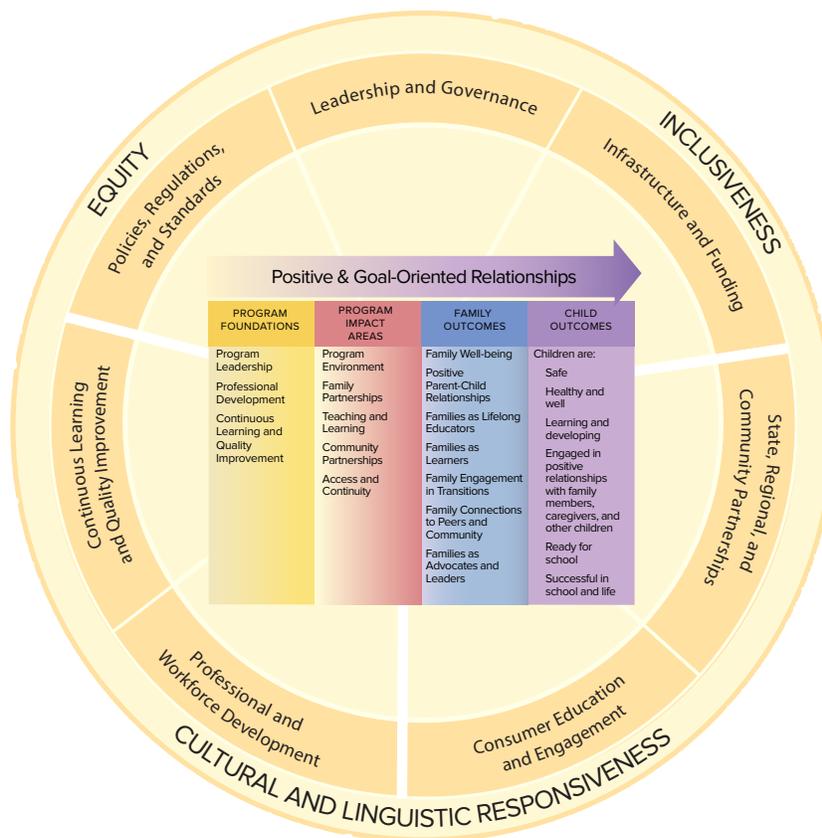
Wondering about how to use the **Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework for Early Childhood Systems** to support early childhood systems building? Explore this Action and Implementation guide to find definitions, opportunities for action, scenarios, and resources to support the implementation of a systemic approach to family engagement in States, Territories, and Tribes.



The goal of the Framework—and this guide—is to promote positive, enduring change for children, families and communities. This guide highlights opportunities within components of an early childhood system to coordinate strategies intended to impact programs positively and strengthen child and family outcomes. State, Territory, Tribal, and community leaders and agency administrators; early childhood professionals; families; and other decision-makers may find this resource useful to support parent, family, and community engagement to align their efforts with the Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule.

This resource is part of a series designed to support efforts to implement the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems in early childhood systems-building efforts (see page 22).

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



## Defining Family and Community Engagement

Family engagement is an interactive process through which early care and education (ECE) providers and other ECE 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 the State systems levels, ECE 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, ECE 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 kind of mutually respectful, strengths-based interactions that are central to family engagement. In communities, these take place among community members and agencies, families, and ECE staff at all levels. As with family engagement, interactions between ECE 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. These partners can work with families and ECE 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 ECE programs and other comprehensive services. These services may include health, nutritional, and social services, among others.

## Using this Resource

This resource describes the seven System Components of the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems.

- Leadership and Governance
- Policies, Regulations, and Standards
- Infrastructure and Funding
- Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement
- State, Regional, and Community Partnerships
- Consumer Education and Engagement
- Professional and Workforce Development

For each System Component, you will find:

**A Definition.** The definition of the System Component in the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems.<sup>1</sup>

**Opportunities for Action.** A description of the opportunities to promote PFCE that may exist within the context of the System Component for early childhood system leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes.

**Examples of Action.** Descriptions of two scenarios based on existing and hypothetical efforts in States, Territories, and Tribes to integrate parent, family, and community engagement in ways that are systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.

Use this resource on its own or together with the accompanying Systems Assessment Workbook in partnership with other leaders in States, Territories, Tribes, families, and communities.

Working together with a variety of partners can spark conversations about opportunities for achieving desired results for young children and their families.

The actions identified for the seven System Components reflect the collective knowledge of research and exemplary practices from multiple stakeholders from the Administration for Children and Families' Early Childhood National Centers for Training and Technical Assistance and agency administrators from States and Tribes participating in the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement's Peer Learning Communities on Family Engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions of "consumer education" and "consumer engagement" are primarily drawn from the resource *Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Professionals* from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, available at [https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/consumer-ed-ecp\\_508\\_4-4-18.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/consumer-ed-ecp_508_4-4-18.pdf)

# LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

## Definition

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 (PFCE). These leaders have unique opportunities within their own roles to develop, promote, and support a shared vision of PFCE.

Leaders can work collaboratively to set agendas, establish common principles, identify shared objectives, coordinate efforts, and 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.

## Opportunities for Action

Early childhood leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes can collaborate to set a shared vision for PFCE by working in partnership with parent and family leaders. They can incorporate PFCE into statewide strategic planning efforts and identify the core principles, objectives, and actions necessary to achieve the shared vision. Engaging families in strategic planning can ensure that the early childhood system is equitable, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically responsive to a diverse range of children and families.

Early childhood system leaders can:

- Raise awareness about the importance of cross-sector support for a shared vision for PFCE. Family and agency leaders can communicate the importance of PFCE to achieving each agency’s mission and to improving opportunities and outcomes for children and families.
- Use their strategic plans to guide decisions across sectors of ECE, health, and family support. Leaders can give special attention in the strategic plan that addresses the root causes of inequities where they exist.
- Establish benchmarks for improving PFCE, select appropriate measures for collecting data, and report progress annually. An integrated, cross-sector data collection system is an important asset to planning, reporting, and achieving success in this work.



- Engage parents who reflect the racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the children and families served within the early childhood system. It is also important that parent leaders have the authority to inform decisions at all levels of the early childhood system (e.g., programs, communities, agencies).
- Encourage parents to contribute by welcoming and respecting them as equal partners in the early childhood system.
- Support staff to participate in inter- and intra-agency relationships to define and implement action steps in the strategic plan. Leaders can also facilitate on-going communication about funding, policies, and practices across agencies for health, ECE, and family support, while at the same time coordinating these program elements.

## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: A State’s Early Childhood Advisory Committee (SECAC) recommended implementing continuous learning and quality improvement processes to monitor how, and how well, the State’s early childhood system is promoting its priority of PFCE. The SECAC established a committee to assess the system’s current strengths in and opportunities for promoting PCFE, and to develop recommendations for systemic change. Committee members included:

- Parent leaders from high-priority communities (including parents of children with delays and/or disabilities and parents from rural, suburban, and urban areas)
- State Child Care Administrator
- Head Start Collaboration Office Director
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B Coordinators
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Administrator
- Maternal and Child Health Director
- State-funded prekindergarten program administrator
- Local early childhood council representatives

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

After reviewing the relevant 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 recommended two immediate priorities:

1. Strengthening the emphasis of PFCE in the State’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for ECE programs.
2. Revising the State’s workforce competencies for children’s health, ECE programs, and family support professionals to include the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series**.

Scenario 2: A State Child Care Administrator identified PFCE as a priority for the State's quality improvement efforts. The administrator consulted with other administrative leaders to develop the State's CCDF Plan.

The administrator also contracted with the Statewide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network to hold café-style conversations with ECE providers and participating families in five communities. The conversations focused on the key features of quality family engagement. The conversations also sparked ideas for improving practice at the program level.

The results informed the State's CCDF plan. The State administrator then disseminated resources from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, such as the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement** and the **Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement** to promote effective strategies for:

- Engaging families in their children's learning and development
- Connecting families to material supports and resources in the community
- Creating opportunities for families to participate as leaders in their program's decision-making processes

# POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND STANDARDS

## Definition

Eligibility policies, quality standards, licensing rules, and other legislative and administrative requirements impact families, programs, communities, and systems. Early childhood (EC) system leaders can look for existing federal, State, and local policy opportunities within children’s health, early childhood education, (ECE), and family support to emphasize Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (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.

## Opportunities for Action

Administrators and other early childhood system leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes can look for opportunities to leverage legislative and administrative policy and regulations to advance PFCE at all levels of the system. Providing opportunities for families and community stakeholders to inform decision-making processes can ensure that policies, regulations, and standards are equitable, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically responsive to all children and families.

To promote positive, equitable outcomes for all children and their families, early childhood system leaders can:

- Align eligibility rules across multiple programs and services to remove barriers and promote access and continuity of services for children and their families
- Set quality standards for PFCE in early childhood programs and services<sup>2</sup> that are:
  1. Research-informed, strengths-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive to diverse families and communities
  2. Aligned across all ECE settings (e.g., aligned and incorporated into child care licensing standards, QRIS standards, and State-funded prekindergarten standards)
- Examine barriers to and opportunities for aligning policies, regulations, and standards that promote effective PFCE practices



<sup>2</sup>For example, see the *Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*, available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/indicators-final-508.pdf>

## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: A State used the Key Indicators of *High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems* to incorporate family and community engagement standards in its ECE QRIS standards. The QRIS standards are designed to be strengths-based and strengthen 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
- IDEA Part B preschool special education programs

The State's QRIS standards are also aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Scenario 2: A State legislature passed and the governor signed new legislation that defines family engagement in ECE settings using the definition in the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems.

The law charges the State's Department of Children and Families (DCF) with developing resources to support the implementation of best practices in ECE programs. DCF used Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to inform a suite of self-assessment tools for family and center-based child care and State-funded prekindergarten programs.

The statute also requires DCF to allocate a portion of the State's Child Care and Development Block Grant quality set-aside dollars to fund coaching and technical assistance to help programs complete the self-assessment tools and develop action plans to improve practice.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING

### Definition

Finance decisions, fiscal policies, and infrastructure can impact how well and how quickly Parent, Family and Community Engagement (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, ECE, and family support.

The infrastructure that supports a coordinated early childhood system together includes systems for quality rating and improvement, licensing and monitoring, consumer education, and coordinated use of data. This infrastructure provides opportunities to promote PCFE integration at all levels.

### Opportunities for Action

Early childhood system leaders can ensure that their system infrastructure and funding are sufficient to support the systemic integration of PFCE. They can:

- Analyze funding allocated to health, early childhood education and care, and family support to understand whether and how public funding is targeted to PFCE
- Utilize funding efficiently from multiple sources by conducting joint PFCE-related training for staff from multiple sectors
- Include specifications related to PCFE practices in regularly issued grants and contracts for training and technical assistance or Child Care Resource and Referral contracts
- Identify funds to support families to participate as advocates and leaders in planning and decision-making processes at the program, community, and system levels
- Implement policies and procedures for appropriately reimbursing or compensating the expenses families incur and their contributions of time spent participating in planning processes and continuous learning and quality improvement feedback loops (e.g., focus groups, surveys)



## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: A State's Children's Cabinet engaged in a process to promote PFCE as a State priority. The cabinet leaders designated a subcommittee to identify and repurpose existing resources to support ECE settings to adopt the Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series. 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 training and technical assistance and support to ECE programs on these competencies.

The cabinet also recommended that the agencies for children's health, early childhood and education, and family support deliver joint training on these competencies 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 competencies, and to promote the use of **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement: Professional Development Assessments** for supervisors and staff.

Scenario 2: A Tribe's director of children and families is responsible for administering CCDF and family support funding to offer prenatal-to-age-5 supports and services to families.

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
- Conduct surveys and focus groups with families
- Offer a series of parent 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, ECE, family engagement, and school readiness

# CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

## Definition

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 data, and how to use it to inform decisions at the program, policy, and system levels.

## Opportunities for Action

Early childhood system leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes can take a number of actions to ensure that continuous learning and quality improvement is a core function of the system. Leaders can develop and adhere to guiding principles that build safety and trust in using data. Leaders also promote a culture of continuous learning and quality improvement in their own work. Systems leaders can commit to engaging families in continuous improvement processes at the program, community, and system levels. To engage families effectively, program leaders can provide linguistically responsive opportunities that support full family participation.

Early childhood leaders should ensure that there are periodic efforts to assess how well the early childhood system:

- Welcomes and includes the diverse perspectives and feedback of all families participating in early childhood programs and services
- Responds to families' perspectives and feedback
- Integrates comprehensive PFCE across sectors serving young children and their families (e.g., health, ECE, and family support)
- Uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform policy and funding decisions
- Promotes continuous learning and professional development in PFCE practices for early childhood professionals

Finally, leaders can encourage the use of valid and reliable PFCE measurement tools for continuous quality improvement planning and implementation at the program and service level.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Such tools may not exist for all program settings and communities of families. In such cases, consider appropriate proxy measures or, if feasible, invest in the development, adaptation, and testing of new tools that are valid and reliable for specific programs and families.



## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: 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 PFCE.

Key features included:

- Guidance and tools for ECE 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 achieving the family outcomes of the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems
- 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 2: 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 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 to identify topics of greatest interest among the programs to inform statewide training and technical assistance offerings.

# PROFESSIONAL AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Definition

Early childhood system leaders can ensure consistency across the fields of health, early childhood education (ECE), 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.

## Opportunities for Action

Early childhood leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes can take several actions to support early childhood professionals to effectively engage parents, families, and communities. They can

- Work to incorporate the perspectives of families in training, technical assistance, and professional development at all levels of the system
- Set goals and targets for recruitment, training, and retention of a workforce that is competent in the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series**. The goals should include building a workforce that is also culturally and linguistically reflective of the families served and the communities in which the families live.

Early childhood leaders also play an important role in setting workforce policies and standards. They can begin by adopting workforce competencies, such as the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series**, that:

- Help professionals build strengths-based, goal-oriented relationships with families and engage families as valued early childhood partners
- Are specific to the roles and responsibilities of all professionals working in ECE settings, as well as subsidy workers
- Are embedded into training and coursework on PFCE across all institutions of higher education in the State, Territory, or Tribe

Early childhood system leaders can also

- Establish requirements for early childhood professionals to complete standardized training based on the competencies. These requirements can be incorporated into professional certification, licensure and continuing education standards, program licensure requirements, and QRIS requirements.



- Require that program directors and administrators specify roles and responsibilities for PFCE in staff job descriptions and accountability in performance evaluations. Program directors and administrators can also include feedback from families and encourage the use of reflective practice as they monitor and evaluate the performance of staff.
- Provide opportunities for PFCE training and technical assistance that:
  - Are offered in multiple locations, formats, and languages and through diverse delivery mechanisms to reach all programs and staff
  - Include collaborative training across sectors (e.g., in health, ECE, family leadership and support programs; and for classroom teachers, home visitors, parent coaches, care coordinators, etc.)
  - Identify and utilize research-based coaching and professional support models that include a focus on PFCE
  - Use reflective supervision and evaluation for staff that includes feedback from families
  - For license-exempt or unlisted care providers, support knowledge development and skill building based on established PFCE competencies

## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: As part of its Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan, a State consulted with the leadership of a Tribe within the State’s boundaries. The purpose of the consultation was to strengthen the capacity of ECE professionals in the State and Tribe to engage families in order to improve school readiness outcomes.

Together with the Tribe’s Child Care Administrator, the State Child Care Administrator:

- Reviewed the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series**
- Surveyed ECE professionals (including family child care providers) and held focus groups with diverse families, including those who were members of the Tribe. Their purpose was to get the input of family members on how professionals can best engage families and what kinds of training and technical assistance most help professionals accomplish this
- Consulted with professional development system stakeholders (including community college partners and the network of trainers and coaches available to providers in the State and Tribe)
- Guided the stakeholders’ input

The Child Care Administrators in the State and Tribe developed a framework and core competencies for family and community engagement for all ECE professional roles. These included cultural and linguistic competencies inclusive of the Tribe’s culture and native language. The Child Care Administrators in the State and Tribe also collaborated with leaders within their family support agencies to deliver cross-sector training and guidance to eligibility staff for child care assistance and family support programs on the [insert title of the final subsidy guide document].

Scenario 2: A State's Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) oversaw a collaborative process to use the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Early Childhood Professionals** to amend professional licensing and certification requirements for ECE professionals. The amendment included requirements for pre-service and in-service training and coursework on relationship-based competencies.

For the next two years, the SECAC planned to use the Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement for family services professionals to revise professional licensing and certification requirements for staff and social workers in the State's network of family support centers to include a competency for conducting strengths and needs assessments.

# STATE, REGIONAL, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## Definition

Partnerships across multiple sectors and at every level of the system 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 early childhood 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 the strengths and needs of children and families in their communities.

## Opportunities for Action

Early childhood system leaders in States, Territories, and Tribes can facilitate on-going communication and coordination across agencies for children's health, early childhood education (ECE), and family support to build commitment toward a shared vision for parent, family, and community engagement (PFCE). They can:

- Establish effective lines of communication among ECE professionals, administrators, policymakers, and families to improve access and expand family choice for ECE services.
- Coordinate activities to help parents locate and access resources and services in their communities (e.g., via State or Territory consumer education websites, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, parent leadership organizations, parent resource centers, etc.). These partnerships can also be used to generate and provide feedback on the accessibility and quality of the services in the early childhood system.
- Offer incentives, training, tools, and resources to support communities to conduct needs assessments and implement PFCE strategic plans to achieve positive child and family outcomes.
- Support the development and implementation of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and/or other formal agreements among partners to achieve desired results for diverse communities of children and families.



## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: 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 helping the local councils to implement a shared vision for PFCE. DEC has drawn on *Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement (2nd Edition)* to develop guidance for local councils. The guidance is helping the councils to focus on examining existing data and collecting new data about community strengths and needs to inform local planning efforts.

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 implementing the shared vision locally. Recently, DEC identified “engaging families of children with disabilities” as a priority. The agency is partnering with a federally funded Community Parent Resource Center to develop family engagement resources for local school districts operating IDEA Part B and state-funded prekindergarten programs for children with disabilities and developmental delays.

Scenario 2: 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. Their purpose was to learn about PFCE and to test innovative practices. The grantees met both 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 partnership grantees.

The State Child Care Administrator and Head Start Collaboration Office Director also 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

## Definition

Engaging parents and families through consumer education uniquely positions programs and initiatives to promote children’s health, development, and learning. This potential is available to all State, Territory, and Tribal administrators and other individuals in early childhood care and education systems, including those working in Child Care Resource and Referral, early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive family support programs.<sup>4</sup>



The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) 2014 Reauthorization prioritizes consumer education and family engagement, raising the bar for States to provide information to parents, providers, and the general public (Sections 658E(c)(2)(D), 658E(c)(2)(E). The 2016 CCDF Final Rule further strengthens requirements for consumer education.

*Consumer education* refers to helping parents build on their knowledge and understanding of:

- Quality and options in early childhood (EC) and school-age care and education programs
- Child development, developmental screenings, services for children with disabilities, and prevention of suspensions and expulsions
- CCDF subsidies and other financial assistance families can use to help pay for early childhood and school-age care and education
- Policies, procedures, and regulations—for example, licensing, monitoring, and background checks; and comprehensive (health, human, and economic support) services to support family well-being

Effective consumer education information is:

- Designed to help parents make informed decisions about early childhood and school-age care and education, and about comprehensive supports for family well-being
- Tailored to match parents’ interests and preferences
- Culturally and linguistically responsive
- Based on data and research representative of the children and families you are working with
- Reflective of exemplary practices to support child development and learning

*Consumer engagement* goes beyond making information available to families. Consumer engagement relies on two-way, relationship-based interactions between families and professionals. They share information with one another and work together to build each other’s knowledge and capacities.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see the Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/indicators-final-508.pdf>

As families expand their knowledge and leadership capacities they can become more effective in finding and applying research-based information—for example, to inform 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 professionals expand their knowledge and capacities, they can become more effective in inviting and responding to families’ interests and values, and supporting and partnering with families and other stakeholders.

When parents and families are engaged as consumers of early childhood and school-age services, they act as:

- Decision-makers who are equipped with information and seek access to quality early childhood and school-age care and education for their children
- Resourceful users of information and early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services that support child and family well-being throughout early childhood and beyond
- Trusted peers who help their friends and families understand and connect with the highest quality options available
- Leaders who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child’s program and their community

## **Opportunities for Action**

Both consumer education and consumer engagement have positive effects on quality. Effective consumer education and engagement demonstrate an early childhood professional’s belief in the importance of families’ access, interests, knowledge, and feedback about program and services. Consumer education and engagement drive quality when equipped, informed, and engaged families influence and improve ECE settings. Leaders can demonstrate and drive quality across early childhood systems by engaging families and ECE professionals through consumer education.

Actions that leaders can use to demonstrate and drive quality in early childhood systems include:

- Equip early childhood professionals with information about child development and comprehensive services to share with families
- Support a QRIS that families rely on to choose programs for their children
- Promote policies that encourage providers to regularly seek feedback from families
- Promote two-way conversations between families and EC professionals that lead to better quality (e.g., conversations about monitoring results and working together on corrective actions)
- Encourage regular, two-way sharing of data and information between programs/ professionals and families
- Emphasize families’ roles as advocates and decision-makers when requesting parental consent for information sharing and referrals to early childhood services and supports

- Equip early childhood professionals with skills and knowledge they need to help families understand and act on their children’s screening results and developmental/school readiness information, including how to access needed supports and services in their community
- Support PFCE in transition planning as children move among ECE settings and as children transition into school
- Incorporate PFCE as an explicit theme in the child care consumer education website; and include links to resources, information, and comprehensive services that align with PFCE outcomes
- Work with families to create culturally and linguistically responsive resources (in formats families prefer) that recognize and affirm their roles; and promote the development of their skills as decision-makers and advocates for their children’s health, development, and learning
- Provide to families in their preferred languages culturally responsive consumer education information about children’s learning and development, indicators of quality early childhood programs and services, and places to find high-quality programs (Indicators include those that account for children’s ages; additional services available in the community; children’s educational rights; and effective advocacy strategies for parents to make their voices heard at the program, community, State, or national level)
- Make a priority of reaching out with consumer education information to families who are experiencing homelessness and to others who may have difficulty accessing information and services
- Promote linguistically and culturally responsive strategies designed to support families as decision-makers and advocates for their children’s health, development, and learning

## Examples of Action

Scenario 1: 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 determined a need for a plan to promote consumer education and engagement.

Throughout the process—from initial development of the plan through its evaluation—the administrator included families’ voices. For example, the administrator sought input from focus groups of diverse families with differing interests and perspectives. The input of families was used to prioritize activities in the plan, which started with making the consumer education website more family friendly.

The website provided consumer education in multiple languages and in formats that support individuals with disabilities. The CCDF Final Rule requires these features. The content was written in plain language and included the twelve consumer education topics required:

1. Contact information for Child Care Resource and Referral agencies
2. Licensing and monitoring processes
3. Contact information for the Lead Agency
4. Deaths in child care settings (aggregate data)
5. Injuries in child care settings (aggregate data)
6. Child abuse cases in child care settings (aggregate data on substantiated cases)
7. Provider search by zip code
8. Provider monitoring reports
9. Provider quality rating
10. Three years of provider monitoring data
11. Data of last provider inspection
12. Provider corrective actions

The administrator used input from families to ensure that the required information was presented in ways that families could easily find, understand, and use. Additionally, based on input from families, the administrator revised and enhanced the content and design of the website to include:

- Opportunities for families to engage with child care agency staff and with other families through such features as chat, surveys, “contact us” portals, and online support groups for families
- Opportunities for sharing information about ECE through text or social media (e.g., links to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest)
- Strengths-based messages that welcome parents to the site, recognize and affirm their role as their children’s first and most important teachers and advocates, and suggest some action they might want to take (For example, “You are the expert on your child and family. Look for an early childhood or school-age care and education professional who asks for and respects your input.”)

Scenario 2: 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 ECE professionals.

The intent was to:

- Create opportunities for parents and ECE professionals to build mutually respectful relationships and learn from one another
- Enhance families’ skills in advocating for their child in their ECE program
- Enhance ECE professional’s skills to invite and respond to feedback from families

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

## Implementing the PFCE Framework

Explore the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems Series available on the Child Care Technical Assistance web site at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/topics/family-engagement-and-consumer-education>.

- Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems
- Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems: Assessment Workbook
- Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems: A Sample State Scenario
- Crosswalk: 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems

You may also use the resources mentioned in this guide to support your work to promote family engagement in your early childhood system. These include:

- Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement>
- Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement:  
<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/key-indicators-high-quality-family-engagement-quality-rating-and-improvement-systems>
- Promoting Informed Child Care Choices and Family Well-being through Consumer and Community Engagement: A Training Guide for Child Care Subsidy Staff
- Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Professionals  
[https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/consumer-ed-ecp\\_508\\_4-4-18.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/consumer-ed-ecp_508_4-4-18.pdf)
- Head Start Program Performance Standards  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>



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